

# The FLOWSTONE

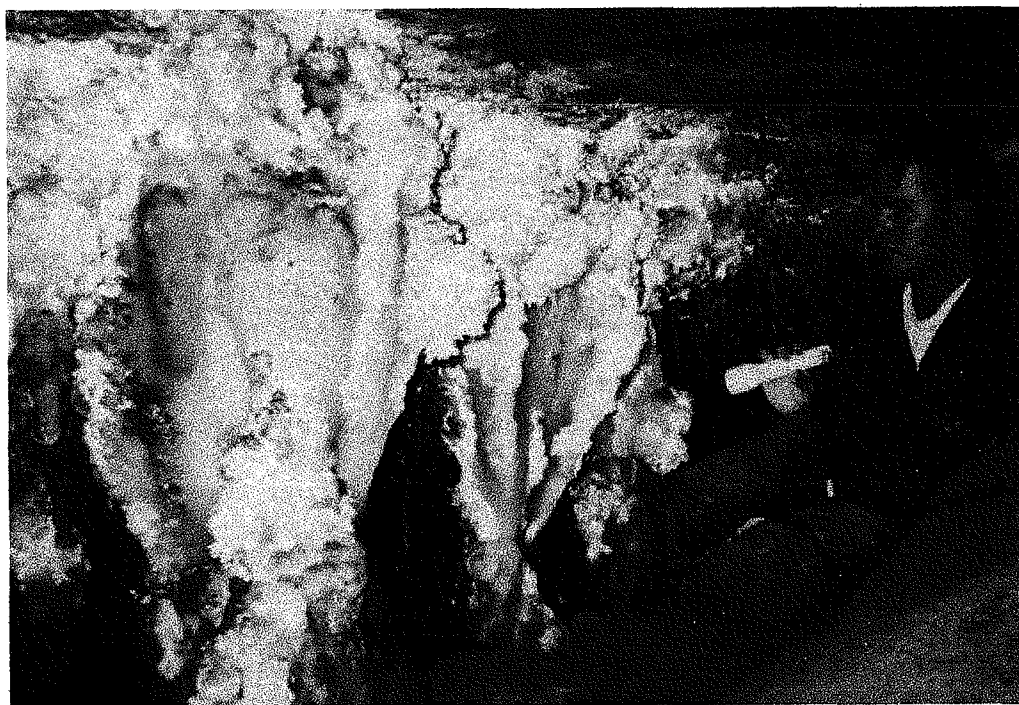
January 2000

Vol. VII No 1

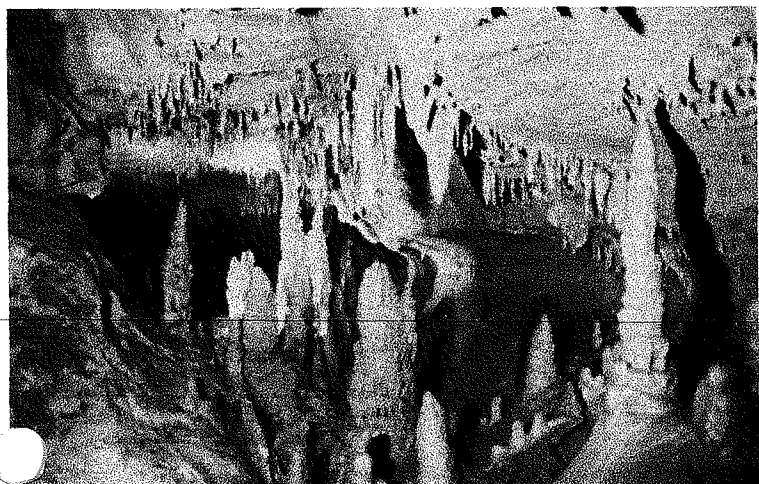
A Monthly Newsletter of the Cullman Grotto  
of the National Speleological Society

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TITLE PAGE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The FLOWSTONE is published monthly by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Items submitted for publication must be received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to be included in the following month's issue.

The Cullman Grotto will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of articles within The FLOWSTONE is allowed without consent provided credit is given to the source.

Membership to the Cullman Grotto is eight dollars (\$8) for individual membership or ten dollars (\$10) per family per year. Due are payable at the first grotto meeting of each year and includes the subscription to The FLOWSTONE. Subscription rate for nonmember is eight dollars (\$8) per year. See the editor for back issues.

The Cullman Grotto meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Cullman County Public Library conference room, 200 Clark St. NE, Cullman, AL. All visitors and prospective members are welcome.

2000 OFFICERS

Chairman: Harold Calvert  
123 Co Rd 250  
Cullman AL 35057  
(256)287-9770  
webcavers@hotmail.com

Vice-Chairman: Micah Sims  
1431 Co Rd 827  
Cullman AL 35057  
(256)734-4042

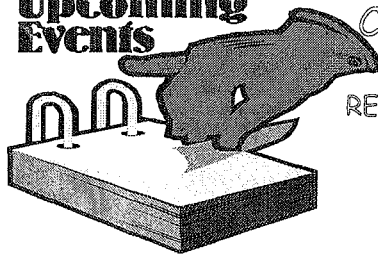
Secretary: Evon Thompson  
378 Co Rd 395  
Cullman AL 35057  
(256)739-1772

Treasurer: Tracy Calvert  
123 Co Rd 250  
Cullman AL 35057  
(256)287-9770  
tcalvert@cullman.net

Official Grotto Address: Cullman Grotto  
c/o Harold Calvert  
123 Co Rd 250  
Cullman AL 35057  
webcavers@hotmail.com

Newsletter Exchange: The FLOWSTONE  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Sandra Ln NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013  
vertical@corrcomm.net

Upcoming Events



CALENDAR OF CAVE RELATED EVENTS

- Jan. 8 8:00 am Grotto trip the Fern Cave: Vertically proficient only. Meet at Library.
- Jan. 15 Tumbling Rock, youth group
- Jan. 29 Tumbling Rock, scout troop 330
- Feb. 1 7:30 pm Grotto meeting at the Cullman County Public Library Conference Room.
- sometime in February Possible grotto trip to Cathedral Caverns

APPOINTMENTS

Advisor: Victor Bradford  
8333 US Hwy 31  
Hanceville AL 35077  
(256)734-2809

Publications, Safety & Membership:  
Patrick O'Diam  
700 Sandra Ln NE  
Cullman AL 3505  
(256)739-0327  
vertical@corrcomm.net

Librarian: David Drake  
110 Co Rd 1386  
Falkville AL 35622  
(256)739-0811  
idopits@cs.com



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Front Cover:

Ryan Madole in a section of Helectite Heaven-Fern Cave, Hall of the Mountain King-Log Cave, and Cedar Ridge Crystal.

CULLMAN

## ECHO CHAMBER

GROTTO

## DATES

We only have one birthday that I'm aware of this month, and I'm not even sure if he is still alive. Jessie Burress (does anyone even remember him?) will be 16 on Jan. 7. Look out, another one of the boys on the road! At least he'll be legal now. Happy birthday!

## RESCUE

Two boys, ages 15 & 16 were rescued out of a cave in Florida a few days after Christmas. While on an outing, they entered a small cave and got hung in a hairpin turn, had bad air, and suffered from hypothermia before rescues arrived and airlifted the two boys to a local h. An accident did occur in Fern Cave while J.V., Steve Pits, Chris Hudson and Kelly ? were doing an obscure loop. Chris fell into a 6' hole and broke his wrist. They decided not to call a full rescue but to try and make it out. This they did and went to the Huntsville Hospital where Chris underwent surgery.

## CLOSED CAVES

Recently, Mr. Harold Grider, owner of Bicentennial Cave, Roaring Rapids Pit, Testy Hole, Ice Palace Cave and other nearby caves in TN, requested that cavers no longer visit these caves. Seems he now has too many concerns about liability. He is not upset with cavers, just does not want them visiting his caves more. Please take note of this and plan on going somewhere else.

## NCRC 2000

The National Cave Rescue Commission Weeklong Seminar will be held from July 15-23, 2000. The seminar will take place at Camp Pioneer, Beverly, West Virginia just down the road from the Old Timers Reunion site. Great facilities, several bunk houses, two shower houses, a main meeting/eating hall, and several other buildings. Visit the site at <http://svis.org/ernrc/wl2000.htm>

## REPENT

I want to "repent" for a safety mistake I made during rigging at Neversink recently. Just a couple of weeks ago I lambasted some cavers in Ellison's for working at the edge of a pit without a safety. Well, I did the same thing at Neversink. I decided to set the rope pad prior to the mainline being lowered down the pit. Without a rope, there was nothing for me to safety to except a small tree which I did grip rather firmly. Although I didn't feel at anytime that I was in danger of slipping, it was not the proper example to set for the novice cavers present. I should have waited for the mainline to be rigged before I set the pad. I need to practice what I preach.....ddrake

## SERA 2000

The 2000 SERA Cave Carnival will be hosted by East Tennessee Grotto May 19-21, 2000 at the Clyde York 4H Center in Crossville, TN. Further information, as it becomes available, will be located at [www.caves.org/grotto/etg/](http://www.caves.org/grotto/etg/)

"I'm sorry, but Grotto policy forbids me to reveal the locations of a cave entrance to a non-NSS member."



Taken from the Huntsville Grotto Newsletter  
Vol. XII, No. 5 - May. '71: Pg. 37

## Moonlight Madness

by ddrake

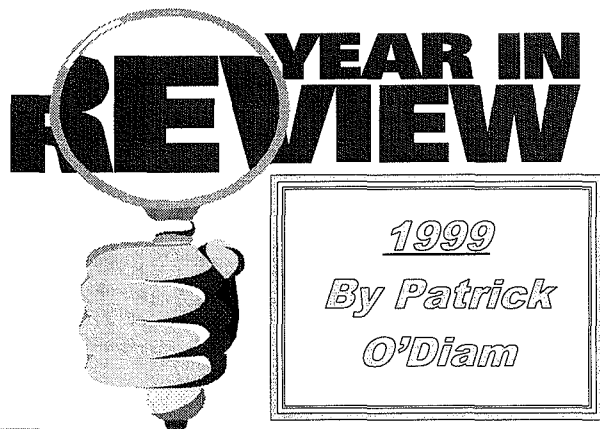
12/22/99

A full moon does hold strange and magical powers. Cattle farmers will note a higher incidence of new calves being born during a full moon. Tides are always higher when the moon is full, and folks that have to work the next day will give up sleep to go bounce an open-air pit on a full moon. Grotto members Jeff Lynn, Wendy Bowen, Derick Mitchell, Harold Calvert, Patrick O'Diam, Victor Bradford, Evon Thompson, Kuenn Drake and David Drake along with New Mexico siblings Brittany and Andrew Webb spent a frigid Wednesday evening/Thursday morning bouncing TAG's most famous pit.

On the brightest moonlit night of our lifetime, Neversink played host to cavers from at least four TAG area grottos. Cullman, Huntsville, Gadsden and Dogwood City were represented this clear, crisp December evening that marked the arrival of winter. Three ropes were rigged. Cullman dropped two and Huntsville shared a rope with DCG. All bounced the pit at least once with the exception of Wendy, most

doing it a couple of times. Jeff yo-yoed it thrice.

It was Brittany and Andrew's first and possibly only time to visit Neversink. Both had rappelled several times before but neither had used a ropewalker. There were those present that may have questioned my decision to put them on bottom given their lack of ascending experience. I thought about it long and hard myself. I made my decision based on the fact that Brittany is a rock climber whose parents assured me that she would have no problem climbing out of a 162' hole. Brittany and her parents, who are high adventure enthusiasts themselves, all vouched for Andrew. I also took into consideration the fact that they were both in top physical condition and last but not least, I knew that we had the manpower, the equipment and the know how to rig a haul system as a last resort. Both bounced the pit marvelously. After derigging some headed home while others headed for the nearest 24-hour greasy spoon. What a spectacular evening!



This past year has been quite eventful as far as the things that were accomplished within the grotto. Things started off with a boom but tended to slow down by the end of the year. The grotto underwent some large changes of the years as new officers came into place, changes within *The Flowstone*, and trying new things for the first time. Throughout the

year, several awards were given to individuals such as Party Points, Bozo Buttons, Pink Jelly Bean Awards, Where's The Beef, the 300 year old birthday cake, and others that seemed to bring a new spirit of entertainment to the grotto meetings. Unfortunately, I missed most of the meetings due to the fact that I had classes on Tuesday nights (and every other night for that matter). Without any further delay, let's review the year.

The year 1999 started off by finding fourteen members of the Cullman Grotto south of the border bouncing the big ones. El Sotano de las Golondrinas was bottomed by ten members of our grotto on New Year's Eve. We thought we had lost our new member of the grotto, Gary Phelps, when a pack by another group was dropped and Gary did not respond for some fifteen minutes. Harold drug his muffler off on the return trip and a drunk hit his van. While the rest of us was eating stake at Hotel

Valles, Micah had other things on his mind, mostly sickness. New Year's Day found most of us going back up the mountain to Cepillo. While Greg and Tracy were earning party points, a haul system was being set up that never had to be used at the pit. A local bounced the pit, Dave sustained a bad cut on his leg, Harold scared some local with his teeth, I got hit by a drunk, Wesley tried to fight about 20 kids that were rocking the van, and finally, the flat tire! Eleven miles on the mountain roads (can they be called roads?) on a donut. It's not over yet. The next day a used tire was found, Wesley says "Give 'er heck Harold!" and the kick butt mini van goes spinning with a blowout 2,000 feet above a valley with no guardrails. Wesley didn't say another word the rest of the trip. Somehow, we all made it home. Later that month, the New Orleans Grotto came up for a 12 ½ hour trip in Fern where Helectite Heaven, the Hall of Giants, and Surprise Pit were visited.

In February, Jamie and Evon's packs got boned in Mrs. Millers and I understand some interesting conversations took place at the top of the drop. The following week, Scottie Arrington got married in Gatlinburg. Micah and I tried to attend but snow stopped us in the Smokies. Therefore, we ended up atop Whiteside Mountain having a snowball fight in our Sunday clothes! The Drake boys lead a trip to grand 'ol Talooky and said it was just as muddy as ever.

March was the five year anniversary of the grotto and the special edition of *The Flowstone* was put out. This month also brought a youth group down to Blount Springs to learn to rappel. Eight grotto members assisted the twenty or so youth make several drops that day. Later that month, twelve grotto members went to the maze, Anvil Cave, with the help of Robert Bumpus (Micah, that's your cue). Two groups went in separate entrances and emerged out of different holes. We were in the cave for four hours and were lost for three hours and fifty minutes of it! The New Orleans group returned at the end of the month for some pit bopping at Graham's and Dinkie's. This month a GA caver also lost his live in Incredible Pit when he got entangled in ropes in the raging waterfall.

April was another active month for trips. A new,

small pit was found just before turkey hunters ran us off the land near No Turkey For Jerry. Wesley P. had to climb about 15 feet of stretch at Kenna Pit before he ever got off the ground. Penitentiary Pit was visited, Steven's Gap, and Painted Bluff. When the Good Doctor (Houston Hardin) brought his wife over, several of us joined him in getting lost in the enormous rooms of Camp's Gulf. Houston brought a raft and stripped down to his undies to go across the lake in the back.

The first of May found several of the grotto headed for Deep Well and Not So Deep Well. Deep Well was nice while Not So Deep Well, well, Micah finally found a hole that he hates! Conley Hole was visited again and snakes were carried out of the pit - Stick decided to just carry his in his had as he climbed. A small bluff near Big Tree was rigged again, New Orleans Grotto returned for an attack on \$67, Mandy's, Jess Eliot, Tate, and Iron Hoop.

The grotto trip in June was to War Eagle. Much preparation went into preparing to run the Munchie Stand at SERA and it turned out to be a wonderful money maker for us. We more than doubled our funds and were able to buy a new grotto rope. The long hike to Doodle Bug Hole was made in the extreme heat and it was dropped and Wendy had sunflower seeds spit at her. Neversink had a lot of visitors that month as Jessie sent down a large amount of rocks on two cavers in Little Neversink. Luckily, no one was hurt. A video trip to Iron Hoop was taken and Micah played the part of a sumo wrestler. Houston and Ryan returned to Camp's Gulf with a large raft and bolting equipment only to find the other side of the lake was large walking passage going a good was further.

July had trips to Steven's Gap, Painted Bluff, the zip line at Desoto Falls, Surprise Pit, Torode Hall, a vertical workshop, and Whiteside, NC. Derick Mitchell had a good record-breaker as he dropped into the vastness of Surprise Pit on a new, slender, red, 10 mil rope. . . It was fast! The vertical workshop was well attended and a cook out topped the evening off. The last day of the month, in the extreme heat, an attack on Whiteside Mountain was made. The tents were hidden behind larger ones, cars parked everywhere, and no one in the

campground slept due to the laughter coming from a certain tent. Oh, Harold discovered there are 12,000,072 red strands in our squeaky grotto rope.

August marked my last good caving month for the year until school was over. A return to Deep Well was made, we bathed in Three Turkey Plunge, had a wonderful time riding the four wheelers to Green's, Mistaken Well, and Hall's, our grotto picnic took place, we returned to Blount Springs to train the Crain Hill Fire Dept., and we enlarged the tight spot in Paul's Cave to be able to do the Cataract.

September found little activity going on cave-wise. Avis VanSwearingen lead a trip to Lammon's Cave where Micah pulled Harold out of the mud with 1" webbing. Beavers were seen in the back of the cave and Micah and I made Avis sick of hearing about food. That's all we talked about the last two hours.

October found most of us at the wet and rainy TAG. With Houston flying in from TX, and Matt and Jennifer flying in from Vermont, we needed a good, hard core cave. Due to the lost luggage, we got a

late start to our adventure for the day, Jamie's favorite cave, Wet Cave. None of us had done the pull-down portion of the cave before but we made it. Cold water crawls, 8 pits to pull down, tight squeezes, this cave has it all. We made it out just minutes before our call out. Ready to go back Jamie?

A nice, warm day in November found a few of us at Natural Well and Hooper's and a cold night a few weeks later found us at Ellison's. Two other groups were ahead of us and we waited sever hours for them to finish. We exited to the cold morning and found ice on our tents. Micah and Jamie also tied the knot on the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month. Vic cleans up rather nicely.

The December meeting showed that the same officers will be in place for the year 2000. A trip to Camp's Gulf took place and all got their butts kicked. The grotto Christmas party was entertaining, and Neversink in the large, bright, super-full moon looked wonderful!

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## FROM THE MAILBAG

### DEEP CAVES

by Andy Porter

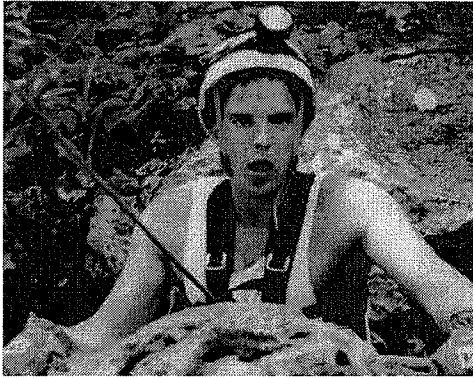
reprinted from Tag-Net with permission from author

To go to the very bottom of deep cave means you have the desire and ability to overcome all adversity and finish the cave. It is a sign of personal strength and determination that transcends a person's life. Some people stop going because it gets nasty or grim or out of convenience. I would never think poorly of anyone who turns around before the bitter end. I respect anyone who realizes the scope of their abilities and does not want to do something they are not conformable doing. I have seen way too many people push themselves beyond their limits and die a grim death in a deep cave. However, if someone goes to the very bitter end of deep wet horror hole cave they will certainly get my deepest respect. It is a badge of honor that your caving peers will recognize. No one can take that away from you.

### NEW, DEEP PIT IN VIRGINIA

For over 30 years, the deepest pits in Virginia has been Triple Wells in the Newberry-Bane system and Whispering Wells in Baner Spring Cave, both reported at just over 200 feet. The record for the deepest pit in Virginia has finally been broken. Twice! Both records were set on Saturday, December 18, 1999. The first drop to break the record required a true bolt-climb. 76 bolts over 5 trips were set in order to climb to the top of Mega Dome in Giles County's Doe Mountain Cave. At 222.6 feet, Mega Dome easily displaced either of the deep pits. Mega Dome's depth was relegated to 2nd place only twelve hours later, when cavers from the Mountain Empire Grotto dropped a recently found pit in a cave in southwestern Virginia. This as yet unnamed drop taped out at a whopping 340 feet! More to come as they explore and map the going cave system.

# CAVER'S



WESLEY PINYAN  
Interviewed by Patrick O'Diam

Wesley Pinyan is a student at the University of Alabama, majoring in International Marketing with a minor in Spanish. He is doing an internship at this time. He's from Blount County and has been caving with us for the last two years or so. He's done all the big things around, now we need to take him to the more common things in TAG.

*Tell us how you started caving, Wesley.*

When I was little, my parents took me to some of the commercial caves around TN, Ruby Falls and the Underground Sea. After that, one of my friends got me into caving. We went to Cave Mountain Trails with some guys, I think they were all drunk, hand-held flashlight spelunkers. I enjoyed caving and wanted to get into it but didn't know where any caves were. The only caves I knew of were Cave Mountain Trails and Banger. When I was at Wallace, I took a class from John McCrary. We went rappelling and caving. He told me about Graves Cave that is right by my house. That is where I first met Micah and Harold. They told me about the Cullman Grotto but I never did go. Then, in an Astronomy class at Wallace, I met you and you got me into vertical caving.

*So how long have you been into this?*

I guess about 2, 2½ years from the time I really got involved.

*What about some of your favorite caving experiences?*

One of the most important trips was Helectite Hell. It was a nice trip, but nine hours in a cave kinda' makes you reconsider what you're doing there. Another one, one of the most terrifying was Whiteside. As I was climbing up, I was considering quitting all of it! I didn't want no part of it.

*I remember you saying when you reached the top,*

*you said, "I'm going to call my mamma, tell her I love her. You get to thinking about things like that when you almost die!"*

A couple of weeks later, I was ready to go back and do Whiteside again. When I dropped Whiteside, it was at sun set. It was dark when I climbed. As I was on bottom, I kept hearing noises and I started thinking about bears and such so I got a big stick and couldn't wait to get on rope. When I got on the rope, I couldn't wait to get off!

*Ever had any funny caving experiences?*

I guess at the 586' Fantastic Pit at Ellison's. We caved all night and I was all fired up, having a great time. When we got out and saw the sun rise, I started dragging my feet. I was so tired. At first I started seeing deer. I'd ask Micah, "Did you see that?" but he didn't know what I was talking about. Then I started seeing little men jumping out from behind trees. I didn't think we were going to make it home. Everyone kept falling asleep. I would wake up and you and Micah kept changing drivers. I think we pulled off on the side of the road and slept a while.

*That was soon after I tried to go through a 160 degree turn at 70 MPH. You never woke up. As we slid around that. It slung you to the floor-board, but you kept sleeping.*

I was supposed to work that day, too. When I got back, I lied on the couch and watched Braveheart all day.

*A favorite cave or pit?*

A favorite cave now would be Grave's Cave. I didn't care too much for it until recently when I found some more section to it. I think I found where the pit is so you can do a through trip. My favorite pit would probably be Little Cepillo, Conley Hole up in TN. I really like all of the places I've been.

*What do you consider to be your greatest caving accomplishment?*

I guess the one that I brag about the most would be Golondrinas. That was amazing. Also, another place where the pucker factor was quite high was Whiteside. I tell both of those stories a good bit.

*How was Mexico for you?*

Oh, I loved every minute of it! I couldn't believe I was really down there. I enjoyed trying to speak the language. It was fun at Cepillo. Harold, Micah, Jon Cammon went back to the van and there was a group of Mexicans around the van. One of the kids came up to me and said, "Pele, mi amigo." I was not sure what he wanted and asked what is pele. He waved his arms and I asked if it was to drive a car. He said no, closed his fists and started swinging. "Pele, mi amigo." I said no, and that's when we got out the tire iron and locked ourselves in the van. I was so happy to get out of there and two miles down the road is when we had a flat. I just knew they were coming after us! That was real fun and exciting.

*We tried to cram a lot into that trip in a short time.*

*I remember we stuck you on rope first at 'drinas. Tell us about your feelings and thoughts as you rappelled and also climbed this monster.*

Yea, I was the first one down and when I got on rope, I was afraid not to put on as many bars as I did. I fed for about 100 feet because I didn't want to take off a bar. Finally, I took off a bar and had a good rappel. I was still afraid so I kept stopping and adding another bar; it took a long time to get down. I think it was about 23 minutes. Once I got about halfway down, the rappel got good. I was taking it slow, looking around at the parrots flying beneath me. I had heard stories about looking down and thinking the rocks were tiny but when you get down, they're huge. I tried to estimate their size and thought I had it figured out. When I finally got down there, there was a huge cliff in the bottom. After being on rappel for 23 min., my legs were numb so I just sat there for 15 min. looking around. When I got up and started walking around, I was amazed at the size. Everything was so disorienting. I stayed down there all day. I rappelled down about 9:00 that morning and didn't climb up until late in the afternoon. I had a great climb up. I stopped to take some pictures and really enjoyed it.

*What are your future goals in caving?*

I would like to go to Hawaii. I've seen pictures of that in the NSS News. I'd like to Alaska someday. I'd like to just go caving wherever I can as I travel. I'd like to stay active, keep doing stuff. There's some more stuff I want to do in Mexico. Oh yea, I will do Angel Falls in Venezuela someday.

## THEM CAVE CRAWLERS

How 'bout them cave crawlers,  
Ain't they a sight?  
Crawlin' through them caves  
Where it's blacker'n night.

Crawlin' in them little holes,  
Crawlin' in them muddy,  
Crawlin' 'til they hands and knees  
Are scraped and sore and bloody.

Them ragged, tagged cave crawlers,  
Crawlin' on them rocks.  
Wearin' out a hunnert jeans  
Before a single pair of socks.

They're crawlin' and creepin'  
Makin' a mighty fuss,  
When thy knee hits a rock  
Well, you orta hear 'em cuss.

Wanter be a cave crawler?  
Ain't no use you bawlin'.  
Jes; find yourself a cave  
Hunker down and start a-crawlin'.

S. P. Lunker

Taken from the Huntsville Grotto Newsletter  
Vol. X, No. 12 - Dec. '69: Pg. 118.



## THE DYING CAVER

- S. P. Lunker

Taken from the Huntsville Grotto Newsletter  
Vol. XII, No. 5 - May. '71: Pg. 40

At the bottom of the pit, the dying caver lay.  
His friend, close beside him there, leaned near to  
hear him say,  
"I had a strange vision, Bill, as through the air I  
fell,  
My one brief glimpse of heaven before I go to  
hell.  
It was a beautiful place, with sinkholes by the  
score,  
In each sink a pit or cave, who could ask for  
more?  
The farmers there were friendly, happy to have  
you come,  
Treating you with great respect, not like some  
ragged bum.  
Their directions to the cave would not lead you  
astray,  
And always get you to it with never a delay.  
The pits are all near a road, no mountains there to  
climb,  
So when you reach the entrance you're fit and  
feeling fine.  
And growing beside each pit, a sturdy oak tree's  
found,  
That's always save to rig to when going  
underground.  
And if your rope's too short, it stretches out a bit,

'Til it gently sets you down on the floor of the pit.  
Then you prusik out with ease on rope of some  
new kind  
That, soon's your weight's on it, will shorten as  
you climb.  
And there's never any lip when to the top you get;  
Therefore you reach the surface without a bit of  
sweat.  
Even the crawls are fun there, they all are hands  
and knees  
On a floor of clean white sand, the crawling is a  
breeze.  
All the water in the caves is warm upon your skin,  
So when they see some water, the cavers jump  
right in.  
And the formations found there are every size and  
shape,  
Just the kind of virgin cave that cavers love to  
rape.  
And the passage there is large. . .", but his voice  
faltered here  
As suddenly he realized the end was very near.  
After he passed away, Bill scanned the bloody  
slope,  
Took from him his rack and lamp, and started up  
the rope.

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MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE CULLMAN GROTTO  
OF THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

December 7, 1999

The regular monthly meeting of Cullman Grotto of National Speleological Society was called to order on Tuesday, December 7, 1999 at 7:30 p.m. in the conference room of the Cullman County Public Library by Harold Calvert, Chairman. 14 members and guests were in attendance.

The minutes of the previous monthly meeting were read. Motion was made by Micah Sims to accept the minutes as read and seconded by David Drake.

The treasurer's report was given.

Grotto dues are payable in January.

There will be a grotto Christmas Party on December 14, 1999 at Greg and Evon Thompson's.

The Cullman Cave and High Angle Rescue Squad will give a presentation at the January meeting.

The December grotto trip will be a horizontal trip to

Camps Gulf on December 11th. Meet at the library at 6:00 a.m.

January trips:

Helectite Heaven - January 8th

Tumbling Rock - January 15th & 29th

Year 2000 officers will be the same as currently:

Chairman - Harold Calvert

Vice-Chairman - Micah Sims

Secretary - Evon Thompson

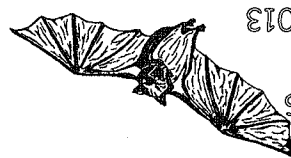
Treasurer - Tracy Calvert

There will be a vertical class in February, which will probably be held in the West Elementary gym. The class will be condensed to Friday night and all day on Saturday and will be conducted by Patrick O'Diam and Tim White.

Several trip reports were given.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, the Chairman declared it adjourned.

You may notice the printing on this issue of *The Flowstone* is a little lighter than normal. Sorry about that, but the economy setting should save the grotto about \$100 or more a year in cartridge cost.



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FEBRUARY 2000

Vol. VII No 2

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2000 OFFICERS

Chairman: Harold Calvert  
123 Co Rd 250  
Cullman AL 35057  
(256)287-9770  
webcavers@hotmail.com

Vice-Chairman: Micah Sims  
1431 Co Rd 827  
Cullman AL 35057  
(256)734-4042

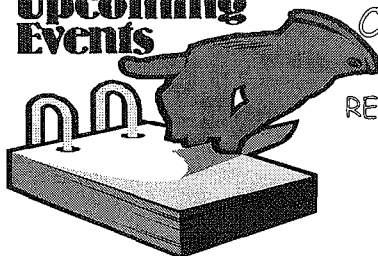
Secretary: Evon Thompson  
378 Co Rd 395  
Cullman AL 35057  
(256)739-1772

Treasurer: Tracy Calvert  
123 Co Rd 250  
Cullman AL 35057  
(256)287-9770  
tcalvert@cullman.net

Official Grotto Address: Cullman Grotto  
c/o Harold Calvert  
123 Co Rd 250  
Cullman AL 35057  
webcavers@hotmail.com

Newsletter Exchange: The FLOWSTONE  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Sandra Ln NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013  
vertical@corrcomm.net

Upcoming Events



CALENDAR OF CAVE RELATED EVENTS

- Feb. 5 8:00 am Possible Grotto trip? Details to be discussed at the grotto meeting.
- March. 7 7:30 pm Grotto meeting at the Cullman County Public Library.
- March 11 8:00 am Grotto Trip TBA - meet at Cullman County Public Library.
- May 19-21 SERA held in Crossville, TN
- June 26-30 NSS Convention - Elkins, WV

APPOINTMENTS

Advisor: Victor Bradford  
8333 US Hwy 31  
Hanceville AL 35077  
(256)734-2809

Publications, Safety & Membership:  
Patrick O'Diam  
700 Sandra Ln NE  
Cullman AL 3505  
(256)739-0327

Librarian: David Drake  
110 Co Rd 1386  
Falkville AL 35622  
(256)739-0811  
idopits@cs.com

vertical@corrcomm.net



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Front Cover:

Patrick O'Diam, Micah Sims and Ryan Madole at the entrance of Camp's Gulf, TN, April 24, 1999; photo by Houston Hardin

CULLMAN *ECHO CHAMBER* GROTTO

BIRTHDAYS

We have several birthdays in this month. Micah Sims has a birthday on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February. Patrick O'Diam has a birthday on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Harold Calvert's birthday is the 16<sup>th</sup> and Bernard Powell's birthday is February 28. Happy Birthdays to you all! Also, speaking of birthdays, the Mail Bag has a little bit of information concerning something along those lines.

TRIP REPORTS

Q: Know what happens when trip reports and information does not get turned into the newsletter editor?

A: You get a short newsletter. I know there have been several trips over the last few weeks and months, but I don't have any report of them. I, for one, enjoy reading about trips that you have gone on, but month after month there are few if any turned in. This is for yo people who don't do anything at all; two or three people's trip reports have made up the bulk of the reported trips for the last six years. It's time for some new blood! If you go on a trip, write it up so we can read about it. If not, you'll just be saving the grotto money from printing costs but you will not have anything entertaining to read.

SERA 2000

The 2000 SERA Cave Carnival will be hosted by East Tennessee Grotto May 19-21, 2000 at the Clyde York 4H Center in Crossville, TN.

NCRC 2000

Walker Co., GA will be doing there weeklong course again this year from May 27 - June 4<sup>th</sup>. Also, the National Cave Rescue Commission Weeklong Seminar will be held from July 15-23, 2000. The seminar will take place at Camp Pioneer, Beverly, West Virginia just down the road from the Old Timers Reunion site. Visit the site at <http://svis.org/emrcrc/wl2000.htm>

RESCUE

No rescues to speak of during the past month. Let's keep it this way!

CULLMAN CAVE AND HIGH ANGLE RESCUE

We would like to thank the members of the Cullman Cave and High Angle Rescue Unit who put on a presentation at our January meeting. It was nice getting to know them. If ever there is a need for their services, I have included there numbers where they can be reached:

Person	Home	Pager
Michael Johnson	737-6058	775-5203
Kim Caudle	796-9875	775-4152
Heith Johnson	734-2642	775-4153
Tim Walker	462-1012	775-4154
Jammie Griffin	747-2593	775-4170
Kelly Johnson	747-8749	775-4174
Gary Edwards	739-1155	739-7256



...and I bagged this one in the stream passage!"

This is where  
*your* trip  
report was  
going to go,  
but you never  
turned one in

for us to read!

Get some

reports turned

in or have

blank pages in

*The Flowstone.*

## FROM THE MAILBAG

### BABY ANNOUNCEMENT

Taken from an e-mail sent out the last week of January  
Hear Ye, Hear Ye!

Kathleen is pregnant! Due date pending but prob. 8 mo.  
from now.

Houston Hardin

*We want to wish the two of them the best as they prepare  
to become parents. Congratulations from the Cullman  
Grotto!*

### DOES THIS QUALIFY AS A HORDE?

By: David Drake

Taken from Tag-Net # 2032

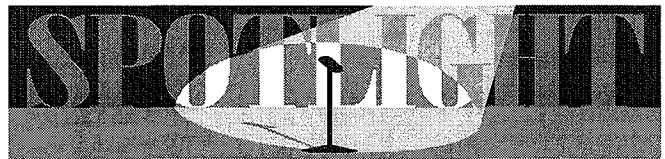
Saturday, 1/15, six Cullman Grotto members led a  
church group of 47, yep I know, on a trip back to the  
dome room in Tumbling Rock. The grotto has taught

rappelling to this group the past two years. The first year  
6 people showed, the second year 15 people showed so  
naturally we expected a like number to show up to go  
caving....wrong! I am pleased to report however that no  
one suffered anything more than a bump or a bruise,  
most were well equipped and all exited with light.

4 of us decided to go on to the Pillar of Fire after the rest  
of the group had decided to exit. Dragging 47+ back to  
the dome caused our trip to Mount Olympus to take  
6hrs. After taking in the beauty of the formation area at  
the top of the mountain for several minutes, the 4 of us,  
who caved at about the same speed, exited in 1:50:00.  
You sometimes forget how much a large group slows  
you down.

The POF is truly a magnificent sight, undamaged and  
pristine. The Suicide Crawl ensures it will stay that  
way.

# CAVER'S



## MICAH SIMS

Interviewed by Patrick O'Diam



Micah Sims has been caving with us for a number of years now. He is recently married to a has-been caver who claims she will not go caving again. He now has a step-son, Kyle, and is enjoying married life. He says it's a new thing with a lot of changes, give and take, but it is good. He more-or-less works for himself at the family lumber yard, SLC incorporated. He's been there from the time of high school on. He worked at Wal-Mart Distribution for a while and Nicolson File. He enjoys the outdoors, hunting, fishing, and of course, caving.

*Just recently, you were telling me how you got started  
caving. Will you recap that for us?*

It happened many moons ago when me and my dad and  
his cousin, who had a cave on family property in Blount  
County, we all went and checked that out. That sparked  
my interest. I was about 5 or 6 at the time. Later we  
made several trips to commercial caves up in TN. In  
high school, I just stumbled upon it again. We went to  
Banger and the one at the rock quarry, some in Blount  
Co. and Morgan Co. As far as rappelling, I pretty much

taught myself to do that out of a US Calvary book. I saw  
a picture and said to myself, "I believe I could do that."  
I ordered some Army Green line from them, the twisted  
stuff - that stuff would make you *spin!* I made my first  
figure 8 in vocational school in the weld shop. It was  
not a good figure 8; later I bought one from Werner's  
and it all escalated from there. I heard about the grotto  
from a girl when I was working at Nicolson File. She  
saw an ad in the paper and cut it out for me. My cousin  
and I came up there and sat through the meeting in June  
of '94. After the meeting, I told my cousin that these



guys were beyond our capabilities. I felt we needed to get some training before we fell in with that group. I didn't know that yall did the training also. We thought yall would think we were a bunch of goons or something. I kept caving and found out about Newsome Sinks, Hughes and Skidmore. I went to what I knew as Yellow Cave, but it is actually Lammons, I had gone to before through a guy who gave me a map of a bunch of caves. We walked to it and went through it. Several years later, I was at work and said to myself, "This is the first Tuesday of the month. I think I'm going to go back to that grotto meeting and just see what it's all about." I did, and just fell into the gang.

*That was around June of '97 because just 6 months later, you were done in Mexico.*

Yea, the first meeting was in June of '94 and then in June of '97 I came back.

*So how long does that make that you've been caving?*

I guess about 6 years. About 2 ½ or 3 with the grotto.

*Any favorite caving experiences?*

Gotta' be Hoya de Luz. That was one of the most rememberable trips. It was hell getting there, but thinking back on it, it's one of my favorites. That was an expedition; that's real caving. That's what I always pictured it to be with the full day hike, the massive entrance, out in the middle of no where, in a different country, it's just hard to explain if you were not there. Another fun trip that comes to mind was Norsman's Well when I went with Glenn Ledbetter. We had a great time in that little multi-drop that day. It was pretty grave train, but fun. Also, Wet Cave; it was hell underground, but it was a great cave. Looking back on it, I can't believe we did that, but I'd like to do it again.

*Any funny experiences while caving?*

Of course, caving with Bernard. That's self-explanatory there, and caving with Vic, and I remember one trip to Fern where your hair looked like you stuck your finger in a light socket.

*Any close calls?*

The scariest I have ever been was at Hoya de Luz. I don't know why; if it was that we were out in the middle of nowhere and a sprang ankle could be detrimental to your future or what. Another time was at Hooper's; I almost became detached from the rope. I was about 10 feet off the floor doing a changeover and had my foot loops rigged in and the rack came off in my hand. I

looked down to see the 'beaner which connected to the safety holding me up right was open and the webbing was halfway out of the 'beaner. If that had of become detached, I would have swung around and hit my head on the floor.

*What's your preference, vertical, horizontal or what?*

I like vertical but now I like the multidrop, in-cave drop, mixing the two.

*Where was your first vertical drop?*

That would be the 117' bluff down at Blount Springs where we train boy scouts sometimes. My first major pit was Neversink. That was great. Before then, I had a frog system - you've got a frog and you know how that can be. I borrowed Bernard's neon green ropewalder climbing system. As I climbed up, I said, "I've gotta get me one of these!"

*Favorite pit or cave?*

That would have to be Hoya de Luz as the top one. In the U.S., I'd have to say Neversink or Valhalla. I guess it's Valhalla; that's just a great pit.

*How about least favorite?*

I like them all, but that would have to be Not So Deep. If I had done that before Deep Well, I may have liked it, but I did the gravy train first and then did that one and just didn't like it.

*What do you feel to be your greatest caving accomplishment?*

Hoya de Luz or 'Drinas. I guess it would be Golondrinas because I was more pumped for that one because I said I would go there one day when I saw it on TV. It was a mind blower.

*What changes have you seen in caving over the last few years?*

More and more caves are being closed. As more people move out in the country, some places are going to be gain access to. At the same time, several things are opening up that we haven't been able to go to for a number of years.

*What kind of caving goals do you have for yourself in the next 20 years or so?*

I would like to go to Lech and also to Venezuela and do Angel Falls. Of course, El Cap, I'd like to have under the ol belt, but Angel Falls would be more up scale than that.

*Any closing comments?*

Just get out and go cave. I really don't think I could have fell in with a nicer and a more competent bunch of

cavers than Cullman. I've heard several say that we bring more people to vertical proficiency than anyone. I enjoy the group.

---

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE CULLMAN GROTTO  
OF THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

January 4, 2000

The regular monthly meeting of Cullman Grotto of National Speleological Society was called to order on Tuesday, January 4, 2000 at 7:30 p.m. in the conference room of the Cullman County Public Library by Harold Calvert, Chairman. 24 members and guests were in attendance.

The minutes of the previous monthly meeting were read. Motion was made by Micah Sims to accept the minutes as read and seconded by David Drake.

The treasurer's report was given.

1999 grotto T-shirts are now \$5.00 each.

Membership dues are payable now.

Upcoming trips:

January 8th - Helectite Heaven

January 15th - Tumbling Rock - church group

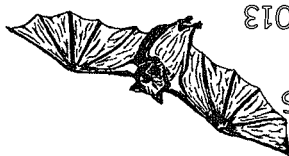
January 29th - Tumbling Rock - boy scout troop

There will possibly be a trip to Cathedral Caverns in February or March.

Several trip reports were given.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, the Chairman declared it adjourned.

A presentation was given by the Cullman Cave and High Angle Rescue.



The Flowstone  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Sandra Ln. NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013

# The FLOWSTONE

MARCH 2000

Vol. VII No 3

A Monthly Newsletter of the Cullman Grotto  
of the National Speleological Society

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TITLE PAGE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The FLOWSTONE is published monthly by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Items submitted for publication must be received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to be included in the following month's issue.

The Cullman Grotto will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of articles within The FLOWSTONE is allowed without consent provided credit is given to the source.

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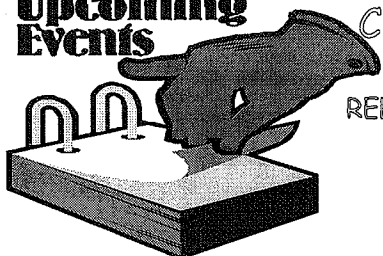
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<b>Official Grotto Address:</b> Cullman Grotto c/o Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 webcavers@hotmail.com	<b>Newsletter Exchange:</b> The FLOWSTONE Cullman Grotto - NSS 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 35055-6013 vertical@corrcomm.net
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Upcoming Events



CALENDAR OF CAVE RELATED EVENTS

- March 11 8:00 am Grotto trip to TR. Details to be discussed at the grotto meeting.
- April 4 7:30 pm Grotto meeting at the Cullman County Public Library.
- May 2 7:30 pm Grotto meeting at the Cullman County Public Library.
- May 19-21 SERA held in Crossville, TN
- June 26-30 NSS Convention - Elkins, WV
- July 6 7:30 pm Grotto meeting at the library: On Thursday night due to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July

Front Cover:

Evon Thompson, Kevin Williams, and Harold Calvert at El Gordo Trail, Fall Creek Falls, TN. Photo by Patrick O'Diam.

APPOINTMENTS

<b>Advisor:</b> Victor Bradford 8333 US Hwy 31 Hanceville AL 35077 (256)734-2809	<b>Publications, Safety &amp; Membership:</b> Patrick O'Diam 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 3505 (256)739-0327 vertical@corrcomm.net
<b>Librarian:</b> David Drake 110 Co Rd 1386 Falkville AL 35622 (256)739-0811 idopits@cs.com	



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CULLMAN

## ECHO CHAMBER

GROTTO

## BIRTHDAYS

We have several birthdays in this month, and we have had a few that have already passed. Becky Buckner had a birthday on the first of March. Wesley Pinyan had a birthday on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March. The future father, Houston Hardin had his birthday on the 5<sup>th</sup>. The old man himself, Mr. Milkman, Paw Paw, even El Gordo has his birthday on the 21<sup>st</sup>. If my records are right, I do believe he will turn 301 years old this year. Also, it was six years ago this month that we officially became a grotto and I'm happy with the progress we have made. There have been many changes, but I feel we all are a close group that enjoy our sport together.

CONTRIBUTORS TO *THE FLOWSTONE*

Last month the newsletter was cut short due to the lack of trip reports. I am happy to say that several people answered the call and sent in articles and other useful information. I would like to thank David Drake for his trip report and cartoons, Jeff Lynn for his report and photos, (thanks from Evon also). Many thanks got to Harold Calvert also for his report. And as always, Evon provided the minutes of the last meeting. It is a group effort to produce a good newsletter. I enjoy doing the newsletter but I need help. Now all of you who have not turned anything in for a long time, get it turned in! We need everyone's help so we don't have another newsletter with no news.

## RESCUE

No rescues to my knowledge during the past month. Let's keep it this way!

## JULY MEETING

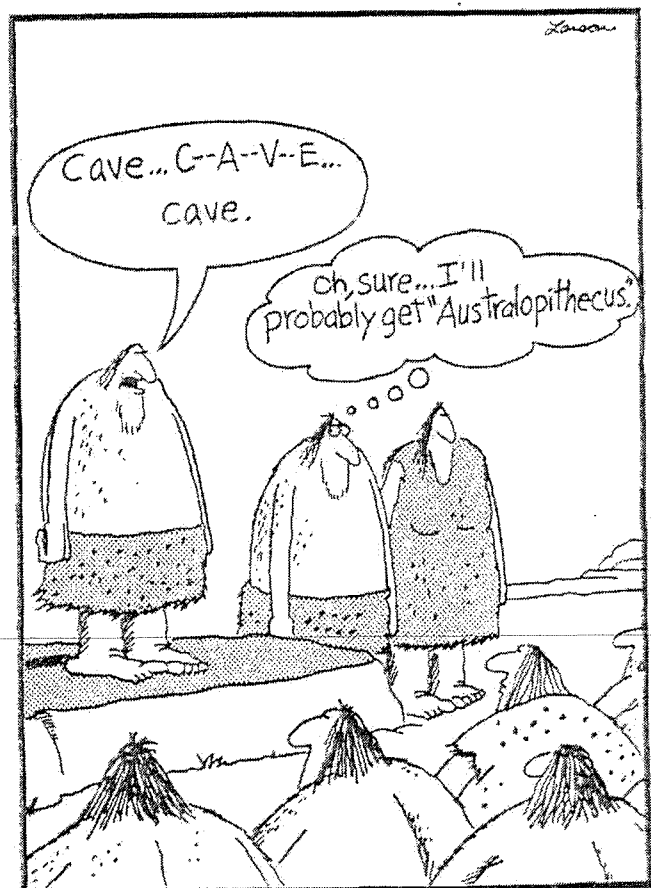
Due to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, our regular first Tuesday of the month meeting has been changed to the first Thursday of the month. The library has agreed to let us come on this date and hold our meeting, so please mark you calendar for this change.

## SERA 2000

The 2000 SERA Cave Carnival will be hosted by East Tennessee Grotto May 19-21, 2000 at the Clyde York 4H Center in Crossville, TN.

## NCRC 2000

Walker Co., GA will be doing there weeklong course again this year from May 27 - June 4<sup>th</sup>. If you would like information or registration forms, see Patrick O'Diam. Also, the National Cave Rescue Commission Weeklong Seminar will be held from July 15-23, 2000. The seminar will take place at Camp Pioneer, Beverly, West Virginia just down the road from the Old Timers Reunion site. Visit the site at <http://svis.org/emrcrc/wl2000.htm>



## BBQ and Fried Catfish

2/26/00

by *ddrake*

Saturday, Feb. 26th, having secured permission from the landowner, I took a small scout troop from Leeds, AL rappelling at an old Blount Springs rock quarry. I use this quarry frequently to teach rappelling to various groups and organizations. It affords a fun 117' drop against a sheer, limestone, rock face. Smaller drops are available but because of the contour of the quarry they all look 117'. The lip of the bluff is very friendly to first timers, so it is a perfect place for training.

The scoutmaster of the troop is an old navy man who takes his troop rappelling on a fairly frequent basis. They came equipped with ropes, helmets, gloves, figure eights, and a duffle bag packed full of bright orange, 1" webbing cut into various lengths. When I inquired as to what it was for, he informed me that the boys would tie their own seat harnesses. I was prepared for a fiasco but instead was impressed by his instruction. He gathered all his boys and accompanying leaders at the top of the bluff and showed them how to select the proper length of webbing. He then proceeded to lead, as each boy followed, in fashioning a secure seat harness. He watched each move of every boy. He knew before they were finished which ones were going to have to untie and start over. He personally checked each rig and OK'd them for descent. Feeling confident of his ability, I rappelled down and provided a bottom belay as the boys, one-by-one, came over the edge. After they had gotten their feel of rope work it was off to Top Hat BBQ and "Truly the South's finest BBQ" it says so right on the sign.

The plan for the remainder of the day was to go caving. Only one problem, I had remembered earlier that I had not remembered earlier to pack hard hats for the cave trip. The troop had brought two of their own but had left the others in Leeds because I had assured them that I had plenty of helmets. They even brought helmet mounted lights to put on the hard hats. I was feeling pretty stupid until I

remembered my brother Shane! I looked at my watch. It showed 1:00. Great I thought, Shane will just be getting up! I went to the restaurant pay phone and called. Luckily, he was at home and graciously offered to bail me out. In fact, he showed up with the helmets at exactly the same time we finished eating. After, sizing hard hats and mounting lights it was off to Catfish.

It's amazing that a cave that is closer to the road than either Bangor or Bryant Mountain caves would have less vandalism than those two, but Catfish Cave does. In retrospect though, an alley wall in Harlem has less vandalism than Bangor or Bryant Mountain. Don't be misled, Catfish is trashed-aplenty, but is still an enjoyable thirty-minute romp through a small, Blount County hillside. Unbelievably, there is no spray paint at either entrance. That changes as soon as you get inside. It was my first trip to the cave since the mid 70's. Catfish Cave is basically one passage through the middle of a hill but I had forgotten how big the passage actually was. The cave boasts some fairly nice size rooms. My recollection, was of a passage that involved a lot of hands and knees crawling and stoop walking. There is some of both but not a lot. There is also some belly crawling, chimneying and wading involved in order to do the through trip. The cave at one time must have been a beautiful spectacle. Draperies, large columns, haystacks and rimstone dams adorn several areas of the cave. All, unfortunately, have been broken or defaced with the exception of one large column in the cave's biggest room. It is a great little cave to take a novice group of young boys through. It is long enough for them to get thoroughly filthy, splash through water, experience total darkness and see a few bats, yet short enough to have them begging for more upon exit. Yes, Catfish was once a pristine wonderland full of pretties but make no mistake, Catfish is now fried.

# NO, NO NO NO

by Harold Calvert

Dont you ever get tired of the strange questions that you are asked when people find out you are a caver?

Do you ever find anything in there? NO.

Ain't them cave thangs full a snakes? NO.

Here's a good one - You goin' cavin' at NIGHT ?  
Hey its night there all the time anyway.

Here's a favorite - You been to Bangor?  
Its hard to escape the dreaded Bangor syndrome. I recently spoke at a scout meeting near Tuscaloosa when during the meeting a scout mother asked, you guessed it, You been to Bangor?

While at a football game an elderly man saw the NSS tag on the KB minivan. National what? Ain't that some kind of bird watching thing?

NO, it's caving.

Oh ok....hey, you ever find anything down there?

One guy where I work saw some of my pictures and asked, "You ever been to Lake Purdy cave? (Anderson) Man ain't that sumthin'! That thing goes all the way to FLORIDA! We went halfway once but had to turn around ,we dun been in there 6 hours!"

Same guy 3 weeks later.... "You been to Lake Purdy cave? That thing goes plum to Georgia!"

Here we go again.... Seems all Alabama caves exit

into different states. Bill Torode must be keeping all those maps hidden.

When another guy saw pictures he asked -Do you ever bring any formations back? will you bring me one? NO.

Well, show me where to go. NO NO NO.

To run through a few quick questions.

NO we dont find any thing.

NO its not full of snakes.

NO we are not a bat worshiping cult (the bat stickers).

NO my arms dont ge tired from climbing that far on rope.

NO I dont repel, I rappel.

NO I am not a spelunker, I am a caver.

NO you can't take your hammer. Or your paint ,or your string.

And finally, about Cullman Grotto,  
NO I dont work for the college, and  
NO YOU HAVE NOT BEEN THERE!

Down and dirty,

Harold

---

## FROM THE MAILBAG

Just to let all the cavers out there know, a caver reported on Tag-Net about having a large amount of equipment and supplies stolen while visiting Neversink about a week ago. The party of two were visiting Neversink on a Friday and both dropped the pit. As one was climbing, he heard voices and felt a tug on the rope. When he reached the top, their equipment and everything was gone - and it was a long list of items. A small gray car with a bat sticker was seen speeding away. It is sad, but it

appears that cavers are staling from cavers. Just be aware of this and make sure you lock up and secure all personal items. It is truly a pity that it has come to this.

---

The big topic of discussion on tag net for the past week now has been the effectiveness of micro racks, slipping Gibbs, and also the cause of spinning while on rope. Some interesting points have been made on these topics.

## *Good Caves with Good Friends*

by Jeff Lynn NSS 38192

3/4/2000

Today was a great day! Not because it was so nice outside, all though that was good; it was a great day because I went caving with my friends. The day started with Wendy and myself meeting Glenn and Derick at Glenn's house at 7:30 a.m. Saturday, March 4, 2000. We were supposed to meet with other Cullman Grotto members at Surprise pit at about 10:30 a.m. so we decided to start our day off with Kenna Pit. We knew where the pit was but none of us had ever done it so we were all excited about the idea of going there. The trail is very well marked and not very long but it is quite steep near the end. There is a big oak tree that has fallen over the pit that makes getting on and off rope a breeze. After everyone bounced the pit we decided to walk over to Brown pit it is about 60 feet deep and is very nice. After everyone bounced it we packed up and headed for Surprise to meet the others.

When we got to the entrance I told Glenn that we were going to get wet! There was a good bit of water flowing in but I have been there when there was more so it shouldn't be too bad. Upon entering the cave we got a little wet but not too bad when we got in the stream passage we were in about 7 to 9

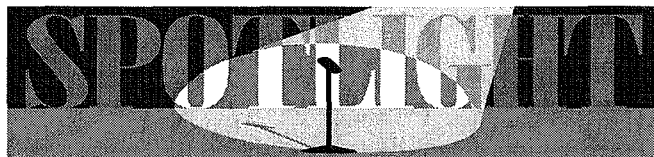
inches of water and it was cold. When we got to the break down bridge, there were 4 people on the bottom: Patrick, Evon, Harold and Shane; three were up top: David, Kuenn and Alan "Stick". David and Kuenn had just climbed out and had to leave to pick up someone from the airport and Stick was waiting on 2 to climb out so he could go down. After Patrick and Shane climbed out Stick and Wendy rappelled down then Harold and Evon climbed out after they got up Stick and Wendy climbed out.

This was Kuenn, Stick, Harold, Shane and Wendy's first time to do this pit and all performed very well. I was very impressed with the attitude and professionalism that they all showed because Surprise can be very intimidating especially when the water is flowing like it was today and Surprise is not a pit to take lightly. We all exited the cave without incident and headed home. Now tell me, could there be a better day than that: good caves, good friends; probably not, but we will keep trying.

GET UP AND GO CAVING

Jeff Lynn NSS 38192

# CAVER'S



GLENN LEDBETTER

Interviewed by Patrick O'Diam

Glenn has been caving with the Cullman Grotto for a number of years and is a wonderful caver. Glenn is a native of Grant, AL. He works at Telidine making carbide products such as drill bits. He is married his wife, Peggy, back in 1993. He has two daughters, Jamie and Beverly, who enjoy cheerleading and playing basketball. Glenn also enjoys deer hunting and mountain biking when he is not caving.



*Tell us how you got started caving and when that was.*

I've been caving about 14 years. That's quite a while. I've been interested in it as long as I can remember. I've always read about it and finally some friends of mine and I just went. We went to Guffy Cave first. A short time after that, we started rappelling off bluffs and went vertical and been vertical ever since.

*So that was about 14 years ago. Was that the time that you first learned of the NSS?*

That was two or three years later. It was about another year or so before I joined it.

*How did you get involved with the Cullman Grotto?*

Actually it was through Jon Cammon. I met him at SERA the first year it was at Camp Jackson. They I met Scottie Arrington and then Jeff and I've been caving with Jeff pretty regularly ever since. I met Scottie on a trip with Jon and a week or two later I met Jeff.

*Any favorite caving experiences?*

All of them! I just like to cave.

*Any close calls?*

I had a pretty good size rock fall on me at Green Smoke Hole last summer. It creamed my shoulder pretty good and I was sore for a few weeks. Another time, some friends of mine and I were caving at Arches Cave and a rock fell off and hit one of them in the head. He didn't have a helmet on. The rock hit on top of his baseball cap and knocked the bead on the top of the hat down into his head. He had a pretty bloody head there for a while. Had to take a four wheeler and pull him out. That was many, many years ago.

*What's your preference, vertical, horizontal or what?*

The last few years it seems to have been just pits, but I really like multi-drops best.

*Where was your first vertical pit?*

I guess some of the smaller pits there in Walnut cave. It may have been Pipeside, I'm not sure.

*What would you say would be your favorite pit or cave?*

I guess Green's Well. I really like that because it is just such a nice pit.

*What do you feel to be your greatest caving accomplishment?*

That would be just learning how to get out and walk, find more caves to go to. I remember when I first started

caving, you couldn't get anyone to tell you where stuff was. I didn't know much about topography, I just started to learn to walk and look and find. I walk a lot of times during hunting season, looking for things. I'm always looking for a good place to dig. I've got one or two that are real good caves that I've dug open that are not on the survey yet. I just enjoy being in the mountains walking.

*In about three weeks, you will be doing the world's deepest free fall drop down in Mexico. What kind of thoughts are going through your head?*

I nervous, real nervous. I was hoping to get in a little better shape than what I'm in but I don't think I am going to make it, nursing a bad knee and a cold. If I can just get over the lip and get started, I'll be alright. When I get down there, if I don't feel right, I'll just do the other two. Just have to wait and see how that goes.

*What changes have you seen in caving over the last fourteen years that you've been caving?*

When I first started caving, I couldn't get people to talk to me. I guess people have seen me around enough to know me now and they'll talk to me and kind of help me out now. I can remember experimenting with types of ascending rigs and finally seeing someone with a real ropewalker. It was hard figuring that out on my own. Now you can just go and buy what you need and put it on and go caving. I guess that's a good thing.

*What kind of caving goals do you have for yourself in the next 10-15 years or so?*

I would like to get into surveying. I think that would be interesting to do. Also, I would just like to find some more digs, make some more caves.



*Candid Caver*

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE CULLMAN GROTTO  
OF THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

February 1, 2000

The regular monthly meeting of Cullman Grotto of National Speleological Society was called to order on Tuesday, February 1, 2000 at 7:30 p.m. in the conference room of the Cullman County Public Library by Harold Calvert, Chairman. 18 were present.

The minutes of the previous monthly meeting were read. Motion was made by David Drake to accept the minutes as read and seconded by Micah Sims.

The treasurers report was given.

Year 2000 grotto dues are payable now.

The grotto now has 20 helmets with chin straps and 5 headlamps.

Steven Whited, the park ranger at Rickwood

Caverns has asked if someone would like to volunteer on Saturday evenings to make a presentation to visitors about bats.

The scout trip to Tumbling Rock has been rescheduled for March 11.

On 2/5/00 there will be a grotto trip to Cedar Ridge Crystal and South Pittsburg Pit. Meet at the library at 8:00 a.m.

Several trip reports were given.

A special award was presented to Patrick O'Diam.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, the Chairman declared it adjourned.



The Flowstone  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Sandra Ln. NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013

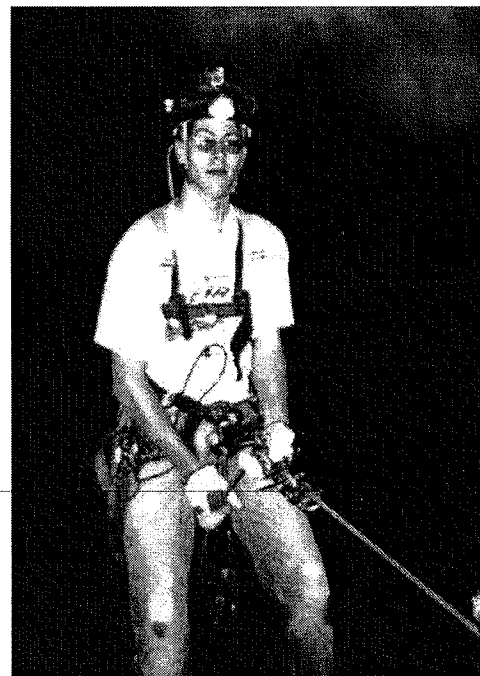
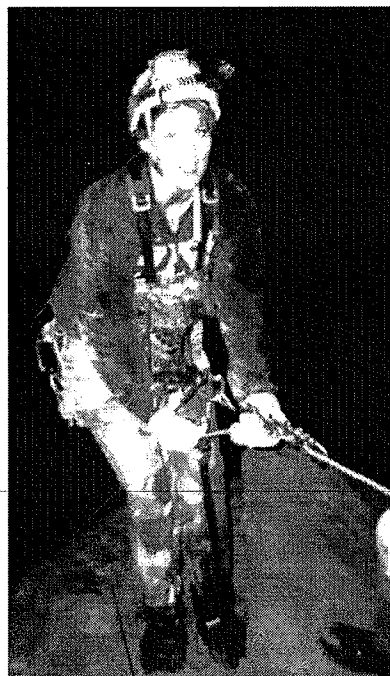
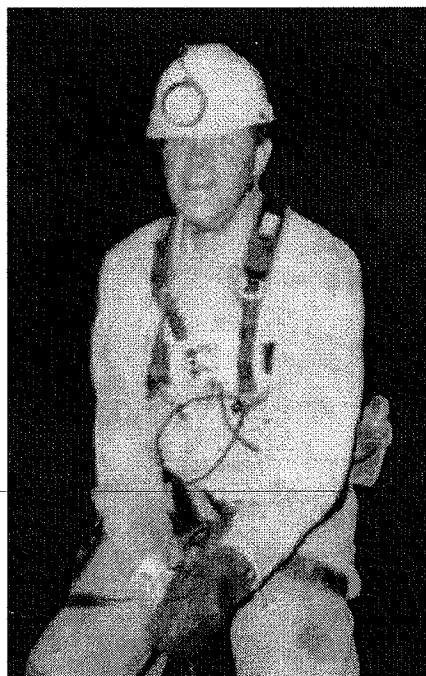
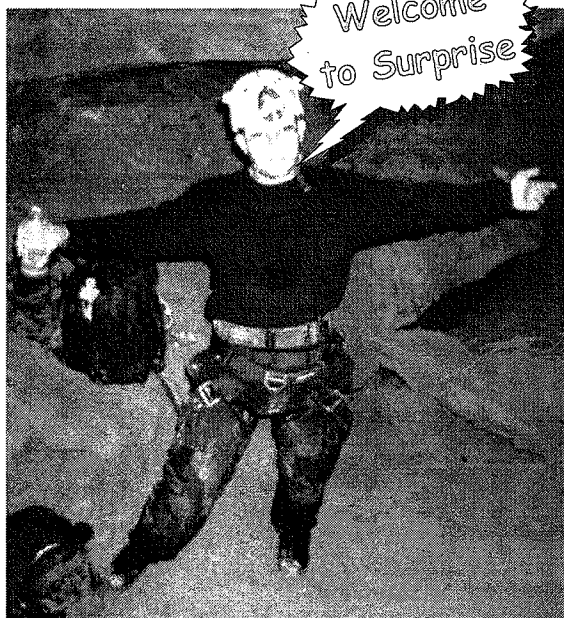
# The FLOWSTONE

April 2000

Vol. VII No 4

A Monthly Newsletter of the Cullman Grotto  
of the National Speleological Society

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TITLE PAGE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The *FLOWSTONE* is published monthly by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Items submitted for publication must be received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to be included in the following month's issue.

The Cullman Grotto will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of articles within *The FLOWSTONE* is allowed without consent provided credit is given to the source.

Membership to the Cullman Grotto is eight dollars (\$8) for individual membership or ten dollars (\$10) per family per year. Due are payable at the first grotto meeting of each year and includes the subscription to *The FLOWSTONE*. Subscription rate for nonmember is eight dollars (\$8) per year. See the editor for back issues.

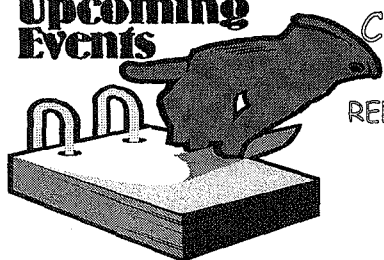
The Cullman Grotto meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Cullman County Public Library conference room, 200 Clark St. NE, Cullman, AL. All visitors and prospective members are welcome.

2000 OFFICERS

Chairman: Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 webcavers@hotmail.com	Vice-Chairman: Micah Sims 1431 Co Rd 827 Cullman AL 35057 (256)734-4042
Secretary: Evon Thompson 378 Co Rd 395 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-1772	Treasurer: Tracy Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 tcalvert@cullman.net

<i>Official Grotto Address:</i> Cullman Grotto c/o Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 webcavers@hotmail.com	<i>Newsletter Exchange:</i> <i>The FLOWSTONE</i> Cullman Grotto - NSS 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 35055-6013 vertical@corrcomm.net
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Upcoming Events



CALENDAR OF CAVE RELATED EVENTS

- April 8 Grotto Trip TBA
- May 2 Grotto meeting at the Cullman County Public Library.
- May 6 Grotto Trip TAB
- May 13 Hackney's Cave trip lead by Van Cain Meet at turn off to Rickwood off I-65.
- May 19-21 SERA held in Crossville, TN
- June 26-30 NSS Convention - Elkins, WV
- July 6 Grotto meeting at the library: On Thursday night due to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July

APPOINTMENTS

Advisor: Victor Bradford 8333 US Hwy 31 Hanceville AL 35077 (256)734-2809	Publications, Safety & Membership: Patrick O'Diam 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 3505 (256)739-0327 vertical@corrcomm.net
Librarian: David Drake 110 Co Rd 1386 Falkville AL 35622 (256)739-0811 idopits@cs.com	

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Front Cover:

Harold Calvert, Shane Drake, Kuenn Drake, Wendy Bowen, and Stick Harper about to do Surprise Pit for their first time. Photos by Patrick O'Diam.

CULLMAN

GROTTO

# ECHO CHAMBER

## FROM THE EDITOR

I would like to thank the people who contributed to the Flowstone this month. I had hoped to get it done before the trip, but it came down to the last second. Here it is at midnight the night before the meeting and I'm just now getting started on it. I do apologize for this. I have had tons to do the last few weeks and after the trip, I found myself way behind. Please overlook any errors in the newsletter and forgive me for throwing it together so quickly. I do hope to do a better job in the future. It just seems the more I want, the worse it gets. Due to lack of time, no caver spotlight will be included this month. I hope to make up for the shortcomings of this newsletter in next month's - a large newsletter completely about Mexico. Of course, that is going to depend on you. I need the trip reports turned in ASAP along with photos or what ever you have.

## BIRTHDAYS

I guess we have ran all of our April birthday people off. Only one current grotto member has a birthday in April, and she says she will never cave again! We want to wish Jamie Sims a very happy birthday on the 6<sup>th</sup> of this month. We also want to see her back below ground one of these days! Have a great day!

## CAVE THIEVES CAUGHT

On March 26, Rangers with the Department of Natural Resources arrested two people breaking into a vehicle at Pigeon Mountain. They were brothers in their early twenties and were cavers. Watch your stuff out there and lock away any valuables. We are lucky that they have been caught. Maybe some the stolen gear will be returned to the people who have suffered a loss.

## RESCUE

No rescues to my knowledge during the past month. Let's keep it this way!

## SERA 2000

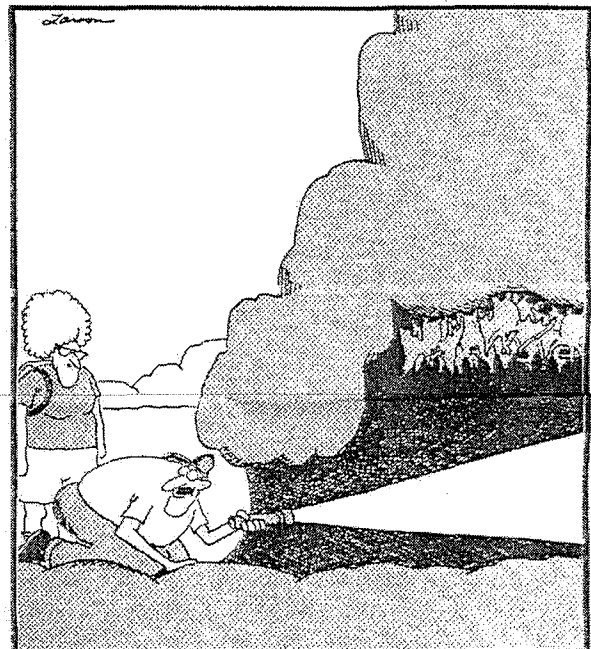
The 2000 SERA Cave Carnival will be hosted by East Tennessee Grotto May 19-21, 2000 at the Clyde York 4H Center in Crossville, TN.

## NCRC 2000

Walker Co., GA will be doing there weeklong course again this year from May 27 - June 4<sup>th</sup>. If you would like information or registration forms, see Patrick O'Diam. Also, the National Cave Rescue Commission Weeklong Seminar will be held from July 15-23, 2000 at Camp Pioneer, Beverly, West Virginia just down the road from the Old Timers Reunion site. Visit the site at <http://svis.org/ernrc/wl2000.htm>

## JULY MEETING

Due to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, our regular first Tuesday of the month meeting has been changed to the first Thursday of the month. The library has agreed to let us come on this date and hold our meeting, so please mark you calendar for this change.



"C'mon, Arlene. Just a few feet in and then we can stand."

## “SURPRISE”

From a Fool's Perspective  
by Kuenn Drake

One of the many things that I despise about getting older is a decaying memory, but for me March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2000 was one of those days that I don't believe I will soon forget...if ever. Living in an age of spontaneity, we rarely wait for anything any more, and often when we do plan, save and prepare, the event falls short of expectations. Well, on this occasion the wait paid off, magnified by 25 years of anticipation, the experience lived up to its billing. At 8 am a group from the Cullman Grotto; Harold Calvert, David Drake, Shane Drake, Patrick O'Diam, Evon Thompson, and I left the library...destination Surprise Pit. We would meet “Stick” Harper at the Texaco in Guntersville and be joined later by Wendy Bowen, Glenn Ledbetter, Jeff Lynn, and Derick Mitchell at the pit. It would be a first for Harold, Shane, Stick, Wendy and I.

The journey that would climax this day began for me in the early 70's when I made my first trip to “New” Fern via the Johnston entrance. That day our group passed the Fern sink entrance as the trip leaders (Ted Oliver and my father, Charles Drake) told us of its discovery and the seven second pit called “Surprise”. While standing around the sink watching the water cascade down, they told us that just a few hundred feet from this entrance, in stream passage, the water plunges into darkness, not to hit bottom until 437 feet later. Wow! To a wide eyed twelve year old that was impressive. I distinctly recall saying, “anyone that would go down that hole has got to be a FOOL!!” Although, I held high esteem at that time (and still do today) for anyone that would do it, especially with the ascending techniques of that era. Three years later I would actually venture back to the brink of Surprise Pit, throw in a rock and listen for the report, and again rehearse my earlier statement.

The drive to Nat Mountain that morning was filled with stories of past adventures in Fern. David, Shane and I road together, David explained the crawl around the pit, the breakdown bridge, rigging points, and the bottom, which by the way he said,

“will not be anything like you have pictured”. He was right. We finally reached our destination and began the hike, all the while wondering if it was really going to happen. You know the feeling when you have waited a long time to do something. Patrick and David entered the main passage via the waterfall entrance. “You're gonna get wet anyway”, they called out.

Patrick led the way and secured a safety line for the crawl. He then rigged and padded the rope. The question was asked who will go first? No one spoke up. “I think Kuenn should go first” he said. Others responded in the affirmative. “Is anyone interested in my opinion”, I responded. What the heck, I have come this far...so I rigged in. Just as I reached the point of no return Patrick yelled, “Kuenn”, “click”, “I wanted to get a picture of this one”, he said. The rappel down was breath taking, literally. I caught myself taking heavy sighs multiple times. The emotions of the moment were overwhelming, the history, the memories, my eyes began to water...the spray had soaked my face. Braking occasionally to make sure I was still in control I recalled the statement about fools. I submit now, they have more fun.

David came down next, then Patrick, then Shane. Patrick descended in a spiral. The effect was great, we could see the walls as he spun, it gave us a better appreciation for the massiveness of this hole. I assumed he was doing it for our benefit, however, on bottom he remarked that he would never use a micro on a long rappel again. “I almost got sick”, he said.

On bottom we took some time to look around. Everything looked, well, freshly washed. David noticed a medical wrapper, “probably from the ill-fated descent of 98” he stated. The rushing sound of water falling and gusts of mist soon drove us from the derigging point to higher ground. We made it to the register and on to McKinney's haystack. Patrick pointed out the general direction to Torode's

Hall and other anomalies. By this time the others on top would be anxious to come down so David and I headed to the rope to begin our climb. I climbed up about 30 feet and waited for him to attach and off we went. I learned quickly that "on top" can be quite a ride in itself. My right ascender did not track as well as I would have liked but it was manageable. On the way up I noticed, from a distance, what appeared to be shiny objects on the walls. I assumed that they were bolts that had been set but could not figure out the erratic spacing. Twenty feet from the top, when the wall comes within a few feet of the rope, I realized that the shiny objects were warm blooded. Tiny water droplets on the backs of bats, a new idea for Christmas decorations. The climb out was uneventful and really not as difficult as I had anticipated.

Once on top, Evon prepared to descend. Now the original plan was for Patrick to come up after Evon

went down, but we decided on top that "Stick" should follow Evon. She would relay the message to Patrick (did I mention that we had no radios). It was about this same time that we were joined by Derick, Glenn, Jeff and Wendy. We received a faint "bo" from bottom. Ok, Evon's down. "Stick" began to rig in and move toward the edge when, "bo bo", not so faint echoed up. Well, I guess somewhere betwixt and between someone forgot to relay a message. This was my first introduction to the "bo" communication system. Not bad. David and I had to make a quick exit to fulfill a previous commitment so we headed out. After our departure "Stick", Harold and Wendy would successfully bounce the pit.

While waiting at the other end of the crawl I spotted a white "crawd" moving in the water. "Wonder if he knows what's downstream", I thought, "probably not...only a FOOL would know!"

---

## *Surprise Encounter*

3/6/00 by ddrake

Eleven cavers, one rope and a big pit makes for a long day of caving/waiting, but that was the scenario on a gorgeous, first Saturday in March as representatives of the Cullman, Huntsville & Gadsden grottos made a trip to Alabama's deepest pit. At 437', Fern Cave's Surprise Pit is the third deepest pit in the continental U.S., behind only Fantastic (586') and Incredible (440'), both in Ellison's Cave, GA.

Seven of us, Patrick O'Diam, Harold Calvert, Evon Thompson, Alan (Stick) Harper, Kuenn Drake, Shane Drake and myself entered the cave around 11am. A second group consisting of Jeff Lynn, Wendy Bowen, Glenn Ledbetter and Derick Mitchell were doing Kenna Pit and would join us later in the day.

There are 4 main rig points for Surprise Pit. The 1<sup>st</sup> rig point is a 437' rappel located near the step across on the ledge that skirts the left side of the pit. There are several bolts in the wall to rig to but most of them have been there for quite sometime since this drop is very seldom used. A new bolt may need to

be set if this drop is to be rigged.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> rig point, from which most rappels are made, is located on the far right hand side of the breakdown bridge beyond the 1<sup>st</sup> rig point. This 404' rappel lands you in an area on the side of a huge rock pile known as Cuddington's Cairn. The landing area is some 33' from the pit floor. Still at 404' it ranks as the third deepest pit. Several bolts have been set for rigging on the right side wall and in the ceiling but questions about stability and length of existence always coerce us into using a natural anchor as the primary rigging source and bolts for backup. The natural anchor we use is a large boulder on the waterfall side of the breakdown bridge. We run the rope over a huge slab of breakdown about midway of the breakdown bridge. This is a little left of the original 2<sup>nd</sup> rig point but we have found the lip to be easier to negotiate at this spot. A 500' rope is suggested to rig the pit in this manner. The drop can be done with a 430' rope if you rig to bolts only and drop the pit at the original rig point.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> rig point is located beyond a ledge that

crickets would have a hard time negotiating. The ledge runs around the left side of the pit from the breakdown bridge, opposite the 2<sup>nd</sup> rig point. The 385' drop is located on a second breakdown bridge and empties directly on top of McKinney's Haystack. It provides the prettiest rappel in the pit (so I've been told). A large rock wedged in the ceiling is the rigging point.

Rig point 4 is a 352' drop that is accessed from a narrow ledge that scoots around the right side of the pit past the 2<sup>nd</sup> rig point. This drop lands on top of Cuddington's Cairn. The rigging point is a boulder above and back from the edge of the pit. Besides vertical gear, a death wish is required to do the pit from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> rig points.

The trip back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> rig point was the first for Harold, Stick, Shane and Kuenn. It was Harold's first trip to Surprise period although he has done the Hall of Giants, Little Morgue and more than one trip to Helectite Heaven. Kuenn and Shane have also made many trips into the Fern Cave System. In fact, Kuenn first stared into the depths of Surprise 23 years ago.

A healthy flow of water was entering the cave at the sink so trying to keep boots dry on the way back to the pit was useless. It also made the stay on the bottom a breezy and misty one. When the water flow is such as it was this day, a good 15 mph wind mixed with mist is constantly bombarding you

making hypo a quick and sure destination unless you keep moving. A better choice is to escape to the McKinney's Haystack side of the rock pile, which provides a break from the wind and the spray. The register hangs from a large breakdown boulder in this area as well. On days when water flow is minimal a hike down the rock pile to Garrison's Grotto provides an interesting diversion while waiting to climb. Garrison's Grotto is where the connection passage to the Lower Cave portion of the Fern Cave system exists. This area is characterized by low, wet, belly crawls.

The climb out of Surprise is entertaining. If you are climbing from the bottom of the 2<sup>nd</sup> rig point an interesting thing happens. As soon as you lose contact with the sloped surface of the rock pile the rope swings out toward the center of the pit and instead of being a couple of feet off the ground you are now 30 feet from the floor. Cavers perched atop Cuddington's Cairn will be at eye level with you when you are 70' up. And visa versa, when on rappel cavers perched atop the cairn will lead you to believe that touchdown is imminent when in fact there is still almost 100' to go.

The bottom of this massive hole is one of kind. The layout is nothing like you would expect it to be. Surprise Pit can definitely be classified as one of the world's great drops but timid cavers need not apply.

---

## *Natural Well / Drake Pit*

By: Derrick Mitchell

Saturday 3/18/2000 our group of four bounced Natural Well. Glenn Ledbetter, Wendy Bowen, Jeff Lynn and I had been there before. We were testing new gear for our trip to Mexico and the 180 ft. pit was just deep enough. Gear tested, we decided to make a trip to Green Mt., Drake Pit is 109 ft. deep, but a enjoyable trip with alot more near by. Trent Chasm, O'Hara Fare Well, etc., more than we had time for, so I guess a return trip will be planned. Last month we spent a little time in Obscure Magnificence and Hung Well, again we did not have the time to do these two great caves justice so

we will also be making a return trip to this area. Bice Mt. has some great caves and will probably give up a few more in the future. Just past Hung Well is a large sink with a huge limestone wall with a small opening, Bice Sink Cave really excited me but the 120 ft. of cave has probably excited and disappointed many before me. With spring just around the corner the problem of too many caves and too little time is already raising its ugly head. This summer is going to be a busy one, see you in the Tagwoods.



## *Surprise Pit..... HUM...*

*Alabama's deepest pit, 404'.*

Stick Harper: NSS 46573

Saturday, March 6, 2000, the Cullman Grotto, consisting of Glenn Ledbetter, Harold Calvert, Jeff Lynn, Kuenn Drake, Shane Drake, David Drake, Derick Mitchell, Patrick O'Diam, Evon Thompson, Wendy Bowen and me, Stick Harper, did THE pit. This is something that I have wanted to do since I first heard of it. I have had to work up to this; it was something that totally awestruck me. When we got to the pit we all started getting rigged for the pit. We lowered the Monstrous rope over the edge and sat and waited. We all had forgot the radios so the only way we could communicate was the BO system. We had two people in the group that had to leave early so they went first. We first sent four down, then two up, two down method. First was Kuenn and David, then Shane and Patrick. Then Kuenn and David came back out. Next were Harold and Evon; they dropped it. On Evon's way down the rest of the group showed up. Patrick and Shane came up next. As I got on rope, I saw and started talking to Derick.

He is like a father to me; he got me into caving and has been with me on most trips. He has watched over me and taught me a great deal about caving. I was excited about seeing him. When I was halfway down I stopped and started thinking: "I am 200' up and 200' down." I thought: "I am a long ways up and a long ways down." There was a great deal of water going over the waterfall outside and when we got down to the bottom 50' of the drop, we were getting heavy spray from the water fall inside the pit. When I got to the bottom I knew that Wendy was next and I told Harold and Evon that no one else was coming down after Wendy. It was really wet down there and we were all ready to get up. I had a bad ascend because my basic kept sticking, it wasn't wanting to track at all. I ended up having to grab my bungee cord and pull it up on half the ascent. But I really enjoyed the trip. Awesome, Inspiring, Beautiful, Exotic, Challenging, I love this. May God Bless You in the Name of Jesus.

---

## A New View

By: Derrick Mitchell

Saturday 3/12/2000 I drove up to the new Wal Mart on 72 to meet Harold Calvert and Patrick O'Diam. Patrick and Harold were meeting a scout troupe to make a trip to TR and I was picking up a rack from Harold. On the drive in, I gave Glenn Ledbetter a call and set up a quick trip to Neversink. Plan 1 had been to pick up the rack and then meet the Gadsden Grotto at Natural Well, but the rain and stormy weather had taken its toll on our group so I went with Plan 2. Glenn and I had been talking about the recent problem at Neversink so we kept our eyes and ears open. When we got to the pit we expected a lot more water. A little talk and the next thing to do was hike up stream to inspect the water flow. Many trips to Neversink in my short caving career and I had never followed the white pipe up to were the water is collected. Climbing uphill over a lot of sandstone, I started viewing the area in a way I see

the other more remote caving areas in Jackson county. Finding new conquest on the survey, topo in hand has become as fun as visiting the cave or pit itself to me. The trip uphill above the pit made Saturday's trip a bit more challenging and gave me a new view of the area. Glenn and I separated and followed two separate stream beds downhill. The rain started and the stream bed became a river. I stopped my trip at a fence line and started back up hill to the pit following the white pipe, I would hate to be the plumber during repair time! The pipe has seen a number of repairs and the old pipe is scattered everywhere I got to the pit Glenn had the rope rigged and we bounced Neversink in a steady rain, another new experience. Walking downhill, I told Glenn I had a new view of a special place that I was beginning to see as common place. Cold and wet, I went into town and picked up a Tall Latte at

Starbucks (yes Scottsboro has a Starbucks, Unclaimed Baggage, front door), and then made the drive home in a nice soft rain. Alabama the

Beautiful is really true, just blink and take a new view.

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE CULLMAN GROTTO OF THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

March 7, 2000

The regular monthly meeting of Cullman Grotto of National Speleological Society was called to order on Tuesday, March 7, 2000 at 7:30 p.m. in the conference room of the Cullman County Public Library by Harold Calvert, Chairman. 18 were present.

The minutes of the previously monthly meeting were read. Motion was made by Micah Sims to accept the minutes as read and seconded by David Drake.

The treasurer's report was given.

SERA will be held May 19th thru 21st in Crossville, Tennessee.

Safety note: Everyone please be sure to inspect your gear before each use.

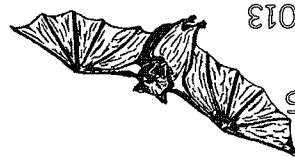
New T-shirts are in process.

There will be a boy scout trip to Tumbling Rock on March 11th. Any help with this trip will be appreciated. Meet at the library at 7:30 a.m.

On May 6th, there will be a church group vertical training at Blount Springs.

Several trip reports were given.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, the Chairman declared it adjourned.



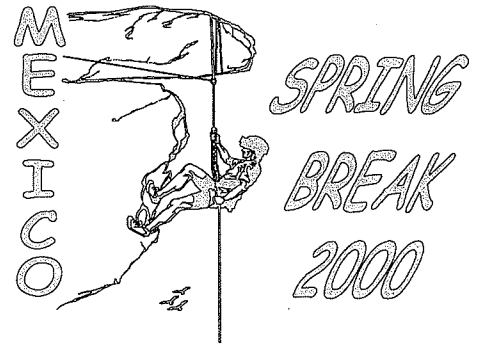
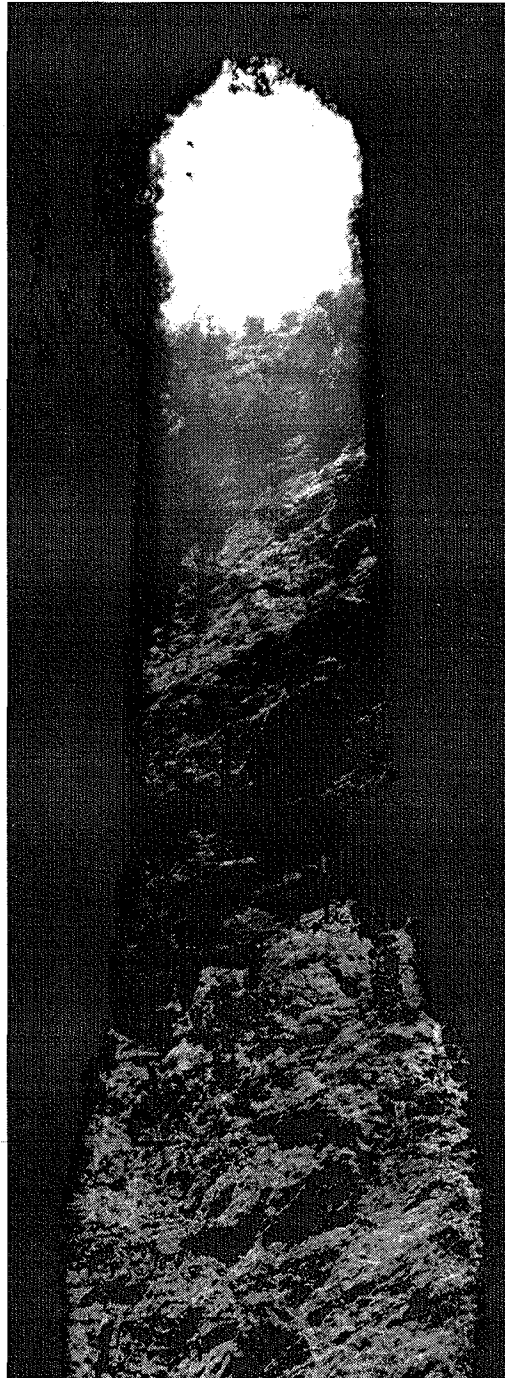
The Flowstone  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Saundra Ln. NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013

# The FLOWSTONE

May 2000

Vol. VII No 5

A Monthly Newsletter of the Cullman Grotto  
of the National Speleological Society



TITLE PAGE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The FLOWSTONE is published monthly by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Items submitted for publication must be received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to be included in the following month's issue.

The Cullman Grotto will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of articles within The FLOWSTONE is allowed without consent provided credit is given to the source.

Membership to the Cullman Grotto is eight dollars (\$8) for individual membership or ten dollars (\$10) per family per year. Due are payable at the first grotto meeting of each year and includes the subscription to The FLOWSTONE. Subscription rate for nonmember is eight dollars (\$8) per year. See the editor for back issues.

The Cullman Grotto meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Cullman County Public Library conference room, 200 Clark St. NE, Cullman, AL. All visitors and prospective members are welcome.

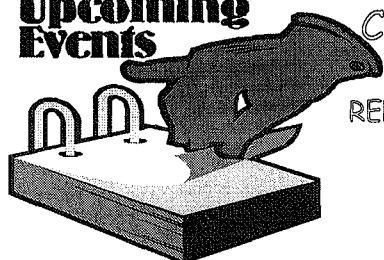
2000 OFFICERS

<b>Chairman:</b> Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 webcavers@hotmail.com	<b>Vice-Chairman:</b> Micah Sims 1431 Co Rd 827 Cullman AL 35057 (256)734-4042
<b>Secretary:</b> Evon Thompson 378 Co Rd 395 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-1772	<b>Treasurer:</b> Tracy Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 tcalvert@cullman.net


**Official Grotto Address:** Cullman Grotto  
c/o Harold Calvert  
123 Co Rd 250  
Cullman AL 35057  
webcavers@hotmail.com

**Newsletter Exchange:** The FLOWSTONE  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Sandra Ln NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013  
vertical@mindspring.com

Upcoming Events



CALENDAR OF CAVE RELATED EVENTS

- May 6 8:00 ??? Grotto Vertical Training at Blunt Springs - Youth group
- May 13 9:00 am Hackney's Cave trip lead by Van Cain Meet at turn off to Rickwood off I-65.
- May 19-21 SERA held in Crossville, TN
- May 20 2:00 pm Patrick's Graduation Van Braun Center 
- June 26-30 NSS Convention - Elkins, WV
- July 6 7:30 pm Grotto meeting at the library: On Thursday night due to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July

APPOINTMENTS

**Advisor:** Victor Bradford  
8333 US Hwy 31  
Hanceville AL 35077  
(256)734-2809

**Librarian:** David Drake  
110 Co Rd 1386  
Falkville AL 35622  
(256)739-0811  
idopits@cs.com

**Publications, Safety & Membership:** Patrick O'Diam  
700 Sandra Ln NE  
Cullman AL 3505  
(256)739-0327  
vertical@mindspring.com



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Front Cover:

El Sotano de las Golondrinas - World's deepest freefall pit. Photo taken by Evon Thompson on the Mexico - Spring Break 2000 trip.

CULLMAN

GROTTO

## ECHO CHAMBER

## FROM THE EDITOR

I would like to thank the people who contributed to the Flowstone this month. I am very pleased at the number of great trip reports that got turned in. It was nice being able to include all of the reports and not have to type any of them. They all were sent in on floppy or by e-mail and that made it very nice. I am very pleased with this month's newsletter and hope each of you enjoy it as much as I have. With this being a special newsletter dedicated all to Mexico, I thought you may want an extra copy or two so I printed up a few extra. Just let me know if you would like one. They are 50 cents each for extra copies. Also, you may have noticed that the print is a little smaller than normal. I have reduced the font to size 10. Maybe Vic will still be able to read it! I thought this would be able to reduce the number of pages included but still contain all the same amount of information.

I would like to encourage each of you to get your trip reports in early for the next few months. Because of school and work, I will be out of the country for the next two months prior to the newsletter getting done. I will print the newsletter a few weeks early, so get those reports in. The June Flowstone is already shaping up nicely. I need the reports by the 18<sup>th</sup> of the month for them to get included. Reports, jokes, philosophies, thoughts, complaints, photos, anything you want to send in, I could use.

On a little more personal note, I have finished school and will be graduating on May 20<sup>th</sup>. I know this is SERA weekend, but if you do not go to SERA, you are welcome to attend my graduation in Huntsville at the Von Braun Center at 2:00 pm. Thanks to all who have helped out with grotto responsibilities over the past few months as my schedule required many long, sleepless nights. Now, let's do some serious caving!

## BIRTHDAYS

Birthdays for the month of May are very slim. Only birthday that I know of is for Greg "Corona" Thompson. I'm not sure how old he is, but we wish him a very happy birthday!

## NCRC 2000

Walker Co., GA will be doing their weeklong course again this year from May 27 - June 4<sup>th</sup>. If you would like information or registration forms, see Patrick O'Diam. Also, the National Cave Rescue Commission Weeklong Seminar will be held from July 15-23, 2000 at Camp Pioneer, Beverly, West Virginia just down the road from the Old Timers Reunion site. Visit the site at <http://svis.org/emnrc/wl2000.htm>.

## RESCUE

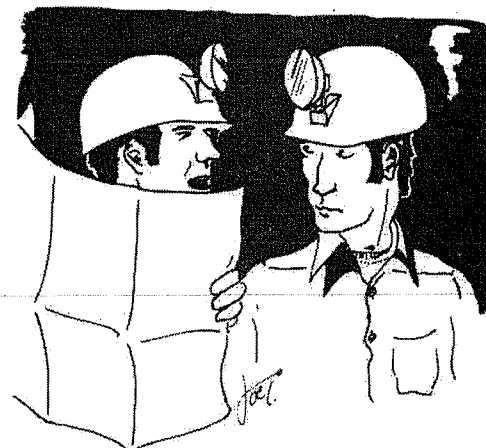
We have had two rescues in the last month that I am aware of. Both were similar situations and were not serious in nature. First, on April 9<sup>th</sup>, two "spelunkers" entered a cave and climbed into a 90-foot cave behind a waterfall. Both men in their early 20's were from Stevenson, AL. They tied knots in a flimsy rope and could not climb back up the pit they entered. One finally got up and went for help. "Luck was with them," said Capt. Hastings. "They had no lights, no caving experience. I wouldn't have tied a dog up with the rope they used." Then, on April 22, a group of four teens entered a cave in TN late at night. They went down a tight and muddy pit of about 30 feet. When they were unable to get back up, one who stayed up top went for help. This group had no caving equipment or hard hats. Each had a band mounted head light with no back up. Two males in the group had no shirts on and had abrasion to the skin. Both groups were taken out of the caves without major difficulty.

## SERA 2000

The 2000 SERA Cave Carnival will be hosted by East Tennessee Grotto May 19-21, 2000 at the Clyde York 4H Center in Crossville, TN.

## JULY MEETING

Due to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, our regular first Tuesday of the month meeting has been changed to the first Thursday of the month. The library has agreed to let us come on this date and hold our meeting, so please mark your calendar for this change.



*This map conclusively proves what I've been telling you all along, Nurdley! We're lost.*  
Taken from the Huntsville Grotto Newsletter  
Vol. XII, No. 9 - Sept. '71: Pg. 84

## MY MEXICO EXPERIENCE

by Jeff Lynn NSS 38192

My Mexico experience started with one long ride! After looking back on it though, I don't think I would go any other way; it was a blast, but don't quote me on that. At the border, I was a little nervous not really knowing what to expect but everything went fine. After passing inspection, we made our way thru Matamoros and that was an adventure in itself because we nearly hit a police officer. That was my first taste of Mexican traffic; little did I know that it would get worse, much worse. More on that later. We were on our way to Valles and we were all excited that we were ALMOST THERE! {That was for you Wesley.} I guess I must have heard Wesley say that about 100 times on the way down to Valles. There wasn't a whole lot to look at on the way down - just flat land with skinny cows on the side of the road. Then, all of a sudden in the distance thru the haze, you could see these massive mountains rising up to the sky. We stopped to get gas and Patrick decided to let Derick drive, BIG MISTAKE!! We immediately got lost in some little Mexican village but after a little driving around, {and I will just leave it at that} we were getting closer to Valles. We arrived at Hotel Valles at around 11:30 p.m. and ate at the hotel. Half the group stayed here and the rest of us stayed at Hotel Pina.

The next day we went to Xilitla. That was very interesting; we also went to see something called the Birdcages. This was very nice; I was told that one man made all of it and it was impressive. Then our group split with some going back to Valles and the rest of us going to a village where you park to go to Hoya De'luz, sorry if that isn't spelled correctly but that was the best I could do. (Good try. It's Hoya de la Luz. Ed.) Patrick wanted to check on making a future trip back there. The people were very nice and I gave some candy to the kids. That was a lot of fun. We headed back to Valles to get some much needed food. After a good nights rest, we headed for Golondrinas. The road up was pretty good, a whole lot better than it used to be I was told. We arrived at the parking area and were met by a young Mexican man named Santos who asked if he could carry our ropes. We had two 1,200' ropes - of course we said yes, so we made the short walk to the pit and got ready to rig it. At this point, I am going to talk about my own experiences and not the group as a whole. I must say I was very impressed with the size of the entrance, the sparrows were coming out and that was really something to see. I saw a hawk catch one and rip it in half; that was wild. After both ropes were rigged, it was time for someone to go and I really wanted to, but I wanted Vic to be there when I went. After the first two went down, I decided I couldn't wait any longer so I went to get rigged in. I was nervous at first but when I had my rack rigged in and I was hanging over the pit all my fears were gone and on I went. I had a great rappel. I didn't have to feed rope at all; I just took my time and tried to focus on where I was at in the pit. When I was about 400' to 500' down, I could see Derick and Gary walking around, but just barely. That was when I first

realized the magnitude of this awesome hole in the ground. The pit was absolutely gorgeous! Everything was green as it should be with all that fertilizer {Bird poop}. I walked around on bottom and filmed others coming down and climbing for about 2 to 3 hours, then I started my climb out. I started out with a pretty good pace, but when I got to the 700' mark, I got really hot and was drinking a lot of water so I slowed down and started climbing 50' and stopping and resting the rest of the way up. Harold was climbing below me and kept telling me just 40' feet to go. Man was he wrong. I made to the lip in 56 minutes - not too bad, but I would have liked to have done better. At least I got out and that's all that matters. I sat down up top and took off my gear and started to contemplate what I had just done. I felt great satisfaction in what I had accomplished. This was a defining moment in my caving life. I truly believe that I can do anything that I set my mind to and I have a lot more things that I want to do. Can you say EL CAPITAN and ANGEL FALLS? After we pulled up both ropes, we headed back to the truck. On the walk back, a little girl came up to me and asked to carry my pelican case that had my video camera in it and I said ok. When we got to the truck I gave her some candy and I had 15 pesos in change so I let her have it and somebody else gave her 10 pesos for carrying something else. She was very happy. A little boy walked up to her while she was counting her pesos I saw her tell the little boy that she got all this for carrying that. I thought that was funny but at the same time it made me realize how lucky I am to have what I have.

The next day we did Cepillo, a 414' pit. We stopped and picked up Santos to carry our rope as we passed the parking area for Golondrinas and headed for Cepillo. We arrived at a small village and parked; from there it was a little over a mile walk. At the parking area a little boy walked up and offered to carry some of our bags so we let him. We asked what his name was but we couldn't understand what he said so we just called him Junior and he seemed to like it. Our group got spread out on our way to the pit, come to find out that some of them took a wrong turn and got lost but Junior found them. He enjoyed that because he made fun of them the rest of the day. I was third to drop the pit. It was very nice - lots of formations. It was nice to do a 400' pit and see everything. Now I have a better idea what Surprise looks like. I decided to do the pit twice, so on my second rappel, I really let it go. It was a very fast rappel and I loved it. Santos said he had always wanted to rappel into these pits so he said he would like to start with a baby pit like this one {SLAM}. So we put him on rope. Patrick rappelled beside him as Shane helped him over the lip. I was on bottom filming his rappel. He did great and was very excited to see the bottom of the pit. He did very well on his climb. When he got out, I showed him the video of him rappelling. He was smiling from ear to ear. When we got back to the truck,

Wendy gave him her boots because he was wearing a ragged pair of shoes. That made him very happy, and it made Wendy feel pretty good to. We paid Santos and Junior and took Santos back home. I am really going to miss Junior. He really made that day a great day and I hope I get to see him again.

That night we headed for Tampico to take Kuenn to the airport and to spend some time at the beach. We played on the beach like a bunch of little kids. It was a lot of fun - even when Harold got his Kick Butt Mini-Van stuck. While driving thru Tampico, Patrick told us that in the city dump there had about 40 families that lived in it. Well it was time to head back and prepare for the next day's trip to Guaguas. We had a hard time finding someone to carry our ropes but we did, so off we went. After about a 35 minute hike, we arrived at the pit. Very impressive! As soon as we got to the pit, I saw a coral snake; that was cool. We rigged the low side, then the high side. I decided to do the low side first and had a great rappel. I climbed out and headed for the high side to do it, but I was very hot and was drinking a lot of water so I decided not to do the high side. I am glad because about 20 minutes later, the bees were getting mad. We were beginning to think we were going to have to wait till dark to pull up the rope because they wouldn't let us near it. After about an hour or so, they calmed down and we pulled up the ropes with only one person getting a bee sting. While hiking back, Wendy and I didn't take the right turn on the path, and we got to see the countryside. It was getting close to sunset and I was getting dehydrated but we

managed to find our way back and had to suffer a few laughs from the others. Then we noticed that Patrick had a flat tire so we laughed at him and then I helped him change it. We started down the mountain and headed back for Valles. It was at that moment that I realized that my Mexico trip was almost over and I wasn't ready to leave; I was having too much fun. The next day we headed for the border and decided to go a different way and drive thru Monterey {BIG MISTAKE!} The traffic there was the worst I have ever seen. The oil pucker factor was off the chart! Looking back on it now, it was a lot of fun too. We crossed the border without any problems and headed for home. This trip was a goal I had set for myself a long time ago and to have finally achieved it gives me great satisfaction. I was a little worried that after this trip everything else might seem small and insignificant but I think just the opposite has happened because I have a renewed desire to get out in TAG and explore! Looking back on the trip, I find myself thinking about the people and the life they lead more than what I have accomplished. The people I met are truly genuine and friendly and full of joy. I am going to miss them but hopefully it won't be too long before I go back, and I will go back! In conclusion, I want to thank Patrick for all he did to make this trip possible and say that I think the reason the trip was so good was because I was with my friends.

GET OUT AND GO CAVING

## *And we call this Fun!?!*

By Patrick O'Diam NSS 35852

As I thought about the post to TAG-Net concerning the Mexico experience, I realized the many bad things that had happened. While on the trip, everything seemed to be going well and I think all really enjoyed the time spent south of the border, but I realized that quite a few things went wrong. This is my post for TAG-Net:

"Fifteen people - three vehicles. One flew. The plane had a malfunction, had to land in Corpus Christi. Caver decided to rent a car and meet us at the border. Driver fell asleep and wrecked. Reports had to be made and slowed us down, but driver was alright. This put 3 people in the back seat for about 8 hours - very crowded. Party got separated near the border. Crossed without incident. Montezuma's Revenge got several people as they were climbing Golondrinas. A few stayed sick the remainder of the trip. Got sun burnt. Had lizards in our room. About starved. Got lost. Visited other villages that were unknown to the world. Put a local down a 414' drop for the first time. (He lives by Golondrinas but wanted to start off on a baby first). Had a hard time finding a hotel room for under \$1500 pesos at 12:30 a.m. Buried the kick-butt mini van in the sand on the beach. Lost prescription sunglasses in the ocean. Ticketed for almost hitting a cop but got out of the ticket for a \$500 peso bribe. Dealt with unfriendly locals. Avoided

coral snakes. Got attacked by killer bees. Got lost again and ended up on the wrong mountain. Had a flat. About had a heart-attack in rush hour traffic in Monterey. Got lost some more. Couldn't find a motel room in all of San Antonio. Ended up driving all night. Had passenger side mirror knocked off as another car passed. Dodged motorcycles that were not there while hallucinating from lack of sleep. Got stuck in construction. Spent more money than planned. Had a blast and am ready to do it again!"

Now the last statement, "Had a blast and am ready to do it again" is really true. I guess at times, you do not realize what all is truly going on because of the good time that you are having. For me, getting to go to Mexico is a way to escape from the rat race. The people there are so wonderful and open to help and make our trip enjoyable. The trip to Mexico is well worth it just to experience the other culture, their easy living, laid back way of life. Getting to do a little caving while experiencing this just puts the icing on the cake. Upon visiting Mexico several times, I am more and more desirous to live there for a time, work, and enjoy their culture. Although many of these people would be considered to live in poverty by standards of the US, I truly feel these people have a richness of their own, and for this, I am envious.

## *Golondrinas*

By: Derrick Mitchell

Friday, 3/24/2000, 6:30PM, my caver friends and I met in Patrick O'Diam's front yard, in Cullman, AL, to start our journey to Mexico. With three vehicles loaded to the roofs with people and gear, we started our nine day trip. Driving all night Friday and all day Saturday, we arrived in Valles. Dividing our group between the Hotel Valles and Hotel Peña, we checked into our rooms. After we had a fine meal at the Valles Stake House, we got some sleep. Sunday we took it easy and enjoyed the beautiful 90 degree weather, making a visit to a garden/curio kind of place called the Birdcage. Monday, 7:00AM, we loaded up our crew and drove to Aquismon. Driving thru Aquismon I could not believe my eyes. The town looks like it fell off the pages of a good book; children on the way to school, men and women walking in and out of the shops on the square, the town has a old world feel that cannot be described. Turning at the Coca-Cola Golondrinas sign we drove up the mountain to a small village and parked just off of a tight turn in the road. A thin young Huastecan Indian ask if he could carry our rope to the pit. Our three Spanish speaking members of the group were soon to tell the rest of us that our new friend was named Santos. While the first rope was rigged, he returned to the truck and got our second rope. The walk to the pit was level and about 800 feet long. I have been told that the first trips to Drinas required pack mules and a two day trip; I am glad I missed those early

trips. This was my first trip to Mexico and my friends encouraged me to be the first to rappel. I took them up on the offer and had a great rappel. The pit floor is a beautiful shade of green thanks to the swallows and parrots who call the pit home. As the other cavers rappelled down to the six acre floor, I was glad to share the pit with them, but I really enjoyed the time I had on the bottom by myself. After a three hour visit on the bottom of the pit, I began my 1091ft climb to the top. Wendy Bowen climbed with me and I made it out in about 1:20; I drank plenty of water and took my time. When I got to the 1000ft. mark, I had a little party, counting those ten rings. After the last person was out, we pulled the rope and spent the night in Aquismon at the Hotel le Mansion. Tuesday we went to Cepillo, but the heat, or the food, or something began to get to me and I got sick before I could do the pit. I sat on the lip and tried to talk myself over the lip but I could not do it. I stayed sick the rest of the trip, but I enjoyed the time with my caver friends. Some of the others will post the trip and cover other aspects of our journey, but I want to thank them all for the support they gave me. Our group: Jeff Lynn, Wendy Bowen, Glenn Ledbetter, Tracy and Harold Calvert, Shane Drake, Kuenn Drake, Wesley Pinyan, Evon and Greg Thomson, Vic Bradford, Donna Freeman (Vic's girlfriend), Gary Phelps and our group leader, Patrick O'Diam.

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## *100 Days and Counting*

wbowen

100 days until we go, the e-mailing between Patrick and myself begin. 90... 80...70... 60... 50... 40... 30... 20... 10... 5 days, now it gets personal, the phone calls back and forth begin. Who is going to carry how many sunflower seeds and if a pistachio shell can be spit farther than sunflower seeds. This is how my trip to the BIG UN'S began.

Jeff and I met everyone at Patrick's house that Friday afternoon. With excitement in the air, we gathered our gear and piled into the vehicles for a long awaited road trip. 65 hours and counting to Drinas.

When we first arrived in Mexico, I didn't know what to expect. The people were all driving in any lane of the road that they thought that their car might fit in and if they didn't think that it would fit they thought that the other person should make room for them. I learned that the left turn signal means that it is okay to pass, and the horn means "Move over, I'm coming in." Wesley did a good job at dodging traffic. He even missed the police car by 3 inches.

Monday morning began with the excitement of going to Golondrinas. "Four hours and counting," was the message that I sent to Patrick over the CB's. When we got to the

parking area to Drinas, we were met by Santos; he would be our rope carrier. Not far behind him was a little boy named Jesus. While the ropes were lowered and I was waiting for my turn at the drop, Jesus and I played Tic-tac-toe. I couldn't speak Spanish, but I can play Tic-tac-toe.

It was finally my turn. Two of my "dads" were on bottom, and my third "dad," Glenn, was there to coach me over the lip. The rappel down was long. I kept thinking that I was almost there, then Gary was climbing out and he said that he had just passed the 600' mark. This meant I had just under 500' to go. I thought that I would have time to go faster, but as I got faster I started to spin. When I finally reached the bottom, I felt like a little kid that had sat on a Sit-and-spin just a little too long.

On the bottom, depth perception is gone. I saw my "dads" Jeff and Derick about 100' from me so I started walking to them. Three minutes later, I am still walking to them. (I felt like a kid that was learning how to swim and their mom keeps going back.) When I finally made it to them, we were discussing the size of the bottom, and I decided that I wanted to do a little exploring, so Shane and I decided that we were going to take a look at the hole in the wall "just over there." Jeff was going



to stay back and take pictures for us. When we finally arrived, ten minutes later, "just over there," we were standing on a big pile of bird poop. The whole time that we were standing there I was thinking, I don't like it when the kid's play in mud, but here I am.

After about three hours on the bottom, the climb begins. Evon had told me that she made it out in 1:33 her first time, so that kind-of gave me a goal to work toward. Derick was on rope. I was to follow him to the top. He did well at timing his rest periods. We climb well together. (About three weeks before the trip Derick told me that the butt above me in Golondrinas would be his. Derick, I am just glad that it wasn't the day after that your butt was above me.) When I got to the top 1:34 minutes later, Jesus was there. I have made a friend.

The next morning we went to Cepillo. This was my favorite pit as far as formations. There were giant flowstones, pools of water, and my favorite "The House of Bamboo."

Santos was also along for this journey, and little did he know that he would be doing his first pit that day. I had to climb out to give him my gear, and Shane made his way up to coach him over the edge. With gear exchanged he was ready to go. After about two hours, they made their way back up the rope and he had a huge smile on his face. Just seeing that smile from someone doing their first pit was worth the trip. (Oh yeah, if you are going to give someone your boots, make sure that you have some more with you to make the hike back to your vehicle.)

Wednesday started out heading for the beach. When we got there, we decided that we were going to go to the pier. The kick-butt minivan got stuck, but that wasn't the highlight of the beach for me. I had more fun watching the guys run after the frisbee like unmarried women running after the bouquet at a wedding.

Thursday still held another pit for us. Guaguas was like going down a rope into the jungle. This pit was also one that you could easily lose all depth perception. Jeff wanted to do this one twice, so I decided to wait on bottom while he climbed out and came back down. After about two hours he decided that he wasn't going to do it again and I could go ahead and climb out. Glenn and I had thought that we might be tandem, until the call came from the top: "The bees are out." Since a change over might be in the future, going tandem was out. People might think that Derick prays a lot on rope, but I think that I had him beat that day. When I got about 80' from the top, I saw a swarm of what I thought were bees. I called for Jeff, and when he looked over the lip, he was quick to inform me that those were just flies that I was doing fine. When I got to the top, I learned that Patrick, Shane, and Harold had been chased by the bees. As the day passed the rope on the far wall had to be pulled up. This is where most of the bees were. Patrick, and Wesley suited up. Jeff went to help, but didn't have the correct amount of clothing on to shield him from the bees. (More praying). When all was said and done, we pulled the ropes out with only one bee sting. The guide picked up the

rope and headed back toward the village. A little later Jeff, Shane and I headed that way. Jeff would ask me which way to go, (for anybody that doesn't know me, never ask me directions) I would tell him, and for some strange reason he would go that way. Shane soon took off ahead of us and we were a little lost. I decided that I would ask for directions, and Jeff was quick to point out to me that I couldn't speak Spanish. I told him that I would point. (Little did I know that this sentence would later come back to haunt me.) Finally we found a power line and followed it until we saw the road. Actually what happened was Jeff and I wanted to spend a little time by ourselves and the getting lost story just sounded good.

The next morning began our journey home. Little did we know that we would be driving in Traffic from Hell. Monterey has some of the craziest drivers that I have ever seen. While we were driving through this town, Jeff pointed out to Wesley that he was losing time finding a wife. There were three girls spotted on the side of the street. I radioed to Patrick that I wanted to ride with them, when Patrick found out why I wanted to ride with him, he wanted to ride with Wesley and Jeff. I thought that I would be smart, I told Jeff "you can't speak Spanish," to which he replied, "but I can point."

I just want to let everyone know that I had a GREAT time and to thank everybody: Patrick, you did BIG. I give you A+++++ and no phooey's; Glenn, thanks for the support over Golondrinas and all of the time that you have spent coaching me; Derick, thanks for climbing and stopping every 100 steps; Wesley, now I know that guys with their tags out and a kool-aid mustaches are just putting on; hey Wesley, psssst; Evon, thanks for giving me a goal to work toward; Greg, your jokes helped ease the tension; Harold, THE RACK'S. Nothing else needs to be said; Tracy, thanks for the drink of Apple Stuff, it hit the spot; Shane, thanks for showing me around The House of Bamboo; Kuenn, thank you for bringing me back over the lip at Golondrinas; Vic, thanks for the pointers going over Drinas; Donna, the enthusiasm that you showed helped a lot; Gary, you amazed me climbing Drinas twice, and made me laugh when you looked in the wrong van; and last but not least, Jeff, thank you for putting up with me, holding my hand when I needed you, and not bringing me back in a body bag.

GREAT TRIP!!!! READY TO DO IT AGAIN!!!! Thanks for a great time Patrick, hope to do it again soon.

HEY PATRICK: ¿ Que' pasa ir too de el girasol pepita?



## *Mexico: My View*

by Glenn Ledbetter

Mexico: At first I dreaded the drive down there and was ready to get back before we got started good. Now I'm ready to go again; the country was great, the people friendly, and the pits deep. Just wish I hadn't wimped out on the big 'un. Cepillo was a really nice drop where I had a great repel and took a lot of pictures. I was really impressed with our rope toting guy who also had a great trip in and out. But my favorite of the two pits was Guaguas: huge. Probably the fastest drop I ever made. I wish we could have bottomed that

one; maybe next time. The only thing I didn't care for was the smell that seemed to lurk everywhere. When I get to go back, I will have more pizza and less stuff I can't say. The last thing I have to say is thanks very much to Patrick to whom this trip, for me, probably would not have ever happened. So now let the count down begin for the next trip to the land of the big 'uns. Thanks again Patrick.

CAVE DEEP Glenn

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## *South of the Border Cave Trip*

by Gary Phelps

Friday, March 24, 2000, about six in the evening, I headed out of town with fellow Cullman Grotto members towards Valles, Mexico after having driven down to Alabama the day before, from Wisconsin. Since I did not have to drive my car this time, I could snooze in the back of Patrick O'Diam's SUV whenever I wanted, making the long trip much more bearable. Riding with us was Derick Mitchell and Kuenn Drake, and later, Shane Drake, who we picked up in Texas after his plane trip to Mexico was cut short. The back seat was a bit crowded the rest of the way, but we made the best of it. With our group of three vehicles back together at Brownsville, everyone visited a local grocery store for supplies and a bite to eat. We got our pesos near the border, then crossed it about 1:30 PM Saturday afternoon and spent at least an hour at customs before continuing on our way (each one of us \$19.50 poorer than before!). After an awfully long and sometimes uncomfortable ride, we reached Hotel Valles around 11 PM where we had dinner and where Vic Bradford and Donna Freeman stayed. Most of us went downtown to Hotel Pina, which is hard to beat for \$12 or so a night.

Sunday, the bunch of us stopped in Aquismon to reserve rooms at Hotel Mansion, appropriately named only by rural Mexican standards. This scenic little Mexican town has an attractive town square and is so far unspoiled with American commercialism. We continued on to Xilitla up in the mountains, then visited "the bird cage," a bizarre collection of surreal concrete structures built in the jungle by a Mr. Edward James. I had seen pictures of this in a magazine years ago but never actually expected to go there! Back at the entrance, Glenn Ledbetter took a photo of me standing at the very top of the tower to nowhere, not exactly the safest place to stand! If you are in the area, the bird cage is not to be missed.

After viewing a huge cave entrance across a valley (Mexico is where the REAL big ones are, people!), those of us in the two SUV's drove way up into the mountains to visit a gentleman named Don Carmelo who helped Cullman Grotto members

reach Hoya de la Luz on a previous expedition. Back in Valles, everyone had dinner together, concluding an enjoyable day of sight seeing.

Monday, we got up around 5:30 AM and headed back to Aquismon and the six mile mountain road to El Sotano de las Golondrinas, a spectacular pit considered by many to be the world's finest. When we arrived, the swallows were coming up out of the 165 by 200 foot entrance in a big slow spiral formation. A new rope was rigged to the boulder at the left hand corner of the pit on the low side (which everyone used for rappelling) and another was set up about 40 feet away. Derick was the first to go down the drop, which measures in at 1,091 feet.

When my turn came, I timed my five bar descent, which took about 11 minutes. I hadn't been down there too long when I started up the other line. I wanted to see if my previous time of 51 minutes was valid, since it had been determined by two different watches. I started timing myself 30 feet off the floor (where I no longer had to pull the line through my ascenders - add a minute for that first 30 feet). Wow, what a climb! The lip is WAY up there! About 500 feet off the ground, my foot Gibbs started to abrade my skin and I ended up with some nice blisters at the end of my 49 plus 1 minute ascent (not bad for 49 years old).

I wanted to go down the pit again, partly to get out of the heat, partly to explore the bottom and partly to see how well I'd do the second time up. I figured this would be a good indication as to whether I could do El Capitan or not. Patrick let me go down the "old" rope, which was a lot more challenging to rappel from than the line rigged to the boulder, due to the fact that it made a right angle at the lip (over an edge roller). The idea was to downclimb on a pigtail and then attach my rack, but my plan was complicated considerably by a long safety tether and a very heavy rope. I wasn't very graceful attempting this maneuver and it took about all the strength I had to get my fifth bar on, having to physically lift 1,094 feet

of rope a couple inches with one arm. Fifteen months before, I had a wonderful rappel on this rope on my way to the bottom of this pit. This time was different, however, and it was not until I was nearly half way down that things went smoothly.

I spent quite some time looking for the hole in the floor that leads to the lowest level of Golondrinas (-1680 feet). Later, after seeing a map, I realized I had looked just about everywhere except where it is. It seemed possible to me that the big hole high up in the wall could be reached from the bottom. I later read that it had been - Patrick and I both noted that the top of the hole is about 450 feet up, going by the marks on the ropes! Wesley Pinyan was not feeling well and must have had an awful time on his way up (Patrick climbed with him).

Like the previous trip, I was the last one down there and had some time to enjoy the fantastic, almost unreal colossal void in solitude. The moss covered boulder strewn subterranean landscape, surrounded by massive towering walls, seemed to be right out of science fiction.

It was time to leave. I made it back up to the top, on the new line, in 50 minutes (add one minute for the first 30 feet not timed). I had wrapped my sore foot with paper napkins to make things more bearable. Later, we spent a pleasant evening in Aquismon before retiring to our rooms at Hotel Mansion. I made myself dinner from some food I had brought with in an effort to avoid picking up something and getting ill. I brushed my teeth with bottled water and had anti-bacterial products for my hands.

Tuesday, we visited 414 foot deep Cepillo which I had been to before. Harold Calvert, Evon Thompson and Derick (who was not feeling too well) missed a turn and went way out of their way before finding it. I took some timed exposures in the bottom of the pit, using Wendy Bowen, Shane, Kuenn and Jeff Lynn (?) for scale (up to several seconds long - got some good results). I tried climbing up to a high ledge but did not have the right tool to make some stairs in a hard to dig dirt wall. For the climb out, I used my foot Gibbs on my other foot wearing two pair of socks - my blistered foot was patched up with perforated mole skin and gauze (the mole skin is cut so it surrounds the blister and keeps things from rubbing on it - works great). After a long walk with a sore left hip back to Tamapas, a cold beer really hit the spot! We headed back to Valles after a very bumpy 10 mile long ride down the mountain, then hit the local Pizza Hut (just as good as in the U.S., but cheaper). We drove to Tampico that evening and managed to find a nice place we could afford to stay at - Hotel San Antonio - for about \$40 a room.

Wednesday, it was around 90 degrees and a good day to visit the beach. I lounged in the shade with a cold Corona while everyone else played frisbee. Derick lost his prescription sunglasses in the water. On the way back to Valles, Harold had to pay a 500 peso 'fine' for an alleged traffic violation, but was not issued any sort of ticket (????!!!). Not to be

outdone, Evon smacked her head on a TV at Hotel Pina (ouch!). The bunch of us did some shopping, then had a fine, relaxing dinner at the Steak House at Hotel Valles before calling it a day.

Thursday, we visited Hoya de las Guaguas, a huge open air pit that birds like to dive bomb into. There were concerns about the presence of killer bees at this site, so I went down the 667 foot drop (the side with the big overhang) dressed in army pants and an army shirt and sprayed with some bug repellent. After taking some pictures of Wesley (and later on, of Evon), I tried to make my way down a funnel shaped slope that leads to a vast chamber extending many hundreds of feet below the pit floor. Lacking a digging tool, I did not wish to tempt fate trying to get over far enough to look down into it. You are suppose to be able to get all the way down to the bottom of this chamber without a rope but how to do this without falling off a big drop was not too obvious from where I was.

Before coming up the high side of the pit, I bundled myself up as best I could in case I had trouble with bees. A long ways above the foliage covered floor, a bee started to buzz around me and would not go away. By the time I was within 50 feet of the lip, several more had come down to join it and I was getting pretty concerned. Patrick, at the top, told me, in a low voice, to be quiet because the bees were swarming (!!!). They were quite aggressive and one of them stung me in the back of the neck after getting caught in my collar (the balaclava in my pack might have offered some additional protection if I had remembered I had it). I was in trouble and I knew it. Realizing the possibility of hundreds of angry killer bees coming down into the pit, I did a change over hanging 600 feet above the pit floor, trying not to agitate the bees near me, and hoping I would have enough time before things got out of control. Once the last ascender was off, I did the fastest rappel I have ever done, completely lacking any of my usual fear of accelerating to a dangerous velocity. The others could hear me whizzing down the rope and I would be surprised if it took me much more than about a minute to reach the bottom. I would have stayed down there till dark but when they radioed that the bees were gone, I came up the low side, a climb of 486 feet (the bees took off after the sun went behind the mountains).

We couldn't leave until Patrick's flat tire was taken care of. Later, back in Valles, Harold and Tracy Calvert, Evon and Greg Thompson and I walked to a Dominoes for a bite to eat. Friday morning, we started the long, long tiring drive back to Cullman, Alabama, arriving about 7 PM Saturday evening. What fun we had trying to find our way out of Monterey, Mexico's second largest city! Monday night, while on my way back to Wisconsin (from Huntsville, where I drove out of a big storm), I nearly hit some big bags or bundles of something in the middle of the interstate. A little north of Chicago, my muffler fell off. Thanks, everyone, for a great trip, especially Patrick, who invited me to come along!

## *Mexico Through the Eyes of Wesley Pinyan*

(Long Story Short, I have finals)

After a very long couple of weeks at school, I couldn't wait to go south. I had studied the night before to 6:00 am the morning. I slept all that day, so I took the first turn at driving. We all met at Patrick's house at around 5:00 pm. We got our stuff loaded up and got on our way. Glen Ledbetter, Jeff Lynn, Wendy the Tag Girl, and I started the long drive. One of the best (and worst) things about the trip is the drive. I really enjoyed the drive to the border; it was very peaceful. Yada Yada .... We changed drivers at about three hours from the border. It seems like we were in Brownsville forever. I really don't remember much; I was sleeping at this time. And then we got to Mexico.....

México es muy espantoso por 15 minutos. Se

asemeja a una demolición Derby. Conduciendo en México es muy diversión. La gente es muy bien. La ciudad de Valles es muy bien. El alimento es muy bien. Hablé con un individuo que tomaba a su familia las vacaciones. Sé encontró con la muchacha a que voy a casar algún día. Fuimos a la playa. Conseguí sacar de Harold la arena. Fuimos a la selva. Las "Killer Bees" y el Mala Mujer eran muy bien también. Pensé que iba a morir en Golondrinas. Era diversión de todos modos. Me Amo México. Voy a vivir allí algún día. Y entonces volvimos a los estados.....

I slept all the way home. The whole experience was one of the best of my life.

## *Sotanos, Abejas, y una Vibora*

by Shane Drake

Although life is a drama of changes, it is nice to know that some things remain the same. Your family will still care about you, good friends will be there for you, and that feeling you get before you plunge into the unknown remains the same. Call it adrenaline, call it crazy, call whatever you want. For me, it's an addiction that runs deeper than I thought, and it was great to be feeding it again after a self imposed moratorium of way too long. If pits are your poison then Mexico is the mother crackhouse. For years I had wondered how I would feel looking into Golondrinas. In all honesty, I don't know what I felt. There wasn't anxiety, or nervousness, or second guessing myself. In truth, I needed to be there. Drinas is the realization of any pit bouncer's dreams, and mine were no exception. The sheer size, the squawking birds, the electricity, words cannot do it justice so I won't even try. I guess maybe I was a little more quiet that day than usual, but events in one's life of that magnitude that utterly and completely blow your mind kind of have that effect.

Equally impressive were the other pits on the agenda. Cepillo was magnificent. I would have liked to have bounced it more than once, but quarter sized blisters limited me to one trip down. Only in Mexico is a 414' pit considered a training drop, and this was the case for Santos, our guide. He made Cepillo the sight of his first rappel and climb. I think both Patrick and I invented some new terminology in Spanish getting him over the lip. On the bottom, Wendy and I discovered that the fabled "House of Bamboo" does not exist solely in song.

As for the abejas and vibora, we had to experience those at Guaguas. Upon reaching the lip, Glenn and I found that all those trips to the Mr. Yarborough's snake show in grade school paid off. "Red touches yella can kill a fella."

Anyway the lure of a 666' foot drop was too much to resist, and no coral snake would stand in our way. Nor would the rumor of killer bees daunt our quest. Once again I'll attribute the misfortune we experienced to the number corresponding to the drop since the killer bees were only on the high side. They are real. They are mean, and they definitely hate gringos. After being warned by Patrick about 30' from the top, I learned the meaning of climbing quietly. I was fortunate to emerge unstung, but Gary was lacking my suerte. My first encounter with the bees was after I had detached, and they sent me scattering gear down the side of the mountain. They never were able to sting me, and I avenged Gary to some degree by killing one of the little bastages. The trip back to the vehicles was scenic since I saw a lot more of it than the rest of the group, and I got to brush up on my Huastecan.

The trip was incredible. These were just some of the highlights. The low lights occurred on the way down. Thanks to everybody for letting me go, especially Pat. Thanks for not giving up on me bud. People "find themselves" in different ways. My way of finding myself is at the bottom of a hole covered in mud, but only then am I clean. The cleanest I've been.



## HERE WE GO AGAIN!

By Evon Thompson

It is Friday, March 24, 2000 and fifteen members of the Cullman Grotto find themselves heading for the border again. It is a long drive that is filled with lots of beautiful scenery shared between good friends. Everyone stayed at Hotel Pifia with the exception of two, who stayed at Hotel Valles.

On Sunday, a wonderful day was spent in Xilitla and at Las Posas. Golondrinas, as usual, holds everyone in awe. This was the first time down the pit for Kuenn Drake, Shane Drake, Derrick Mitchell, Jeff Lynn and Wendy Bowen. Then after spending a very soul satisfying day at Golondrinas, we trekked down the mountain to spend the night at Hotel La Mansion in Aquismon. With large holes in the walls in some rooms and with lizards in others, not everyone had a good nights sleep.

The next day, we headed back up the same road to spend the day at Cepillo. Derrick was not feeling very well and decided to let everyone go ahead to the pit and he would find the way. Harold and I did not want to leave him alone feeling so poorly, so we stayed behind with him. Following directions to take the right at the "Y" in the road, led us up the wrong side of the mountain. After a trek to the top of the mountain, we headed back down with the intention of going back to the van at Tamapaz. Almost back at the "Y", we met "Junior" who led us to the right trail. "Junior" proceeded to tell everyone that we three had been on a honeymoon. Somehow, the three of us must have short term amnesia, since none of us have any memories of this honeymoon. "Junior" was a local kid with a terrific sense of humor. After all that extra mile or so hiking up the mountain, Harold and I were still able to descend Cepillo. We just couldn't pass it up! The best part of the day was when Santos, who had carried our rope to Golondrinas and also to Cepillo, was geared up and descended the pit with us. This was his first time to rappel and climb. He did great and had a great time!

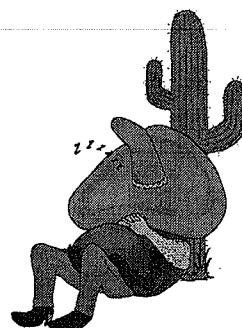
We picked up the others at Valles that evening and drove to Tampico to spend the night as Kuenn had to fly home on Wednesday morning. We spent a few hours on the beach - playing in the sand and getting the "hot rod mini van" out of the sand, and Wesley has a new love interest - a mermaid. He was also smiling a lot at a "pretty young thang" working at Hotel Valles. Wednesday was finished out with shopping in Valles and dinner at the Hotel Valles Steakhouse. (Can't

break the traditional celebratory dinner ritual.)

Thursday found us headed to Guaguas to battle killer bees. They were offset by the pair of Eagles who were quite talkative that were around the pit during the day. This was the first time at Guaguas for all of us, except Patrick. This pit was very impressive indeed with a large opening similar to Golondrinas. We rigged two areas: the 665' and 510'. Several rappelled and climbed the low side. One rappelled the low side and climbed the high side. Three rappelled the high side and climbed the low side. Gary Phelps was the only one to rappel and climb the high side. But on ascent, approximately 50 feet from the top, Gary was stung by a killer bee. He heard more bees at the top and performed a change over and descended and climbed the low side. The sight at the top of the pit was quite necessary but comical. Patrick and a couple of others were dressed for battle with the bees. Complete with long pants, a gear net bag over the head, cap, jacket and gloves they retrieved everyone's backpacks and the rope from the high side. Arriving back at the village, we found Patrick had a flat tire. Then, you will never believe what happened again! Three members finally made it to the village who had been lost. And no it wasn't me again. Shane Drake made it back alone after getting separated from Jeff Lynn and Wendy Bowen who showed up a little while later. (Honeymoon time again? Where was "Junior" when you needed him?)

Friday morning, the caravan headed back home. This time via Monterrey instead of Matamoros. Bad idea! We just thought we had seen bad driving in Mexico before. It can't get any worse than Monterrey!

Same as last year, these three were some of my best rappels and climbs ever. (Not too bad for an almost 40 year old female, huh?!) We will never forget this week together. The members of the Cullman Grotto are not just fellow cavers. We have become like family who truly care about and would do anything for each other! Again, I am proud to be a member of the Cullman Grotto and to call these people my friends. Mucho grande gracias to Patrick O'Diam, who organized and issued the invitation for the trip. I hope to go back to Golondrinas at least once more in my life - when I am Avis Van Swearingen's age when she last descended and climbed Golondrinas.



## *IN SEARCH OF CEPILLO (the honeymoon)*

by Harold Calvert

"Just follow the trail and take the right turn." That's what we were told as the others went out of sight. "You cant miss it." Evon and I had elected to fall back and take care of Derick, who was feeling ill, but determined to at least be there with us at the pit. Right turn .....wrong place! We had been here before, but as we came upon this fork in the trail, suddenly this looked different. Is this the way? They said take the trail to the right. It was the obvious choice, and was a large and well traveled trail. As we began our journey we passed many Huastecans, who either gave strange looks or snickered and whispered to each other. A few tried to tell us something ,but we couldn't speak the language. Later we would understand. The trail kept getting steeper and less familiar as we made our way up the next mountain. "Were we supposed to climb another mountain?", Evon asked. "No," I replied, "and we've gone way too far also." Derick was getting in bad shape, so we stopped at a shady spot on the trail so he could rest and get a drink. I kept going up the trail, to find out where we were. After another half hour walking I made it to the top, where I found another village! Definitely not the right trail! After hiking back down to where Derick and Evon were, and

realizing no one would be looking for us, thinking that we took Derick back to the van, we decided to rest a little, then head back to the van. On the way back, I went down every side trail we found, but nothing was familiar. When we got to the famous right turn, there was Junior, one of the village kids with us that day. He set us on the right trail, then ran ahead to tell the others he found us. After finally getting to the pit, we found out what he was in such a hurry for. He told the group that we had went on a honeymoon! Anyway, we found the pit, and after such a day we were too tired to drop it. Evon and I looked at the pit at the same time, and she asked, are you going? I said yes, that after this, I had to. She said me too. Cepillo is too nice a pit to go and not drop it. A sky-lit pit with formations top to bottom, a pool, and small waterfall decorates this beautiful cave. Junior made fun of us the rest of the day, but we didn't care; it was quite an experience. I guess people are right when they say "Half the adventure is getting there" and I must agree. Take the road less traveled some time. You may be surprised at what comes about.

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## *You're My Witness, She Said I Could Go*

by Kuenn Drake

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. No, Patrick, my wife is not dead, but I can go on the Mexico Trip. Why would I start out a trip report about the Cullman Grotto's 2000 Mexico trip this way? Well, in a "Flowstone" caver spotlight Patrick asked me if I would ever like to go to Golondrinas, I think I responded Cyndy would have to die first. You can imagine my consternation when plans were being made for this trip and Cyndy said it was OK with her if I went. The caving gods must have been smiling on me that day.

Work schedule would not allow me to stay for the entire trip, but I would be able to do Golondrinas, and Cepillo. So preparations began in earnest. Part of the excitement in going to Mexico is the prior preparation required. Fine tuning gear, technique and bodies, well, two out of three wasn't bad. The Friday night "condition climbing" activities at Patrick's house became a weekly thing. Although weather was not always cooperative we did manage to put together 7 or 8 of them. For me, I made about 4, although, they helped, I was not sure if I was physically where I should be when it came time to go.

I will not go into detail about the trip to Valles. Let it suffice to say that it didn't go without a hitch. Tag team flying/driving is probably not a good plan. But then, driving 26 hours straight has about as much appeal as ... egg plant soufflé. Maybe it was riding the hump for 400 miles on

bumpy Mexican roads, whatever the reason, this was one person that was sure happy to see Hotel Piña, regardless of the accommodations, which I might add were better than expected.

Sunday was an enjoyable day of getting to know the people, their culture and way of life. Aquismon, Xilitla and Ranchito de los Piños were eye openers. Nothing like seeing others in there surroundings to help you appreciate what you have, big or small. When I first arrived I must admit that I didn't think the leaving day would get there soon enough. But the longer I was there, the more I began to actually feel at home and a kinship with the people. A whole book could be written on the simple way of life and what makes happiness; come to think of it, many have. And who can really say that ones' way of life is better than anyone else's, including the number of amenities. This caver came back with a different perspective than when he left.

Monday, the day for Drinas was here. The trip there was filled with anxiety and Maná. It was a beautiful day and everything looked right. The locals began to congregate as we made ready to walk the short distance to the pit. The golondrinas and parrots could be seen exiting the pit from the parking area. A local by the name of Santos carried the ropes. At the lip there was plenty of oo's and ah's and a whole lot of

heavy sigh's on my parts. Word's can't describe it, so I won't try. It was nothing short of spectacular.

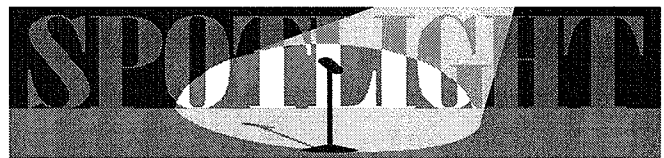
Derick was the first to get on rope, after that I don't remember the order. I was very proud of the entire group. There was a lot enthusiasm, moral support and helpful encouragement. When it came my turn, the butterflies had butterflies, until I got on rope. After that it was so exciting that it was hard to think of anything else but the massiveness and beauty. The bottom was serene and peaceful. The company was great.

At the end of the day I wondered if anything could come close to what I had experienced at Drinas. However, after hiking from Tamapaz to Cepillo, I knew that this day would be as

good as the last. Cepillo has a beauty all of its own. The most disappointing thing was just prior to exiting the pit I realized that my Mexico adventure had come to an end. It was short, intense, but over way to soon, I would be flying home from Tampico early the following morning.

This was a wonderful trip for me. It was filled with excitement, unknowns and good people. I pondered on the flight home how truly unique the experience was. I determined that it was not really the activity or the place, but rather, it was the people I spent it with. Thanks Patrick for getting me there and thank you Cullman Grotto members for an unforgettable time.

# CAVER'S



## Spotlighting Gary Phelps - Interview by Patrick O'Diam



Gary is from Oshkosh, Wisconsin and has been a member of the Cullman Grotto for about a year and a half now. Several members know him from prior trips to Mexico, Whiteside, and survey trips to Fern Cave. He is a watch maker and clock maker as well as buys and sells antique watches. He spends a lot of time working on his two story Victorian house which was built in the 1860's. He also spends a good amount of time working in his grotto, the WSS.

TELL US HOW YOU GOT STARTED CAVING, HOW LONG HAVE YOU CAVED, AND WHY DID YOU START?

I've been interested in caving ever since I was a kid but I had no idea how to get into it. Back in the late 80's, I was driving down to Florida to visit my Grandfather, I saw a sign for Russell Cave in Alabama. I went to visit that and was so impressed with that huge opening that I asked the ranger if they ever let people go in there. He told me that if I had the right equipment and was a member of a caving club, they would let me go in there. That got me very excited and I soon joined the NSS and then I found out about the WSS. That was back in 1989.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR FAVORITE CAVING EXPERIENCES THAT YOU'VE HAD.

I guess the one trip that really sticks out was my solo photography trip to Surprise Pit. It was a very technical operation. I had to carry all the ropes, cameras, and equipment up by myself. I was in for fifteen hours and had two cameras at the bottom of the pit. I closed the shutters by having a 100' sting tied to the bottom of the pit connected to the shutters. I climbed up to the top of Surprise and pulled the main line up and that pulled the string and closed the shutters. That is just part of it.

I REMEMBER HEARING ABOUT THAT TRIP ON ONE OF OUR SURVEY TRIPS TO FERN. SOUNDED QUITE INTERESTING.

Yes, and the pictures did turn out quite good, too.

SPEAKING OF FERN, HOW ARE YOU RELATED TO THE FERN CAVE PROJECT?

I am the cartographer for the FCP right now and I was left with a large amount of materials that were disorganized and scattered all over the place. It's taken a few years to get hold of all of it. I've gone through most of it, about 80%, and after

I'm finished checking over the errors, coping it, etc. etc., I am going to draw the data into compass and then I will be joining that into a computer. It will be in color.

ANY IDEA WHEN THE FCP WILL BE COMPLETED?

I wrote the FCP board a letter a while ago telling them that I have set a goal of having this done in five years. They probably thought that was very unrealistic, but the fact is that had they been perusing the project like they had in 1993, it would have been done by now.

WHAT IS YOUR PREFERENCE AS FAR AS CAVING GOES?

I prefer a mixture of horizontal and vertical, but enjoy any kind of caving. I prefer hard-core caving and I don't have too many people to go with any more. When I go to a cave, I like to have something to do, whether it's climbing, finding a passage, digging, cartography, or photography, or something like that.

YOU TOLD US ABOUT YOUR FIRST INTEREST IN CAVING, WHEN DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH VERTICAL CAVING?

Very soon after I joined the WSS, I bought a pair of brand new Jumars from George Zacaryson who had them for years for \$35. I got interested in vertical just right away.

DO YOU RECALL WHAT YOUR FIRST PIT WAS?

The first time I rappelled was at Sunset Rock on Lookout Mount. Butch Fieldhouse showed me how to rappel off of that which is about 90 - 100'. I didn't climb that day. I actually don't remember off the top of my head what my first climb was.

LIVING IN WISCONSIN, WHAT KIND OF OPPORTUNITY DO YOU HAVE TO GO CAVING?

Up in Wisconsin, we have a lot of small, wet, muddy holes which most of them would not interest people down here. We have one called Horseshoe Bay Cave which no one has ever gotten to the end of. It's quite challenging, I can vouch for that.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU MAKE IT DOWN TO TAG TO CAVE?

Sometimes I've made it down here as many as five times in a year. Lately, it's been more like three times, maybe four.

WELL, AS OF ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES AGO, WE RETURNED FROM A MEXICO TRIP. THAT WAS YOUR SECOND TRIP TO MEXICO. GIVE US YOUR THOUGHTS ON WHAT YOU'VE SEEN AND OBSERVED IN GENERAL IN MEXICO.

It is just a fantastic place to go. As far as caving, I wish it was not so far. It's a very neat culture and the caves are just huge. I understand that there are a tremendous number of caves down there that are yet to be explored. It is a very exciting place to go caving.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE CAVE?

My favorite cave right now, at least in TAG, would be Fern Cave. My favorite pit would be Golondrinas.

EVER HAD ANY CLOSE CALLS?

Well, funny you should mention that. This trip we were just on to Mexico, I had a frightening experience at Guaguas. I was climbing up the high side which is 666', and I was within 50' of the lip where I had to do a real fast changeover because I was being attacked by killer bees. I did about the fastest rappel I can ever remember in my entire life to get away from the bees.

THAT'S A BAD SITUATION. I THINK YOU DID RIGHT BY DOING WHAT YOU DID.

I think I would have been a total fool to keep climbing.

WHAT DO YOU FEEL TO BE AN ACCOMPLISHMENT THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN TO THE CAVING CAREER?

To caving in general, I would say my mapping projects. I have done a lot of work with our grotto. In fact, I started a chapter from our grotto so it's almost like we have two separate groups now. I've done some conservation. I found a very highly decorated room up in Door County, Wisconsin, which I've gone to a lot of trouble to make sure it's not trashed.

IN THE 12 YEARS OR SO YOU'VE BEEN CAVING, WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU SEEN TO THE CAVING SPORT.

I feel like it's getting too popular. I don't like to tell other people that they can't go in a cave, but it's getting to be too popular and I see too many caves that are seeing too many people. They are seeing too much wear and tear.

WHAT ABOUT FUTURE GOALS FOR CAVING?

I would like to see more caves in Mexico. I would like to do a really deep multi-drop cave in Mexico. I would like to see Hoya de la Luz. I'm planning on doing El Capitan, and I certainly want to see the Fern Cave Project completed. I also am writing a book on Wisconsin caves. I believe it will be the first on that has ever been written.

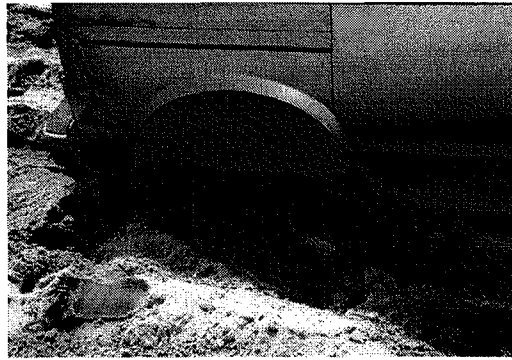
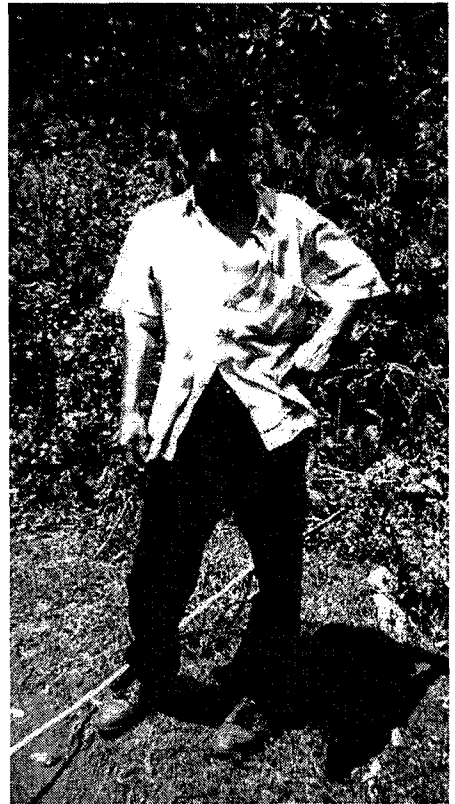
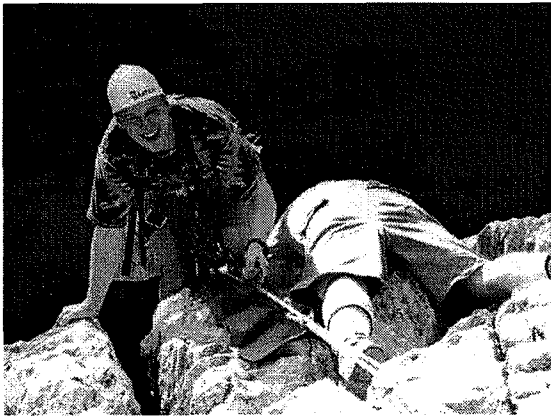
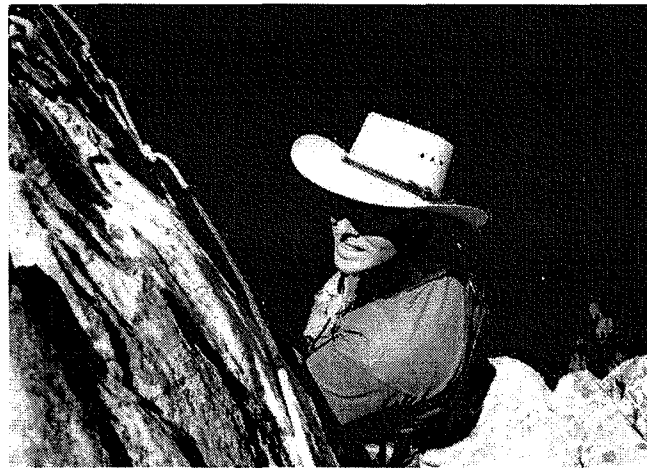
ANY FINAL, CLOSING COMMENTS?

I wish Mexico was not so far away!





*A Few Photos From Mexico*



MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE CULLMAN GROTTO  
OF THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

April 4, 2000

The regular monthly meeting of Cullman Grotto of National Speleological Society was called to order on Tuesday, April 4, 2000 at 7:30 p.m. in the conference room of the Cullman County Public Library by Harold Calvert, Chairman. 15 members and 1 guest were in attendance.

The minutes of the previously monthly meeting were read. Motion was made by David Drake to accept the minutes as read and seconded by Micah Sims.

The treasurer's report was given.

There will be a trip to Sinkhole on 4/15/00 if verification can be made that it is now open. If Sinkhole is closed, then will check on a trip to Cathedral Caverns.

As it has been agreed upon to purchase grotto patches, designs ideas are NEEDED.

T-shirt design suggestions for last month's Mexico trip are also needed.

Designing for Cave shirts for 2000 is in process.

The Alabama Cave Survey meeting will be held April 16<sup>th</sup> in Gadsden.

One big trip report was given by all.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, the Chairman declared it adjourned.



CULLMAN

GROTTO

## ECHO CHAMBER

## FROM THE EDITOR

I would like to thank the people who contributed to the Flowstone this month. I received some great things for the newsletter. I would like to encourage each of you to get your trip reports in early for the next few months. Because of school and work, I will be in Mexico at the time of the June meeting and in Venezuela during the time of the July Meeting. While in Mexico, I will be close to Xilitla and will get to go to the Pyramid of the Sun and Moon, but don't plan to get any caving in. In Venezuela, I hope to do a little caving and get to check out Angel Falls. Grotto member Shane Drake will be down there at the same time, and as of now, we are planning to return, but you never know. . . That area sound really wonderful. I need info for the July newsletter right away in order to get that put together. Please send in your reports. That is what makes *The Flowstone* much more enjoyable.

I would also like to thank the grotto members who showed their support at the time of my graduation. This group is a wonderful group of people and I thank you all for what you did. By the way, the gift certificates and money was just enough to buy a large frame pack from North Face. That pack will be used in the upcoming El Cap trip. Thanks so very much!

## RESCUE

I have thought and thought about what the recent rescue was and could not remember. I knew there were some but having just read the NSS News Accident Reports, I could not think of one, but about 100 that I read about. I did finally remember that a respected rock climber fell a distance of 80' in the area of Chattanooga, breaking most every bone in his body. Reports of this sounded very grim, but the fall did not kill him. A few days later, a person in Huntsville fell about the same distance and had similar injuries. This was at a quarry area in Huntsville. No news is know at this time as to the conditions of these individuals.

## NCRC 2000

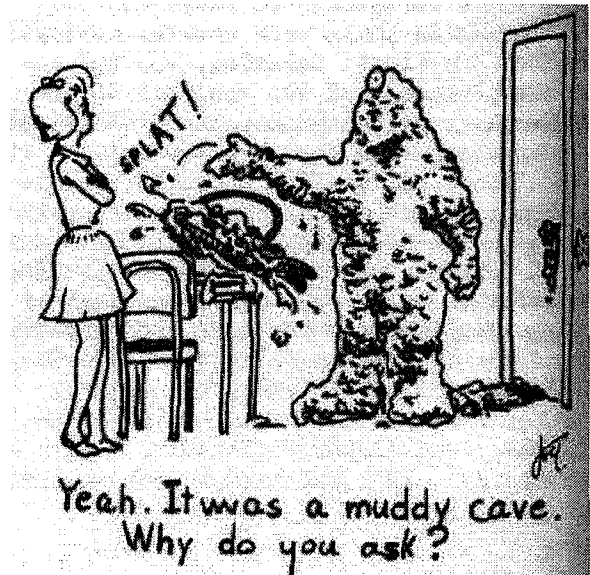
The National Cave Rescue Commission Weeklong Seminar will be held from July 15-23, 2000 at Camp Pioneer, Beverly, West Virginia just down the road from the Old Timers Reunion site. Visit the site at <http://svis.org/ernrc/wl2000.htm>.

## JULY MEETING

Due to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, our regular first Tuesday of the month meeting has been changed to the first Thursday of the month of July. Same place, same time, different day.

## BIRTHDAYS

Wow! We have a whole slew of birthdays this month! First of all, we want to wish a happy birthday do Gary Moon who had his birthday on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June. June the 7<sup>th</sup> is Jeff Lynn's birthday. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, David Drake and Derick Mitchell will celebrate their birthdays. Amel Drake has a birthday on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, and Houston's wife, Kathleen Hardin will have her birthday on June 25. We hope each of you have a wonderful day and that all your caving dreams come true.



Taken from the Huntsville Grotto Newsletter  
Vol. XII, No. 11 - Nov. '71: Pg. 102

Nervous Nelson the Spelunking Wonder  
Committed a serious blunder:  
When his buddy yelled, "Rock!"  
He went into shock  
And neglected to step out from under.

Some spelunkers thought they would go  
On a cave trip to Old Mexico.  
What they had there were fleas  
And a social disease  
And seven flat tires in a row.

Taken from the Huntsville Grotto Newsletter  
Vol. XII, No. 5 - May. '71: Pg. 40

## Quenching a Thirst

By ddrake

We empathized with camel jockeys on the Sahara as each of us, parched, took a tiny swig from a dwindling water supply. The afternoon was young, our water bottles were near empty and we had really done nothing that we had set out to do, yet. It was decision time. Do we do a pit, call it a day and head down the mountain for refreshment or do we continue on with our plans of locating, mapping and bouncing almost virgin pits and risk perishing from dehydration only to be found days later by flocks of hungry buzzards? After much deliberation we arrived at a unanimous decision. Go find the landlords who were cruising the mountainside on 4-wheelers with coolers and try to grovel enough to gain pity and a cold beverage, a cup of cooler water, a piece of ice..ANYTHING!

Huntsville Grotto members Tim White, Paul Meyer and I had made arrangements to meet landowner Robbie Smith, his father Bobby Smith and a neighbor at the Smith property to locate, plot and map caves located on their land that had either vague coordinates or no map, or both. We had hiked the long, steep trail to the destined bench level, sans gear, thanks to the willingness of the hosts to transport the rope, packs, etc. on their 4-wheelers.

"It's a good thing we didn't stop or ya'll woulda passed us!" said one of the riders as our threesome arrived about 2 minutes later at the rendezvous spot.

Our speed of ascent could be blamed on Tim and his ski poles. I would gladly have rested a time or two on the way up and I don't think Paul would have objected either but Tim was obviously on a mission. Here we were in full sweat ready to quench our caving thirst with an afternoon of pit bouncing and ridgewalking. Three hours later we would find ourselves at a dilemma, little water and lots of daylight.

After an unsuccessful coaxing of liquid from our prey, we trudged on through the woods in search of Blasted Shirt Well and a spring, not necessarily in that order. Earlier in the day we had located Bandit Well, a small cave with a 13 ft climb down entrance and a small but pretty 70 ft pit. The pit presents one of the more interesting ways to get on rope. One must rig into the rope prior to entering a tight, feet-first squeeze then more or less tumble into the drop. A pool of "in-transition" cave pearls lies at the bottom of the drop. Exiting the pit is not as much of a challenge as it appears it will be when you are squirming through the squeeze on the way down. I bounced the pit while Tim and Paul went off in search of one of the many other Bandit named caves we would visit this day.

We also located Bandit's Surprise, a smaller version of Natural Well in appearance less about 120 ft and a chain-link fence. We also located and mapped Bandit Cave, an impressive looking sinkhole until you get to the lip and realize that the drop is only 25 ft. Fortunately, there is another 25 or 30 ft of horizontal passage making Bandit Cave a qualifier. Tim

bounced and mapped this one while Paul and I remained up top making snide comments about Tim's rigging and whether or not we should pull the rope and leave him down there. We found another 2 or 3 karst features that might have qualified in Tennessee since their criteria for qualifying is not as stringent as Alabama's. I've always wondered how many caves TN would have on their survey if the less than 50 footers were subtracted.

Our tongues by now were dragging the earth in search of moisture as we crested a draw in our search to determine if Blasted Shirt Well was on the landowner's property. It was then that we heard a beautiful sound: water running; lots of water running. We nearly broke our necks as we rushed toward the source of the friendly sound. Within moments we were witnesses to a true-life desert oasis. A massive spring was emerging from the hillside. The water was not flowing from its mouth it was gushing. Cold, crystal-clear, natural, spring water. We blinked our eyes to make sure we weren't hallucinating as some of us still suffer from flashbacks. Further inspection showed the water re-entering the earth about a thousand linear feet and seventy vertical feet later. To the squirrels that live nearby we probably looked like a bunch of giddy fools as we splashed, drank and practically bathed in our newfound refreshment. We had been saved from certain demise. The source of the water was Loki's Cave we believe. However, the two entrances to Loki's that are shown on the topo don't exactly match up with the two entrances that we saw and the description that we had listed both as stoopwalk. The upper entrance from whence the spring came looked to be a low, wet, and on this day impassable, belly crawl. The lower entrance into which the water flowed consisted of an 8 ft climbdown to a stoop walk passage that we didn't push. The description said nothing about a climbdown. Because the GPS coordinates matched up we were confident that we had found Loki's, we just weren't sure that the two entrances both belonged to the same cave.

Rehydrated, we set off to bounce Green Smoke Hole. Green Smoke Hole is a much larger cavern than the entrance would indicate. The pit is 130 ft deep. 105 ft to the top of a talus pile then another 25 ft to the floor. The 105 ft entrance drop is broken up by a small ledge about 40 ft down. Any further voice communication with the top should be done from this ledge. Because of the diminutive size of the entrance and the steepness of the sink, it is very difficult to make voice contact from the bottom. At the bottom of the talus pile, the cave continues as a series of large dome rooms. There is not much in the way of horizontal passage or pretties, but the domes are very impressive. Paul and I bounced the pit and did the cave while Tim waited up top. He had done the pit previously and didn't feel like "frogging" out after having traipsed through the woods all day. The pit was a fitting end to a truly satisfying day of caving in TAG. Our thirsts had been quenched.

## *Satan's Awaiteen and Crypt of Terror*

by Glenn Ledbetter NSS 32198

On April 21, after work, Wendy and I decided to put my new A.C.S. updates to good use and do a little reckon work and pit bouncing. We drove down the road to Fern and parked near the white church on the left and begin walking up the mountain looking for Satan's Awaiteen Well and Crypt of Terror. At first, we started to leave the gear in the truck but knew we would regret it if we found them and had no gear. We found Crypt of Terror, 66' pit, right off with virtually no trouble (that's odd). Any way, the first pit found, rigged and dropped - very nice for a wall drop with some nice formations. Now on to the next pit, thinking there's no way

we can find two pits in the same afternoon in less than 1 ½ hours after work; wrong - walked right to it! Satan's Awaiteen Well is a 114' pit that you rig the rope through a hole in breakdown and then climb down into the sink and rig in. This is a really nice drop and has some cave at the bottom. These two pits were found by Andy Zellner and Leslie Weldon on Halloween Day last year and are very worth doing. If any one wants to go just ask and I will give directions or just take you there.

## *Cave Philosophy*

by Jeff Lymm NSS 38192

I have long considered caving a sport until recently. My views changed after my recent trip to Mexico. I now feel that caving is a pursuit, but a pursuit of what? A pursuit of pain? A pursuit of personal misery? Or is it a pursuit of an inner quest? A desire to go where so few have gone before. For me it is a desire from within that cannot be put into words, (Except the part about the pain and misery)! I just know that I must continue to go caving! When I was climbing out of Golondrinas I was thinking to myself, why am I doing this, why put myself thru so much pain and suffering? But as I reached the top and I realized what I had

just done I knew that it wouldn't be long until I would be on rope again. By the way, 1 day later I was on rope again loving every minute! Now as I set my sight on El Capitan I find the desire growing. I know that it will take lots of training and the pain will be great but I have to go. That's all I know, I have to go! In conclusion I would like to ask you this question. Why do you go caving? It's not as easy to answer as you might think.

Get up and go caving!

## *One More Reason to Cave*

by Glenn Ledbetter NSS 32198

While sitting around one evening, I was reading a book by W.C. Jameson, *Buried Treasures of The South*, a book on Indian legends and folklore. I ran across a story named Yuchi Gold of Paint Rock Valley. The story told of Spanish soldiers mining gold in northern Mexico, and a plan to steal some of it and return to Europe and live out there lives in splendor. They started east with their wealth and were attacked by Indians in central Alabama. The Indians carried the gold to paint rock valley and hid it in a cave in the mountains. The story goes on to say when the Indians were forced to leave the valley on the trail of tears, some of the Indians took some of the gold but left most of it. Some of the Indians fled to Tennessee with their share, settling at a place called Henderson ridge. Sometime in the mid 1920's, a Indian

claiming to be from there showed up in Paint Rock looking for someone to help load mules with the treasure. Two young men around 16 went with the Indian into the mountains blindfolded. They went into a cave and loaded the mules with what they thought was led. Several years later they learned of the gold taken from the Spanish, and hid in the cave. They spent several years looking for the cave but never found it. I know this sounds like legend, but just last year while caving near the town of Hollytree, I heard some old farmers talking about it. One of them said he knew one of the boys that went with the old Indian. Just think, with a find like that you could by all the caves you wanted!!! Just one more reason to ridgewalk. Ever wonder how some folks get to cave all the time and hardly work? Maybe it's true. . . NAH??

## 2 vs Legions

By ddrake 5/6/00

I never really got an accurate head count but I was told to prepare for 40+. There were that many or more. And there was me and Shane.

The annual rite of spring, i.e. the Cullman Grotto's hosting of the Mormon church's scout High Adventure rappelling outing took place the first weekend in May at Blount Springs. The youth group which in the past had numbered in the 10-20 range exploded this year while the Cullman Grotto help force which in the past had numbered in the 6-12 range imploded. There were several reasons for both occurrences. The dramatic increase in youth participation can be attributed to warmer weather, better publicity and word of mouth from previous participants about the "awesome bluff". The decrease in CG participation can be attributed to three major things: 1) a convoluted weekend [free trips through Cathedral Caverns, final year for rigging main drop at Fall Creek Falls, ball games, math tournaments, etc], 2) the fact that most of the grotto had just returned from Mexico where the drops are 500-1000 feet deeper [who wants to waste time with a 117 foot bluff], and 3) probably the #1 reason for abstinence, I mentioned the dreaded word: McClung's Hole. Had I said we were going to Fern or Ellison's after the bluff we would have had to rent a bus.

Utilizing a variety of hardware and harness arrangements we ran 'em through like cattle, figuratively speaking. Every one got the chance to do the bluff at least twice. Shane and I manned the two ropes on top with the help of our cousin Todd

Booth, while adult leaders provided bottom belays. Several of the boys wore military style rope harnesses so we let Todd, who is active duty, inspect those prior to rigging. Racks were used on most rappels. A few descents were made with Figure 8's. With the exception of the few who participated last year, none had ever used a rack before. But every one of them insisted on using the rack on subsequent rappels, even if they were more familiar with an 8. It was interesting to listen to the instructions on how to "properly rappel" coming from the leaders congregated below, most of whom hadn't rappelled since the war. The instruction of choice was "put your right hand behind your back". That'll work, but so will keeping your control hand beside you, above you, beneath you, or in front of you. We instructed the boys prior to going over the lip that any amount of pressure on the rope would slow or stop their rappel. We also demonstrated moving the bottom friction bar up or down with the left hand to control descent.

Only one minor incident occurred all day. One of the heavier adults became inverted going over the lip as his backside moved downward a great deal faster than did his feet. He was able to correct himself within a matter of seconds. We then thanked him for demonstrating that even if the worst possible scenario comes into play the rack method of SRT is safe. We had all 40+ satisfied and on their way by 2:00pm. After all were gone, Shane, Todd and I and a boy who rode with Todd did what we came to Blount Springs to do in the first place: Eat at Top Hat BBQ.

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## CAN YOU SAY BOREHOLE!!!!

by Glenn Ledbetter NSS 32198

Saturday was a super day of digging (mining). This trip was in the works for weeks. When all details such as hunting club guest permits and a key to the gate were worked out. The plan was for everyone to meet at my house and head for a dig left by David Teal and Jim Loftin over 10 years ago. When we got to the entrance and discovered it had collapsed I thought oh well guess well head over to Neversink, but with very little effort, we were in and standing at a 10 inch high and 4 inch wide crack with wind howling in our faces and no way on. This is were the work begins; we stretched 100 feet of extension cord into the cave and plugged into the generator and started drilling with a rotary drill and 3/4 in bit. Using a cone shaped chisel to take off the big chunks worked

great. After we got through, we found a 50' pit followed by a 12' pit to a hands and knees stream passage. At this point, there were only 3 of us in the cave as the others were tired from the mining operation that took just over 4 hours to complete. Jim Loftin, Mark Medlin and I started down the crawl for about 200' to a passage of 8' high and 6' wide. We followed the stream passage, walking and running to were it narrowed down and went for a few hundred feet, then, as I rounded a turn I heard Jim yell "BOREHOLE!" I came into the passage that was 12 to 15' wide and 10' tall and went off into the darkness. As we pushed on, we passed walking passages off to the sides and good looking climb ups; the passage seemed to go forever. Then as the ceiling begin to

recede to the floor and looked like the end was coming. I climbed up into breakdown and found more borehole that led off into the opposite direction and back down to the stream. We opted for the stream wanting to leave some virgin borehole for the rest. As we begin to follow the stream, Mark's light started to fail so we had to turn back in going stream passage. As we returned to the pit, we were met by Jeff Lynn and Wendy Bowen who were saying, "I knew we should have came on when we had the chance." All and all,

we must have seen 3 to 4 thousand feet of virgin passage, most of which was easy walking and running. The cave is not yet named and a return trip is in the works with survey tape in hand. More to come on this later. Thanks to all who were there: Derick Mitchell, David Teal, Jim Loftin, Mark Medlin, Jeff Lynn and Wendy Bowen. Hope this part doesn't get anyone mad but if not for the A.T.V's this cave would not have happened, we hauled the genitor with it.

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## *Mysterious Serging Water in Norseman's Well*

By Patrick O'Diam, NSS 35852

The plan was to go to Whopper Well on Saturday, May 13, 2000. With the borehole passage being found the week before, it looked like Whopper was going to have to wait for a while. A few days before Saturday, plans changed again and the possibility of going to Whopper Well was working out, but then the suggestion of going to Norseman's Well was also made. Ether trip requires a rather lengthy ride on four wheelers to get to the entrance. Both are multidrop caves with several drops and nice passage.

Micah showed up at my house about 6:00 in the morning and we were off, not really knowing where we would end up. I had never been to ether, but had wanted to visit both for quite some time. As Micah and I stunk up the basketball court at Glenn's, Jeff and Wendy soon showed up. They left it up to me to decide where to go, so I did the only thing I could: the call was tails, Norseman's Well.

Norseman's is a cave that is really somewhat closed. The only way we got to go is because it's on the land that Glenn hunts on and it is not hunting season now. By having a key to the gate, we drove on back to where his trailer is located, packed all of our stuff on the four wheelers and took off on the dusty roads at high speeds; I still have seven or eight oz. of sand in my eyes. I guess we road about 15 min. or so, and finally got to the area to pull off, about 100 yards from the entrance pit.

The entrance is very wide as is Neversink. There seemed to be pits and rig points everywhere, each going in a different direction. The entrance drop is 80'; it was quickly rigged with a 300' rope. Glenn went down and put the remainder of the rope down the next drop, a 97'er just out of reach of the daylight. From the bottom of this pit, we went down the nice walking passage filled with active formations. Before long, we found a pit with tons of water going in, and no way of doing it without getting drenched. Micah and Glenn did not recall the pit looking like that, so we were off again looking for another pit. Up until this time, we were still dry, but soon

entered passage with water about 6" deep. Only a small indication of what was to come.

The next pit of 25' was gushing water, but Micah rigged the rope to some formations out over the pit and we were able to rappel next to the water and only get a little splash now and then. The climb out was a little different, but that comes later. The drop landed in a pool of water waist deep or so. We all made it down and headed through some nicely scalloped passage with water raging beneath our feet. A small 6' climb was rigged with some webbing and we body rappelled along side the water that was shooting over the lip, being projected out quite a ways before tumbling down the to pool below. The next pit was one of 41' with a bolt as the main rig point. Upon reaching bottom, we went on to what had stopped Glenn and Micah the last time, the 18' pit, what we thought was the last pit. With that pit rigged, we proceeded down a drencher of a drop. Upon reaching bottom, Micah and Jeff soon returned and reported that there was yet another pit. It seemed to be about a 12' climb, but with the water raging, it could not be climbed without a handline. Only one problem: we were out of rope.

The passage back to this point was filled with nice formations so everyone made it to the lip of the undercut climb. Our packs were raided, searching for rope, webbing, or anything we could find. A knob was rigged with about 2' of 7mm rope, connected to a beaner, then to about 5 feet of webbing, to 3 feet of webbing, and then to about 8 beaners which reached the pool at the bottom. I rigged an eight into the webbing, rappelled to the beaner holding the two webbing pieces together, and passed the knot, beaner and all, through the eight. The water pounded on my legs with a tremendous force. The others waited atop the drop for the report. I walked through beautiful passage filled with large flowstone and other formations. It went just a short way before getting very low, just before the sump. I returned and made the climb back up which was easier than anticipated. Micah was the

only other one that made the drop; as he did this, the others headed out because the chill was starting to take it's toll on them.

Glenn, Jeff, and Wendy made their way toward the entrance as Micah and I derigged each drop. As we would make it to the next drop, Jeff would pull up the ropes and all that we had derigged and proceed onward. This made it nice because Micah and I never got bogged down with a lot of ropes and gear. It was quite evenly spread among the group. As I got on rope at the waist deep splash pool, I noticed that the rope was a foot or so closer to the waterfall than it had been on the way down. The 25' waterfall that was roaring loudly mysteriously quieted and almost dried up. I climbed like crazy for a few feet until I heard, "NOW!" Anticipating what was about to come, I could do nothing but hang on and wait for the initial surge to recede. That happened time and time again on the short climb. Seems the pool that was being dammed up by other's feet only took a few seconds to fill to overflowing. As I made it to the top, I made another minor adjustment in the rigging ensuring that Micah would have the same thrill as I did, if not more. As he proceeded up, taking frequent baths, he was heard to say, "I'm going to ge. . . blob, blob, blob!" He later said the water nearly knocked his climbing equipment off the rope it was so powerful.

Standing around the bottom of the 97' pit, I waited for the others to climb. By the time I got on rope, I was very ready. The cold was finally getting the best of me. It was very pleasant to climb up to the bottom of the entrance drop, and then to the top where the temp was in the mid 80's. I felt deprived because I was the only one who didn't get to climb the horizontal rope. The way the 300' rope was rigged, the others got on rope and climbed at a good angle before finally heading upward. I derigged the rope and pulled it up to the floor of the entrance pit, and then continued out. What a great cave!

With our drenched clothes, we climbed on the four wheelers and traveled back to Glenn's trailer. This time, the dust and sand stuck to all parts of me, not just my eyes and mouth. I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to go on this trip and feel blessed that Glenn, a member of that hunting club, is also a member of the Cullman Grotto. Thanks Glenn. Thanks too to Micah for hauling me back there on his four wheeler. Jeff and Wendy also made the trip so enjoyable just by their company. By the way, Glenn can do a neat trick. He can make a squirrel do a double back flip up a hill. Very impressive!

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## *Northeast Regional*

by Matt Harris - Long distant TAG Caver known by many in the gortto

Hello, all. After a long winter's hiatus, caving season has returned to the northeast.

This past weekend was the spring Northeast Regional (NRO) and to coincide with that weekend, myself, Jennifer Russell, Craig Douglas, Kara Loiko, Toinette Hartshorne, Buster Miller, and Erica Douglas went with the intent to remove the winter debris from the Ack's Shack entrance to McFail's Cave.

Ack's Shack is about a 50 ft. rappel in a crack that gets about body tight in a few places. Also, one is required to traverse sideways about 20 feet inside the crack to get to the bottom. This has been a very wet spring, so Ack's Shack was taking a lot of water. Well, I went to check it out and give the report from the bottom, and discovered that while the small room at the bottom was not terribly wet, the crawlway exiting the room was indeed taking about 2-3" of water. No problem, except that the crawl was only about 6" high. Well, I removed a few rocks (which were quickly replaced by the flowing water), took my helmet off, plopped down in the chilly water (my wet suit was up above) and jammed my head and chest into the hole. Just so I could say I tried. By the time

I got up another group hoping we had the entrance open had shown up. After my report, Jennifer and Craig descended the drop, followed by a member of the other group. After some time, all three were back on the surface. Later, another group showed up, only to be discouraged after a short attempt at the dig. Oh well, I suppose the annual reopening of McFail's Cave will wait for a later weekend.

That afternoon, Kara, Erica, Craig, Jennifer and I all went (in two groups) to Schoherie Cave, where we met quite a few others walking through the small cave. Mostly walking/stooping passage, although always ankle to waist deep in water. One caver was necked, and another wearing only shorts. In 43 degree water. We didn't ask.

Sunday was reserved for the wet side of Gage Cave. We rigged in and rappelled into the 50ish foot pit. The rappel was made more challenging by the ladder sticking through the center of the pit. We suited up and plunged into the 43 degree water, swimming through passage 6 feet wide with plenty of airspace. We crossed the largest rimstone dams I have ever seen. The water was waist-chest deep on either side of these dams. After that several hundred feet of passage, we left the



water temporarily to prepare for the nose drag that leads to the rest of the cave. Unfortunately, the high water had all but submerged the nose drag. The passage was far too long for a duck under, and after some consideration, was considered too unsafe to attempt. You couldn't really even keep a nostril out of the water. We did then do the "dry" side of Gage just

to get a little caving in and then exited by ladder (rigged in to our rope just in case, of course).

Not the caving we were hoping to do, but a lot of fun anyway. And, at NRO, I proudly proclaimed my allegiance to the Crescent City Cavers on my name tag. Happy Caving!

## FROM THE MAILBAG

# Bat cave may influence Greystone road ruling

By BRETT J. BLACKLEDGE  
News staff writer

Developers of the Greystone subdivision want to build a road near a cave that provides summer shelter for about 5,000 endangered bats.

But environmentalists have asked Birmingham officials to wait for their input before selling 5.5 acres needed for the road because they fear the deal could hurt the bats and the city's water supply.

The Daniel Corp., Greystone's developer, plans to add 500 new homes and a second golf course to the Shelby County community's northeast section. The developer wants better access to the addition and has offered to pay the city \$120,000 for the land.

The company also has agreed to protect water quality near Lake Purdy, Birmingham's largest source of drinking water, said Mark Parnell, an attorney for the Birmingham Water Works.

But the City Council delayed action on Daniel's request Tuesday, deferring action until the Planning Commission's subdivision committee considers the new road today.

Daniel wants to close an existing road near Anderson

Cave, realign part of Cox Creek and build a new street for the subdivision just north of the area that would connect to the existing road.

Anderson is among about a dozen Southeastern caves with a significant gray bat population. State biologists monitor the cave as a habitat for the bat, which is listed by the U.S. Wildlife and Fisheries as an endangered species.

The Atlanta-based Southeastern Cave Conservancy proposed managing Anderson four years ago for the water board, but those plans stalled in 1998 when the city took over the board's assets. William Putnam, a conservancy board member, said his group is still negotiating to manage the cave.

Daniel's bid Tuesday to buy the land surprised the Cahaba River Society and the conservancy, group officials said. The groups are concerned that the development and road changes could hurt the creek and the bat cave. They are concerned about realignment of Cox Creek, control of development runoff and other potential problems for Lake Purdy.

Beth Stewart, the society's executive director, said the organization knew nothing about Daniel's proposal until a re-

porter contacted her Tuesday. She sent letters to Mayor Bernard Kincaid and Council President William Bell urging a delay until the proposal can be reviewed.

"There should be public participation in all decisions concerning former water board lands, as this issue is of great importance to the citizens," Ms. Stewart's letter states.

Kincaid said he was unaware of opposition. "I share the conservationists issues," he said. "But they weren't on the table on this one."

Daniel already has commissioned a study that shows the Greystone expansion will not harm the cave, said Alton Parker Jr., a lawyer for the developer. Parker said Daniel also has agreed to protect the cave and the Lake Purdy watershed.

Parker pointed out that water board officials have agreed to the Daniel proposal for the new road. If they saw any problems, they would have objected, Parker said.

Daniel also is agreeing to allow Birmingham officials to monitor and maintain water quality in Lake Purdy, he said. Those restrictions could not have been imposed without Daniel's consent and the city's agreement to sell the land, Parker said.

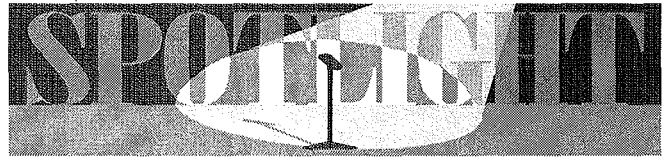
# CAVER'S



Houston is 30 years old, married to Kathleen who is also in Radiology residency with him (yr. 2 of 5) in Dallas, TX. They have no kids yet. Houston grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, went to high school in Chattanooga, finished up college in New Orleans and finally med school in Mississippi, and did a 1 year internship at Baptist in Memphis last year before moving out to Texas. He says overall nowadays, lots of work and little caving.

*TELL US HOW YOU GOT STARTED CAVING, HOW LONG HAVE YOU CAVED, AND WHY DID YOU START?*

While at boarding school in Chattanooga I went on a trip with a high school teacher. I didn't even know caves (other than Ruby Falls) existed in the area until then. We went to Howard's Waterfall cave. This other guy and myself got separated from the group at one point and of course our lights failed (all 2 of them). We didn't have backups but did have helmets but that didn't help us any at that time! So we sat and yelled and sat and yelled until about 45 min. later they found us sitting in the dark. I just could not believe that there was that much hollowness in the earth. I fell in love with caving. After that trip, on weekends we'd sneak out of the dorm after hours, cave all night, and sneak back in. I guess we made 20 trips to Pettijohn and Howard's since those were the only 2 caves I knew of.



Spotlighting Houston Hardim -

Interview by Patrick O'Diam via e-mail

*WHEN WAS YOUR FIRST VERTICAL EXPERIENCE WITH CAVING?*

After introducing Matt Harris, Hubert Crook, and Reed Hilton (B-ham grotto) to caving, we caved strictly horizontal for 6 years or so. Keep in mind that the nearest cave (and cavers) were a 7 hr. drive from MS so we didn't exactly meet a lot of other cavers and didn't even know what the NSS was. Somehow or another we heard about TAG and in 1991 (?) went and bought some vertical gear, On Rope, and copied a fellow's cave guidebook. We were in heaven! So after jerry-rigging our equipment together and training on trees/bridges we went to Cagle's Chasm. Shallow pit was our first followed by Cagle's which scared the crap out of me at the time. It was winter and icicles were falling off the rim into that huge hole. I think Matt went down first after I rigged in and chickened out.

*WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE CAVE/PIT?*

Sinkhole is my favorite TAG pit while Cepillo is my favorite overall pit.

*WHAT PREFERENCE DO YOU HAVE IN CAVING?*

TAG caves to start with, specifically challenging ( for my skill level) wet multidrop pulldowns.

*WHAT WOULD YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR BIGGEST HARDCORE OUTING?*

Well, at the time years ago it was a thru trip in Guffey Cave. Matt and I made the mistake of bringing two friends who were in town from Chicago on their 1st (and only to this day) caving trip. We knew about "The Barrier" but only brought 2 wetsuits to split among us. It took us 11 hours and the 2000' sand crawl simply devastated our bodies and morale. It was high water and one of the Yankee dudes kept saying "We're all gonna die!!" over and over for the last 4 hours of the trip. The problem was that the wet sand crawl just kept on going and going and we weren't really even sure if the exit would be open (fear of it being gated) or that we could even find it. The whole trip was one massive debate of should we turn around now and suffer thru retracing our entire route or gamble by

going forward towards an elusive entrance? The trip was hell and I still have not been back.

*EVER HAD ANY CLOSE CALLS WHILE CAVING?*

Yep, a few minor ones and two major ones. One involved being terribly hypothermic while trying to negotiate the Root Canal in the winter and the other was a Matt/Houston combo assault on lower Ellison's when 15 hrs into the cave we found ourselves totally lost, going in circles and low on light b/c BOTH of our 10 Amp hour backup batteries failed within 1 hr of each other. My mini mag light finally died as we were stumbling down the trail back toward the blue hole. It was one of those situations where if God appeared in the midst of our desperation and said "I'll teleport you out of here if you'd simply sign this \$20,000 credit card bill" We both would have signed immediately.

*SEEMS LIKE I RECALL YOU SAYING YOU LIVED IN HOLLYWOOD, AL FOR A SUMMER DOING NOTHING BUT CAVING. WHAT ABOUT THAT?*

Yep, summer of '94. What an awesome summer. I had med school coming up and had saved a bit of \$ so I drove to Hollywood, AL and rented a trailer for \$200/mo ( I think) furnished. I lived there for 2 months and caved, usually solo & vertical , every chance I got. I also went to every major cave carnival in the South that year. It was lonely but so much fun.

*WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR GREATEST CAVING ACCOMPLISHMENT?*

It'd have to be Hoya de Luz with you, Micah, and Matt Harris a few years ago. What a hike! What a pit! What an adventure in the true sense of the word. Boy was I glad to have you there for your Spanish speaking abilities.

*WHAT ABOUT MEXICO? YOU'VE BEEN SEVERAL TIMES. TELL US ABOUT THAT.*

My first trip to Mexico was summer of '94 after the Brackettsville, TX NSS convention. There were 11 of us from 11 different states who went on a 10 day Guas Guas/ El Sotano trip led by renown TX caver , Don. . .can't remember his last name. Hoya is the closest thing to El Sotano de Barro (approx. 1400' ) that I've done. It was a life changing trip for me concerning caving. From there I knew there was no limit and that anyone who loves the sport can manage to do just unbelievable caves. I knew I'd return and in '95 I did with Matt, Dave Quillen ( from ATL, now in Jackson Co.) and his friend Bob. We spent 10 days in San Louis Potosi doing Guas Guas, Golindrin, and visiting Las Posas. And my last trip was with ya'll (Micah, Patrick, and The Infamous Milkman, aka el Gordo) when we did Golindrin, Cepillo, Hoya de la Luz, and Guas Guas. Mexico is great in both culture and caving and I hope to be involved in project caving down there in the future after my training (both medicine and caving).

*WE THOUGHT WE MET ON OUR JUNE '98 MEXICO TRIP, BUT LATER REMEMBERED MEETING BOTH MATT HARRIS AND YOU IN '97 IN ELLISON'S AT THE TOP OF THE WARM UP DROP. THAT WAS THE TRIP YOU HAVE REFEREED TO AS ONE OF YOUR CLOSE CALLS. I'VE ENJOYED HEARING OTHER PARTS OF THAT STORY. SHARE A LITTLE MORE WITH US.*

That Ellison's trip was a puckering type of trip. After seeing ya'll at the top of the warmup drop turn around I knew it'd be quite a trip. Well, first of all we got soaked there and then again much worse in Fantastic where the water/wind swirled around like a cyclone, intermittently crashing down and soaking you. Once at the bottom, the two of us proceeded thru the tourist route past North Pole, Angel's Paradise, and back to the Gnome's Creamery at which point we decided to switch to our bigger 10 Ahr bachup batteries because our lights were fading. Well, they both were dead but we still felt OK, It was just time to start exiting ( leaving Gnome's Creamery for another trip). Well, we lost the route back thru the fault line towards the Gypsum Passage. Being low on light is OK, being lost is OK, being exhausted and 15+ hrs into a trip is OK....But I tell you, the combination of those things is really, really scary. We climbed each of those pounding pits in darkness to conserve light. Our last lights died completely on the hike down after a grueling 24 hr. trip. Be glad you turned around!

*WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU SEEN TO CAVING OVER THE YEARS?*

I guess the variety and accessability of top notch gear is the biggest change. I mean, now a days you can buy a complete custom built kit and complete caving get up (light system, suit ,etc) and waaallaaahh you're armed to the teeth like the pros...only lacking the most important item, experience.

*WHAT DO YOU SEE IN YOUR CAVING FUTURE?*

I hope to be involved in project caves in Mexico one day and later in life, after that, an armchair caver with arthritis who donates lots of money to sponsor caving projects, training, and conservation.

*THAT'S GREAT. I LOVE THAT RESPONSE. ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE TO ADD TO THIS INTERVIEW?*

I'd like to thank all of ya'll in the Cullman grotto for allowing me the opportunity to cave with ya'll. From the Mexico trips with Patrick to the Camp's Gulf "sump " crossing with Ryan It's been great and I expect to remain lifelong friends with those of you I've caved with over the past few years. And I'm sure I'll meet and cave with many more of you. If any Cullman caver is ever in Dallas, you got a place to stay.

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE CULLMAN GROTTO  
OF THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

May 2, 2000

The regular monthly meeting of Cullman Grotto of National Speleological Society was called to order on Tuesday, May 2, 2000 at 7:30 p.m. in the conference room of the Cullman County Public Library by Harold Calvert, Chairman. 18 members and guests were in attendance.

The minutes of the previous monthly meeting were read. Motion was made by Micah Sims to accept the minutes as read and seconded by David Drake.

The treasurer's report was given.

If anyone needs a Simmons field roller, contact Bruce Smith.

There will be a tentative trip to Obe Gorge Overlook this summer or fall.

An Executive Board Meeting will be held immediately after

the June regular monthly meeting.

Ideas for the grotto patch are NEEDED!

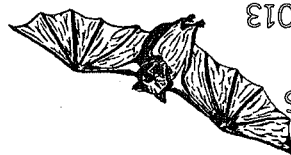
Cathedral Cavern will hold an open house on 5/5/00 at 2:30 p.m.

There will be a youth vertical training held at Blount Springs on 5/6/00 from 9:00-2:00 p.m.

David Drake will be taking a group from work to Steven's Gap. Anyone wishing to assist with this trip, please contact David.

Several trip reports were given.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, the Chairman declared it adjourned.



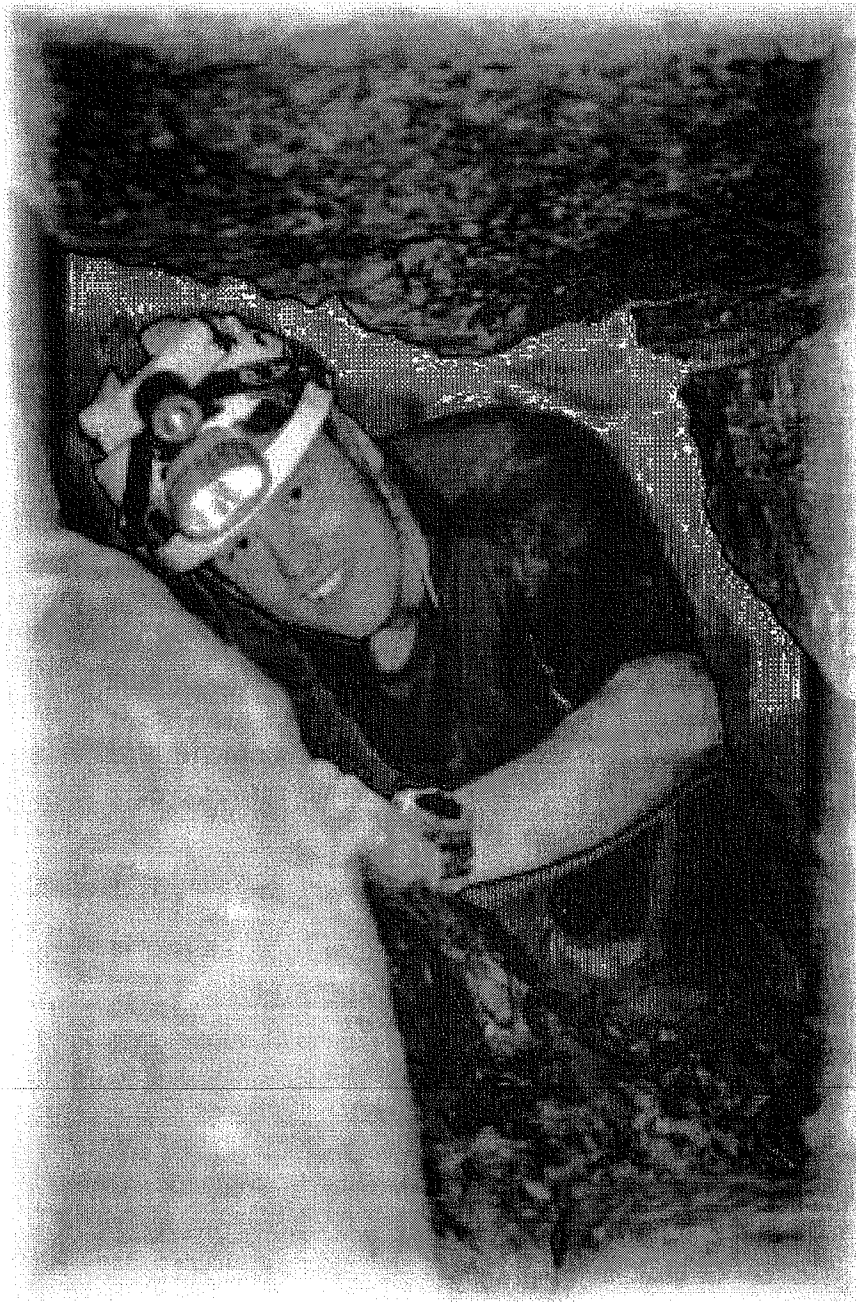
# The FLOWSTONE

July 2000

Vol. VII No 7

A Monthly Newsletter of the Cullman Grotto  
of the National Speleological Society

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TITLE PAGE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The FLOWSTONE is published monthly by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Items submitted for publication must be received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to be included in the following month's issue.

The Cullman Grotto will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of articles within The FLOWSTONE is allowed without consent provided credit is given to the source.

Membership to the Cullman Grotto is eight dollars (\$8) for individual membership or ten dollars (\$10) per family per year. Due are payable at the first grotto meeting of each year and includes the subscription to The FLOWSTONE. Subscription rate for nonmember is eight dollars (\$8) per year. See the editor for back issues.

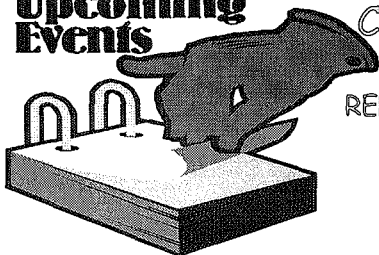
The Cullman Grotto meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Cullman County Public Library conference room, 200 Clark St. NE, Cullman, AL. All visitors and prospective members are welcome.

2000 OFFICERS

<b>Chairman:</b> Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 webcavers@hotmail.com	<b>Vice-Chairman:</b> Micah Sims 1431 Co Rd 827 Cullman AL 35057 (256)734-4042
<b>Secretary:</b> Evon Thompson 378 Co Rd 395 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-1772	<b>Treasurer:</b> Tracy Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 tcavert@mindspring.com

<b>Official Grotto Address:</b> Cullman Grotto c/o Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 webcavers@hotmail.com	<b>Newsletter Exchange:</b> The FLOWSTONE Cullman Grotto - NSS 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 35055-6013 vertical@mindspring.com
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Upcoming Events



CALENDAR OF CAVE RELATED EVENTS

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| July 6<br>7:30 pm  | Grotto meeting at the library: On Thursday night due to the 4 <sup>th</sup> of July. |
| July 8<br>8:00 am  | Grotto Trip TBA  |
| July 22<br>7:45 am | Grotto trip to Cathedral Caverns, Meet at Library at 7:45, leave by 8:00.            |
| Aug 1<br>7:30 pm   | Grotto meeting at the library.   |
| Aug. 5<br>8:00 am  | Grotto Trip TBA  |

APPOINTMENTS

<b>Advisor:</b> Victor Bradford 8333 US Hwy 31 Hanceville AL 35077	<b>Publications, Safety &amp; Membership:</b> Patrick O'Diam 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 3505 (256)739-0327 vertical@mindspring.com
<b>Librarian:</b> David Drake 110 Co Rd 1386 Falkville AL 35622 (256)739-0811 idopits@cs.com	



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Front Cover:

Jeff Lynn in a tight spot in Thor's Natural Bridge Cave. Photo taken by Glenn Ledbetter and edited by Wendy Bowen.

CULLMAN

GROTTO

## ECHO CHAMBER

## FROM THE EDITOR

You know, you people are wonderful! I have been so very pleased with the number of trip reports and information turned in for publications. It has really made the job of pulling *The Flowstone* together much easier and quicker. Once again, I would like to encourage each of you to get your trip reports turned in to me. There are several of you that we have not heard from in a while and your contributions are what keeps this newsletter going.

Because of school and work, I was in Mexico at the time of the June meeting. I hated missing the meeting, but I had such a wonderful time while in Mexico. I was able to work in six different schools and found the people there to be extra marvelous. Immense friendships were formed and I gained much knowledge as to the education system of Mexico. While there, I unexpectedly got to enter a cave, and it was so amazing! The passage was 5' X 5' and had 110° water squirting in from every direction like a car wash. Because I didn't have a light with me, I only got to go back 50' or so, but I was having a blast. The water exited the cave and formed a beautiful river with many waterfalls and the clearest astonishing water I have ever seen. I love it and can not wait to go back and share this wonderful place with the grotto members. I also had the chance to visit the Pyramid of the Sun and Moon, two of the largest Pyramids in the Western Hemisphere. The entire trip was better than could be asked for.

Once again, I will miss the July meeting due to schooling. I am off to Venezuela for three weeks to do some work on my Masters. Classes will be held Mon. - Fri. for a few hours each day, and weekends are free to explore. I have done a little exploring on my own with the Internet. The area where I'll be is way up in the mountains, and there are big cliffs and deep caves. My caving gear and 300' of rope is going with me, and grotto member Shane Drake will also be there, so I'm sure we will get into something. We plan to visit Angel Falls and get the scoop on what it will take to return and do the drop in a few years.

I hope everyone remembered about the meeting change for July. With the 4<sup>th</sup> being on Tuesday, the meeting was changed to Thursday, July 6<sup>th</sup>. Last of all, I'd just like to say keep sending in those trip reports, photos, articles, thoughts, or what ever you have. The deadline to have things included in the next issue is the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month. E-mailed articles are wonderful and immense time savers for a hurried newsletter editor, but I'll take anything you send. Keep up the good work

## BIRTHDAYS

We only have one birthday that I'm aware of in the month of July. Ryan Madole has his birthday on the 7<sup>th</sup> of the month. We hope he has a wonderful day and that all of his caving dreams come true. Check out the Caver Spotlight on Ryan in this issue.

## RESCUE

No rescues have taken place recently that I am aware of. I did hear about a case where a rescue was almost needed, but the participants managed to make it out without any incident. Unfortunately, I do not have any details on the incident - only what is printed later on in this newsletter written by an anonymous caver that goes by Lonnie P.

## JULY TRIP TO CATHEDRAL CAVERNS

Well, the long awaited trip to Cathedral Caverns has finally been organized. After many months of trying to contact the right person, the trip has been set for July 22<sup>nd</sup>. Harold Calvert and I went to this wonderful cave about two months ago during the open house along with several thousand other visitors. The passage was impressive and they did a good job at hiding the lights and wires in this commercial cave. Everyone who wishes to go, meet at the Cullman Public Library at 7:45 on the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. We will be leaving at 8:00 am sharp. We must be at the gate of Cathedral Caverns at 9:45. There is a 20 person limit on this trip, but that should not be a problem. Be sure to bring your camera for photos. Seeing as how the trip will be about an hour and a half, bring the rest of your caving gear in order to do some other caving in the area before returning home. Oh yea, you may need to bring your money . . . they are charging us \$8 per person to enter the cave. If you have children ages 12 or under, the price is \$6 each.



"Well, you said take nothing but pictures. Didn't you? Huh?"

Taken from the Huntsville Grotto Newsletter Vol. XII, No. 4 - April '71: Pg. 32

## BLEH!

by ddrake 5/27/00

The expression goes: "There's always a first time." To which I'll add "There's always a last time too." Until Saturday, 5/27, I had never done the main drop at Stephen's Gap. As of today, I doubt that I will again. Numerous, previous trips to the cave had always found the temperature too low and the water too high, or someone else's rope already in the pit.

I knew hiking in this day that we SHOULD be the only organized cavers at the pit, having secured access privileges from Milton Polsky a week prior. And through obedience or just dumb luck no other cavers appeared on this gorgeous holiday weekend. My crew this day was a group of 5, 2 co-workers, 2 spouses of co-workers and 1 relative of a co-worker. All with little or no rappelling experience.

Upon arrival, I quickly rigged the main drop and disappeared. The waterfall was nothing more than a trickle so staying dry was no effort, even though wet would have felt good. Now, I don't know where I got the idea that the main rig at Stephen's was beautiful and free but I guess one out of two ain't bad. What a miserable climb. I mean there are plenty worse in TAG, it's just that when you're expecting to be hanging free, as the wind and spray from the waterfall gently swing you to and fro and then are confronted with horseflies buzzing your head whilst trying keep yourself pushed away from a rockface, I mean crap.

I had originally intended to put everyone down the main drop. I knew that you could free climb from the bottom back up to the stream passage level and then walk out of the cave but it had been three or four years since my last visit and I had forgotten how exposed the climb was. Once down I realized that it would probably not be a good idea to have a bunch of beginners try that just yet. I ropewalked out and told the group that the Keyhole was the drop to do. We quickly derigged and transported the gear up the bluff side to the Keyhole drop.

Oohs and aaahs were the words of preference as each new rappeller dropped through the keyhole and found themselves dangling in the open expanses of a TAG classic. The pit was picture perfect. Complete with sunbeams splashing off the landing pedestal below and rainbows dancing in what mist there was.

After bouncing the pit a couple times each we packed away the vertical gear and broke out the horizontal. We opted not to enter the cave thru the main entrance behind the waterfall and instead chose to poke around in some of the upper passageways. We pushed all accessible passages to their end before packing up and calling it a day.

Gratified, I went home a caught pneumonia. BLEH!

## YES!!! I WANT TO GO!

By Evon Thompson

The night Patrick called to see if I would be interested in a trip to Fantastic on April 28<sup>th</sup>, I could not believe my ears. I even thought he was playing a joke on me, as I had seriously pouted about not being able to go on the Thanksgiving trip to Fantastic. So, of course, my answer was "Yes!! I want to go!"

On Friday, April 28, 2000, Harold Calvert, Shane Drake, Kuenn Drake, Patrick O'Diam and I left from Patrick's house around 6:00 p.m. for Georgia. Conversation still centered around our Mexico trip and the fact that this would be the first time at Fantastic for Shane and Kuenn. While in line at Hardee's at Trenton, some very interesting conversations took place. There is still one question posed by Harold that is still unanswered. He stated "I know where you squeeze a lemon to get lemonade, but where do you squeeze a gator to get Gatorade?" This was followed up by asking the clerk what kind of monster a monster burger was made of?

Upon finally arriving at the parking area, we discovered several others already there. But... HOORAY... they were going to camp and head up in the morning. The five of us headed up wondering how much water would be there to greet us. I love the BIG pits in Mexico, but it was great to actually

do some horizontal caving again, especially when a pit is also involved. As for myself, the sticker "I've Got Mud In My Blood", is true. I feel best when underground with mud in my hair and on my face and clothes. The pit was quite a bit more wet than when I was there last, 16 months earlier. There was quite a bit of spray almost the whole way on rope. Everyone had good rappells and climbs. It was great to be with Shane and Kuenn on their first trip to Fantastic. It reminded me of my first trip. Ah... the adrenaline rush! This pit is very appropriately named. With our caving appetites satisfied for the moment, we headed out to meet the daylight and expecting to see the other cavers before we got back to the parking lot. They were getting ready to head up. We at breakfast at Hardee's at Trenton before heading back home. Still no explanation for the monster burger or the monster breakfast! This is a great trip and we always have almost as much fun on the ride. After leaving home after working all day, caving all night and driving back home the next day, to finally get some sleep after approximately 33 hours, this is one of the most physically exhausting trips I have ever made. It proves what we are made of. Some people might say stupidity. I say...mud. And, no...I can't wait to do it again! Thanks guys for always inviting me and looking out for me.



# *Wet Cave: The Wettest I've Ever Been*

## *Or*

# *Me, My Pig, and a Heck of A lot of Water*

By: Wesley Pinyan

I had attempted this trip once before (but never made it). I read the last trip report. Nothing short of being dragged through a creek over sharp rocks for a mile could have prepared me for this trip.

As usual Patrick O'Diam, Harold Calvert, Ryan Madole, and my self met at the library at 7 am (that's 4 am lazy college student time) and headed for Wet Cave in Swanee, TN. To my surprise, we arrived at a beautiful little Bed and Breakfast that had flower gardens and a creek around back. All this pretty stuff is just an illusion to hide the evil that lies within the mountain. As we crossed the creek, the air blowing from the exit of the cave was so cold I swear it was December (the first sign of trouble). By the time we all got to the cave entrance, we were all soaking wet with sweat. As we started gearing up, I noticed that Patrick, being the only one who had done the cave before, was a little more prepared than Ryan, Harold or myself (the second sign of trouble). Then we entered the cave.

The cool air felt great. The first drop is only about 30 ft. inside the cave. Wet Cave is a pull down, so once you're in you're committed (people should be committed for doing it in the first place). When we got to the bottom of the first drop, I pulled down the rope and began the 600 ft. crawl (felt like a mile) through a creek (a very cold creek). The crawl was so tight that my helmet wouldn't fit up right, so I had to turn it to the side. Sometimes my face was in the water. The whole time I kept thinking about things. Things like: How crazy was the first person that did this? ; Why is this water so cold? ; Is that a Crawfish or a Cave Lobster? What does Hypothermia feel like? ; Why didn't someone kill Patrick after the last trip? ; Will I want to kill Patrick after this trip? ; Is Patrick trying to kill me? ; And how long is 600 ft., really? I wore the elbows and knees out of a pair of Dickies, drug the stomach off my jacket, and nearly drowned my pig (that's for you Micah). The 8 drops came and went like little surprises, but I can hardly remember the times when I got to stand completely upright. After the last drop we all ate our wet lunch, and let me tell you flattened out, cold, wet apple pie is surprisingly good.

Through the remainder of the cave we got to walk some. Close to the end is the mudroom. This was my favorite part. We were knee deep in mud, and when Patrick made Ryan and myself crawl down the wrong passage, it was really easy on your elbows and knees (remember this part). From here on we crawled through the creek again. We hit a dry (by this I mean not so wet) crawl for about 100 ft. I did it twice because I forgot my pig. This is where I let the rest of the group in on

my patented "Rolling Wesley" technique (rolling instead of crawling). The rest of the cave was very pretty, and it was no time before we were back where we started.

I have never been so wet. I used muscles that I didn't even know that I had, and I thought that I was going to freeze to death. But, I was surprisingly happy (signs of Hypothermia, no doubt). I had a great time, but as I told Patrick, I had fun but I won't do it again (probably not, I said the same about White Side).

Here is a short run down of Wet Cave:

First drop,  
Faith pull down,  
Wet, hypothermic, never ending crawl  
(with pauses for praying, fighting crawfish,  
and talking to Leprechauns),  
Some where in the next 7 drops: The wet part,  
Crawling part,  
The wet part,  
Crawling part,  
The wet part,  
Birth canal (I had to dislocate my shoulder for this one),  
The wet part,  
Crawling part,  
Last drop,  
Wet crying with happiness,  
Wet group hug,  
Wet lunch,  
The wet part,  
Wet mud part,  
Crawling in mud in a dead end passage part (remember this),  
The wet part again,  
Tuck tag back in shirt part (for Wendy),  
And finally the bath part out side the cave in the creek.



Photo by Glenn Ledbetter - See article *Booty Scoop* up next!

## *Booty Scoop!!*

Glenn Ledbetter

On May 27, we finally got most of the group together for a second push and hopefully bottom Thors Natural Bridge Cave. The plan was for everybody to meet at my house and head out early, but as most trips go, we were late getting on the road. We arrived at the parking, spot unloaded the A.T.V.'s, loaded them with cave gear, and headed for the entrance getting there around 11:00 am.

Once there, we climbed down into the cave and with a lot of cursing and flailing around we were through the tight spot and down the first pits. When everyone was down we started off down the stream crawl and then into the main passage. When we got to the point where the first trip stooped we split up. Jim Loftin climbed down through the breakdown while David Teal and Derick Mitchell went up in the breakdown and found a large room above. When I realized they were scooping, I took off after them followed by the others.

We regrouped and David and I went up to the top of the sloped room while Derick, Jeff and Wendy went toward the bottom. There was no apparent passages leading off from this room. We joined Jim back at his crawl to find out he had

found a pit that looked very big. After we crawled down the passage for about 200', we were looking down a very large pit about 80' across and looked deeper than it was: 48'. We all descended and once, on bottom, David went upstream and I went down. This is where the largest room in the cave is; my light just barely shined to the far wall. When every one came to this room, we located another pit taking in major water. The pit appeared to be around 80' deep with a huge black void below. We did not drop this pit due to the threat of rain and the fact the pit is directly in the water. David says this is a very dangerous pit due to the water. Upstream yielded some nice leads noted by Jeff Lynn. We could see large walking passages above the stream borehole, and we turned around in walking passage where the stream entered from two different walking size leads. We started for the entrance and got there about 2 ½ hours later. We are very excited about this cave as we have seen over a mile of mostly walking passage. With one more push trip we should bottom it and then start bringing in others to help survey and to push some of the upper level (walking) leads. More on this later. The next push trip is in the works but not certain when.

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## *Rediscovering Dynamite*

by ddrake

"Dave's always willing to be the guinea pig, let's send him."  
...Good friends are hard to find...

Saturday morning, June 10, Harold Calvert, Evon Thompson and I left the Cullman Public Library enroute to Grant, AL to rendezvous with Glenn Ledbetter, Jeff Lynn, Wendy Bowen, Derick Mitchell and Becky Buckner. We met at Glenn's house for a trip to a seldom visited portion of Guffey Cave. We left Glenn's at about 10am and drove to an area below the main entrance where a group of Gadsden cavers were camping. Jim Loftin, Mark Medlin and Kelly Keener were eating breakfast when we arrived. We conversed with them for a short time and gave them directions to the Dynamite entrance in case they wanted to join us later.

Jeff had noticed earlier that the front passenger side tire on Glenn's truck had a baseball-sized knot on it, so our first order of business upon leaving the Gadsden campers was to get the tire fixed. Having done this, we headed for the cave.

A steep but well kept logging road leads to the entrance located approximately a mile from the main road. Had it not been for a fallen tree, which blocked passage, we could have driven all the way down to the sink. Glenn was the only one of our party that had ever been to the Dynamite entrance and he had never been in. Judging by the initials carved into the bark of nearby trees, it was evident that this beautiful sink had

been a popular local hangout in the past. Derick and Becky had to be back in Gadsden that afternoon so they walked with us to the entrance then routed.

The entrance sink was taking on a small waterfall that cascaded over breakdown blocks through a small, tight opening. A 6' climbdown through an even smaller hole led to the beginning of a 75' wet bellycrawl. Since none of our group had ever been in this part of Guffey, no one was 100% sure that this uninviting little entrance and subsequent pebble & stone lined water tube would even lead to the pit we were in search of. I was selected to be the sacrificial lamb.

As I squirmed through the horror hole, I would periodically tilt my head to one side in order to shine my light far enough ahead to see if I still had going passage in front of me. Each time I was met with the same miserable report, low, tight and wet as far as my Nite Lite would shine. If this turned out to be the wrong passage, I would have to back out as there was no way to turn around. However, as miserable as the crawl was, I was still filled with a rush of adrenaline akin to scooping virgin passage because to me this part of the cave was virgin. Finally, the passage opened enough to allow a semi hands and knees crawl. At least it was enough to allow me to get off my now bruised and lacerated stomach, chest and arms. Soon the passage expanded to stoop walk and the sound of rushing

water could be heard coming from around a dogleg right. The source of the welcomed sound was a 6' falls that crashed into a decent-sized flowstone encrusted room. 20' to the left the water disappeared into blackness. We had a pit! A couple of rocks confirmed that it was deep and it was huge. I looked about for a rigging bolt that I had been told was there, but was unsuccessful in locating it. I found a number of natural anchors to rig to before scurrying back through the crawls to tell the others what awaited. All were gung ho except Wendy who didn't feel up to a wet crawl so she waited at the entrance for our return. Again, I entered the passage first and made my way back to an area near the falls room where I waited on the rest of the entourage. The main reason I stopped was to listen to the grunts, groans, and colorful language that I knew would be emanating from the crawl. However, I was met with laughter instead of the expected response. It seems that Evon, who was crawling behind Jeff, was complaining more of the view she was forced to reckon with than the discomfort of the passage.

As I was showing the group where I thought the best place to rig was, Glenn spotted an upper route leading out over the pit. He, Jeff and I climbed up to a breakdown bridge that was directly over the pit. It was here that we realized just how big this pit really was. Several small holes pockmarked the breakdown floor and a huge, gaping abyss existed at the end of the bridge. An abundance of natural anchors gave us a choice of several rig points. We dropped a few rocks and noticed that the ones we tossed down the smaller holes reverberated much more than the one tossed in the abyss. This led to our decision to eventually rig one of the smaller holes. We would discover the difference in reverb production when we reached the bottom.

After our rock tossing party, we beckoned the others up. No sooner had Evon climbed to our level than she noticed a rigging bolt high on the near wall. Below it a snug little hole fell to the floor below. We decided to rig here using a natural anchor as backup. Rope marks on another breakdown block indicated that some have used a larger and more easily accessible hole to get to the bottom. About the time all the rigging was done and I was on rope to make the first descent, 4 Gadsden cavers showed up: Jim, Mark, Kelly and Gary Stewart. Now how convenient is that.

The first 10' or so of the drop is tight but it soon opens wide as you discover you are descending right down the middle of a mega hole. Perhaps now would be a good time to give some perspective of the dimensions of the pit. There are certainly much bigger holes in TAG, but this pit would be classified huge by anyone's standard. The landing area for this drop is almost identical, on a smaller scale, to the landing area at Fantastic, a flat, pebble-strewn floor with a stream meandering across the bottom. Dimensionally, it is close in length and width to the bottom of Neversink. Several passages exit this room most in the form of wet crawls. At least one of these connects to the rest of the cave and would make for a sporting thru trip. The main passage, which is actually an extension of

the pit, leads to an 80' breakdown mountain and ends with a Pillar of Fire type flowstone formation on top. Very impressive.

We also discovered the reason for the lack of reverberation when I had thrown the rock into the abyss. The floor in this area is a sand/mud tier. The volleyball-sized rock I had dropped was buried over a foot deep in thick mud. This would not be a good place to get off rope.

Because of the uninviting entrance and difficult crawl required to get there, the pit has seen very little traffic. The flowstone around the pit is pristine, the formations are undamaged, including several soda straws 2' in length, and footprints are practically nonexistent. The drop is dry, but you will be soaked long before reaching the pit. We put 9 cavers down and were out of the cave in 5 hrs.

So often my "cave trips" include training newcomers and novices. It was great to be on a trip again where all participants were competent, vertically proficient cavers. It was also fun to cave with some new faces. If you're a vertical TAG caver who doesn't mind tight, wet crawls to get to huge cavernous pits, this one's a goody.

#### History of the Discovery of Dynamite Pit

Guffey Cave has been known to Grant, AL locals for decades but it didn't become known to cavers until the 1950's. Guffey Cave was originally surveyed by the Birmingham Grotto in 1959 with many leads remaining unpushed. It became somewhat of a project cave for the grotto, who named many of the features in the cave. A gate was installed at the main entrance in the late 50's.

In 1989, Richard O'Hara, Doil Ward, Jon Brown, Mark Hughes, Jimmy Christman, Don Dawson, Ramsey Thompson, Shawn Green and Blake Reid began a resurvey of the cave. During one survey trip a major breakthrough was made. Richard O'Hara explains:\*

*September 2, 1990*

*It all began while surveying between the Beck Entrance and the Barrier. Our four-person survey team split up at the Y. Jimmy Christman and Don Dawson stayed at the Y while Mark Hughes and I surveyed. The Y branch headed due south. This passage was supposed to become too low at 500 feet. Sure enough, we ended up in a belly crawl in sand. I told Mark that it looked like the end, but I also wanted to survey every foot I could get. I grabbed the tape and scooted through about thirty feet of very low passage. Then it opened up....*

*...Off in the distance we could hear a waterfall, and it sounded big. It was a footrace down the passage. We rounded a corner, slid down a slope and splashed across a stream and looked into blackness. The opposite wall eluded our lights. We looked up and couldn't make out the ceiling through the mist. We guessed it was at least 150 feet high.*

O'Hara, studying the topo for the Grant quad in an effort to identify the Guffey drainage system noted the presence of Dynamite Cave (listed as short but taking on water). Dynamite Cave is a small qualifier located just to the right of the sink that accesses Guffey. Access to this blowing hole was not passable so Bill Torode used dynamite to enlarge the entrance, hence the name. There has been no physical connection made between Dynamite Cave and Guffey Cave, however, since Dynamite Cave is located in the same sink as the stream crawl that leads to the pit, the sink entrance is referred to as the Dynamite entrance and the pit Dynamite Pit.

September 6, 1990

Huntsville cavers O'Hara, Ward, Green and Christman organized a scouting trip to locate the Dynamite entrance. Since it was a scouting trip the group brought only minimal caving gear and no vertical gear. Without much trouble they found the Dynamite entrance and surmised that the waterfall at the sink was the source of water falling into the dome.

O'Hara was the first into the cave but experienced a little difficulty negotiating the crawl so he reluctantly backed out and asked Christman to take a look. Jimmy slithered down the crawlway and returned a short time later to report that he had found the pit. After showing the pit to Richard a weekend assault was planned to bottom the newly found pit.

September 8, 1990

O'Hara, Hughes, Christman and Ward, armed with a 300' rope, made the crawl back to the pit. It was decided that O'Hara should get the honors of first descent. He describes the event:

*Mark followed me down. He derigged at the bottom with a wide grin. It was obvious he felt like I did. Jimmy came next with the tape. Doil held it on the lip while Jimmy*

*brought the reel down. At 90' Jimmy locked off his rack and Doil dropped the tape. Unfortunately, he didn't toss it away from Jimmy and tied him up in the tape. Ten minutes later Jimmy lowered the tape to me. 56' for a total of 146'. A pretty good-sized drop.*

*People who discover things tend to exaggerate their finds a little. Something is always prettier to the discoverer. Keep this in mind when I say that this pit was great. One of the best ones I've ever done. Except for a few feet at the lip, it was totally free. Some formations graced the walls and ledges. The rope just missed the waterfall, allowing a fairly dry rappel except for a little spray at the bottom. The pit was huge; again, the far wall eluded my light. Both side walls were 30' away, and steadily belling out. Halfway down I could tell this was the room that Mark and I had discovered. It was official. Guffey had a new entrance and now was a vertical cave.*

Aside from the initial rush of cavers after discovery, activity in this portion of the cave has been close to nil. The stream crawl provides a natural deterrent. It should be noted that access to the Dynamite entrance is restricted. Glenn Ledbetter has special permission from the landowner. Any trips to this portion of the cave must be cleared through Glenn or the landowner so as not to jeopardize the relationship.

Thanks to Bill Torode, Gary Griner, Jon Brown, and Sharon Faulkner for their help in gathering information about the discovery of the Dynamite entrance and pit. Special thanks to Gary for the copy of Richard O'Hara's trip report "Guffey Goes Vertical".

\*Italicized text taken from Huntsville Grotto Newsletter, Volume 33 Number 1, January-February 1991, Guffey Goes Vertical, Richard O'Hara.

## *Excited, Scared, and Censored*

by Lonnie P. a.k.a. cowboy caver

The story that you are about to read is true. The names were changed to protect the innocent. Due to interpreting this as accident or incident, I will be forced to x out incriminating words. Feel free to use your imagination.

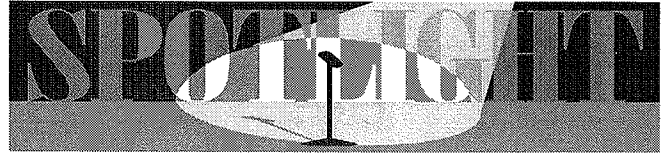
On saturday ,xxxxx 17 ,xxxx,four members of xxxxxx grotto decided to take a through trip to xxxxx cave, located near xxxxxxx. These four were doc, rock, teacher, and cowboy. After obtaining permission from Mr. xxxx, we were on our way. With a quick look at the lower xxxxxx, we knew it should be an easy trip. Upon finding the xxxxxx entrance, ropes were rigged and we began our descent. Pit after pit was dropped until we came to a grinding halt. Houston ,we have a problem... It appeared that our xxx was wrong! Well, maybe only partially incorrect. After a frantic xxxxx we decided the way xxx was the xxx we had

just came from. Have you ever heard of a push up trip? You have now! With Lightning speed and agile reflex, rock (now known as monkey-boy) xxxxxxx and xxxxx our way xxx. Just as it seemed things were going our way, we found a xxx that was not xxxxxxxxxx. BIG problem! As things were looking grim, cowboy stepped up to bat. With a quick swoosh, the next xxx xxxxx was lassoed! With shouts of happiness, the next xxx was rigged and we were out of there, only to arrive outdoors to a thunderstorm that we had to hike forever through. With all well and dry at the car, we headed to xxxxxxx for a late night snack that really hit the xxxx.

Yes all this really happened. No #^&\* ,I was there ,it did !

Lonnie P. the cowboy caver

# CAVER'S



## Spotlighting Ryan Madole Interview by Patrick O'Diam via e-mail

Ryan is originally from Stillwater, Oklahoma. He moved to Cullman about 4½ years ago. He works in Cullman for a construction company. He says he loves it and it's almost like a dream

place compared to Oklahoma in that fact that he likes the mountains and trees and the outdoors. When he moved to Alabama, he said it all just came together.

*TELL US HOW YOU GOT STARTED CAVING, HOW LONG HAVE YOU CAVED, AND WHY DID YOU START?*

I never realized that there were as many caves anywhere as there are in Alabama. I went on a backpacking trip in the Bankhead and I happened to run across two Birmingham Grotto members and they told me about the NSS and grottos and all. They asked me where I was from and I told them I live in Cullman. They told me that there was a grotto right there in Cullman. The very next week I saw an add in the newspaper that said the caving club was having a meeting and that's when I came to the first meeting. That's been about 3 years ago

*HAD YOU DONE VERY MUCH CAVING PRIOR TO THAT?*

No, just the local stuff such as Bangor and other local things I had heard about before the NSS.

*I KNOW YOU ENJOY OTHER OUTDOOR SPORTS SUCH AS BACKPACKING AND SUCH. DIDN'T YOU DO SOME KAYAKING?*

I kayaked for two or three years and had a couple of close calls so I got out of that. I am through with kayaking and consider myself lucky. Other than that, rock climbing, backpacking and caving are the other sports I enjoy.

*HOW MUCH ROCK CLIMBING DO YOU DO?*

Probably more than caving now. Several times a month.

*WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE CAVING EXPERIENCE YOU HAVE HAD?*

I would say the float trip in Camps Gulf was a high time. I

always enjoyed caving with Houston. It was a good weekend for us to camp out and do the float. I also enjoy the Fern Cave trips that we do several times a year. Somehow I came across a small passage in Torode Hall that Gary said was not on the map so he named it Ryan's Passage.

*EVER HAD ANY CLOSE CALLS WHILE CAVING?*

Knock on wood, I've never had anything serious happen - a few hang-ups here and there, but no close calls so far.

*DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE CAVE OR PIT?*

My favorite pit would probably be Conley Hole. Camp's Gulf or Cider Ridge Crystal would be my favorite cave.

*WHAT PREFERENCE DO YOU HAVE IN CAVING?*

I guess I prefer multi-drop caving. I like horizontal and vertical about the same, but don't like one more than the other. If I get to do a multi-drop, it's like having cake and eating it too.

*DO YOU HAVE A LEAST FAVORITE CAVE THAT YOU WILL NEVER RETURN TO?*

Probably Wet Cave. It was a fun experience now, but it was one of those caves that I looked back the whole time and said I'm glad I'll never see this again. It was a good experience that I got to do a wet, multi-drop cave and I'm glad I got to do it, and looking back on it, I had fun but I remember while I was there, I was miserable at the time.

*WHAT DO YOU SEE IN YOUR CAVING FUTURE?*

I want to do more small pits. I want to get out and do more pits that are side beside each other in one area. I love doing two or three pits a day that are close together. A lot of people like to go get big pits and I like to hit several smaller - they're all unique in their own way.

*ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE TO ADD TO THIS INTERVIEW?*

I'm just glad that I found the grotto. When I lived in Oklahoma, as a kid, I could just dream about actually going in a cave that very few people had ever been in because in that part of the country, there are not many caves. So when I moved to Alabama, it was like I was in a dream world with so many caves and new ones being found all the time, there's old caves, and big caves. When I came here, I knew I would

really enjoy living here.

## MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE CULLMAN GROTTO OF THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

June 6, 2000

The regular monthly meeting of Cullman Grotto of National Speleological Society was called to order on Tuesday, June 6, 2000 at 7:30 p.m. in the conference room of the Cullman County Public Library by Harold Calvert, Chairman. 15 were present.

The minutes of the previously monthly meeting were read. Motion was made by David Drake to accept the minutes as read and seconded by Micah Sims.

The treasurer's report was given.

Suggestions are still NEEDED for the grotto patch and 2000 ~~t-shirts and mud shirts~~

The Mexico t-shirts will be ready the end of this week and the

Mexico videos will be available at the July grotto meeting. \$10 donation per video is recommended.

There is a new grotto in the process of being formed - The Northwest Alabama Grotto.

The Gadsden Grotto will be camping June 9th and 10th at Guffey's. The Cullman Grotto will be joining them on Saturday as the monthly grotto trip.

Several trip reports were given.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, the Chairman declared it adjourned.

## MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING OF THE CULLMAN GROTTO OF THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

June 6, 2000

The executive board meeting of Cullman Grotto of National Speleological Society was called to order on Tuesday, June 6, 2000 immediately following the conclusion of the regular monthly meeting by Harold Calvert, Chairman.

There was a general discussion regarding SERA 2001: If the opportunity to host SERA is made to the Gadsden Grotto, would the Cullman Grotto be interested in co-hosting?

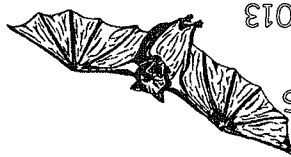
The decision was made for the 2000 Cullman Grotto t-shirts to be hunter green in color. Prices were also set. If the t-shirts have

front and back designs, the price will be \$15 for the first shirt and \$12 each shirt thereafter.

There was a general discussion regarding a grotto web site.

The Cullman Grotto picnic will be held at Little Rock City in September. Date and time will be decided upon at a later date.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, the Chairman declared it adjourned.



The Flowstone  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Sandra Ln. NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013

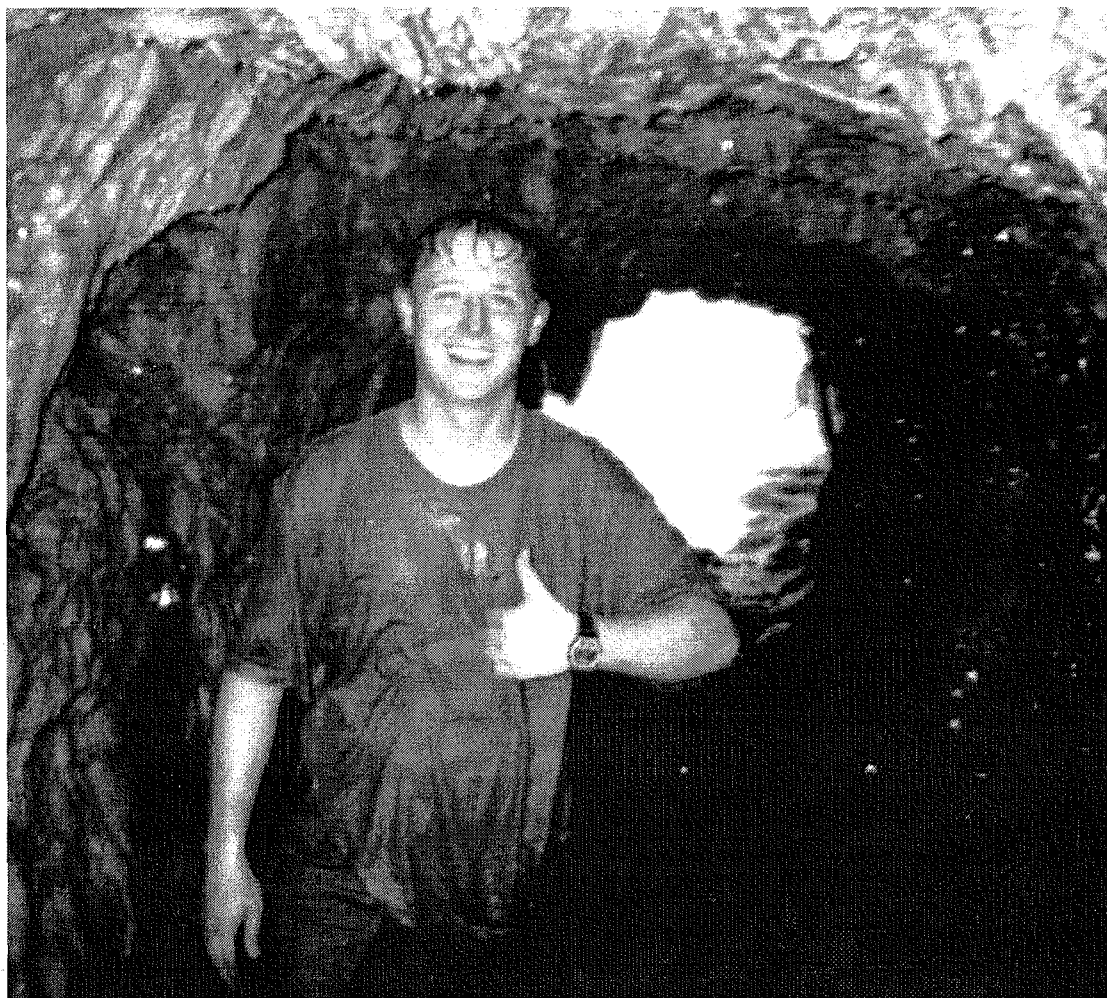
# The FLOWSTONE

August 2000

Vol. VII No 8

A Monthly Newsletter of the Cullman Grotto  
of the National Speleological Society

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TITLE PAGE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The FLOWSTONE is published monthly by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Items submitted for publication must be received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to be included in the following month's issue.

The Cullman Grotto will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of articles within The FLOWSTONE is allowed without consent provided credit is given to the source.

Membership to the Cullman Grotto is eight dollars (\$8) for individual membership or ten dollars (\$10) per family per year. Due are payable at the first grotto meeting of each year and includes the subscription to The FLOWSTONE. Subscription rate for nonmember is eight dollars (\$8) per year. See the editor for back issues.

The Cullman Grotto meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Cullman County Public Library conference room, 200 Clark St. NE, Cullman, AL. All visitors and prospective members are welcome.

2000 OFFICERS

<b>Chairman:</b> Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 webcavers@hotmail.com	<b>Vice-Chairman:</b> Micah Sims 1431 Co Rd 827 Cullman AL 35057 (256)734-4042
<b>Secretary:</b> Evon Thompson 378 Co Rd 395 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-1772	<b>Treasurer:</b> Tracy Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 tcavert@mindspring.com

<b>Official Grotto Address:</b> Cullman Grotto c/o Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 webcavers@hotmail.com	<b>Newsletter Exchange:</b> The FLOWSTONE Cullman Grotto - NSS 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 35055-6013 vertical@mindspring.com
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Upcoming Events



CALENDAR OF CAVE RELATED EVENTS

- Aug 11-13 Grotto Trip to Whiteside, NC for the vertically proficient.
- Sept. 5 7:30 p.m. Monthly meeting in the conference room at the Cullman Public Library.
- Sept. 9 8:00 a.m. Grotto Trip TBA. ?Picnic?
- Oct. 3 7:30 p.m. Monthly meeting in the conference room at the Cullman Public Library.
- Oct. 5-8 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual TAG Fall Cave-In at Sequoyah Caverns, Valley Head, AL.

APPOINTMENTS

<b>Advisor:</b> Victor Bradford 8333 US Hwy 31 Hanceville AL 35077	<b>Publications, Safety &amp; Membership:</b> Patrick O'Diam 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 3505 (256)739-0327 vertical@mindspring.com
<b>Librarian:</b> David Drake 110 Co Rd 1386 Falkville AL 35622 (256)739-0811 idopits@cs.com	



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Front Cover:

Patrick O'Diam in La Gutas de Teotehuacan, hot springs cave in Hidalgo, Mexico. Photo taken by Anne Farley.



CULLMAN

## ECHO CHAMBER

GROTTO

## FROM THE EDITOR

Well, I am back from beyond and look forward to getting in some more caving with the group. I have had a wonderful summer, but am totally worn out! I have missed the good 'ol TAG caves as well as all my fantastic caving partners. I'll give a little more detailed report about what all I did while away in a later issue. As of right now, there are only a few hours left before the meeting, and I'm just getting started on this. I also have a good bit of school work to do before tomorrow morning. School orientation is tomorrow and I still have work to do, so I do not plan to get any sleep tonight.

Will I ever slow down? It seems there are always a few hundred things that are pressing and time is so limited. Anyway, having said that, I must apologize for this issue of *The Flowstone*. I usually put about 10 - 12 hours of work into each issue, but I'm only putting in about 2 hours on this issue because I have more pressing issues right now. Sorry about that. There will be no Caver Spotlight this month, but I hope to get it done for next month. Also, the Grotto minutes are not in this issue. I forgot about getting them and time just ran out. Hey Evon, it's 11:53 p.m. Do you mind if I come over and get them tonight? Well, I'll just let them slide this month. They will be in next month's newsletter. Other than that, this issue just contains articles from other people who submitted them during the last month. Thanks to them, you have a newsletter this month. I apologize for a smaller issue without several

normal parts included, but I'm trying. Speaking of trying, the Mexico Video is still underway. If anyone would like to take it on, I'd be happy for you to, but I am still working on it. So far, I've got about 80 hours of work in it, and have another 20-30 more hours before it's done. I will not make any promises, but I do hope to finish it in the next few weeks (or at least before our next Mexico Grotto Trip in 2002).

## BIRTHDAYS

There are two birthdays in the month of August that I am aware of. Van Cain will have a birthday on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August and Kuenn Drake has a birthday on August 26<sup>th</sup>. We wish both of you gentlemen a very happy birthday.

## RESCUE

No rescues have taken place recently that I am aware of. Of course, I'm very sleepy right now and I may be forgetting about something, and there again, I've not been around much lately to even hear of one if there was one.

## TAG Fall Cave-In

The 23<sup>rd</sup> annual TAG Fall Cave-In will take place at Sequoyah Caverns in Valley Head, AL again this year just like every other year. It is a week earlier in October this year than normal. The Cave-In will start at noon on Thursday, October 5th, and end Sunday, October 8th. For pre-registration info contact Nancy Rodgers at [Nrodgers4@aol.com](mailto:Nrodgers4@aol.com)

## TETON CAVING

By ddrake

I tossed a large rock to try and bust away part of the snow pack that was obscuring the entrance. The date was July 1<sup>st</sup>.

High atop Jackson Hole, Wyoming's Rendezvous Mountain my brother-in-law, Jeff Fraser, and I decided to do some high altitude caving. A week earlier Jeff had taken me to the summit of this magnificent Teton mountain to turn me on to paragliding. On the tram ride to the summit he introduced me to an acquaintance of his who was a caver. The caver told me of several vertical caves in and around Jackson including a pull-down, trip in the Wind Cave/Ice Cave system. As we were preparing to launch the paragliders, the caver pointed to a basin with a small, dry streambed on the far hillside. "At the end of that streambed is a vertical cave", he told me. From that point forward my quest was to hike to that basin.

Jeff and I made plans to find the cave the next day. Unfortunately, on the morrow, I discovered that my rope was in the trunk of a Ford Contour in Vinemont, AL. Plans were scrapped and we headed into Jackson Hole to buy some rope and to outfit Jeff with a ropewalking system. We visited every outfitter in town and found a combined total of 150' of static rope. We could have bought 4 miles of dynamic. It then dawned on me that this was "mountain climber" territory not TAG. Out of curiosity I asked if anyone carried a Simmons roller for a chest harness. I might as well have been speaking Greek.

After spending a few days in Yellowstone, I returned to my sister's house in Jackson. On Monday, July 1, Jeff and I decided to make another attempt to reach the aforementioned

basin. With no rope, other than a 20' hand line, I wasn't sure if we could even get in the cave.

We boarded the tram at 6100' and took it to the summit at 10200'. From the summit several ski trails lead down the mountain, through a series of switchbacks, to Teton Village. Jeff had skied the mountain countless times but had never taken any of the trails. Unsure if any of them would take us even close to our destination, we elected to blaze our own trail. The basin was 700 vertical feet and approximately 1000-1500 linear feet away. At this point on the mountain we were above the tree line so keeping an eye on our destination was no problem. However, trying to keep from arriving at our destination in 30 seconds or less was a problem. The slope of the mountain was close to 60 degrees so we traversed most of the vertical footage on our butts. The limestone at this elevation is dolomite. I checked several other streambeds on the way down and nothing even gave the appearance of a karst area. I began to doubt that we would find a cave. That doubt was compounded when Jeff informed me that the caver I was talking with was widely considered a kook. Add another tally mark for the social status of cavers in the public eye.

We located the streambed with relative ease and started walking to its point of termination. Lo and behold, as we got closer I could tell that it emptied into a small sink. We had us a cave!! The streambed feeding into the cave was really nothing more than a runoff channel for melting snow. The cave entrance was a double-barrel type. Two holes that dropped down about 13' each separated by a bridge of rock and mud. The southern hole was partially obscured by thick, packed snow. I tossed a large rock on it hoping to open it up some, however, very little broke off. The remaining rocks in the area were fist-sized. I chimneyed down the first hole and discovered that the connection to the

other side was too small to get through. I climbed back out and went over to the north hole. I was able to chimney down to about 4' above the floor of the passage below. I could easily drop down from this point but was concerned that I would not be able to reach the first foothold on the climb out without a hand line. The nearest rig point was 100' away negating my 20' hand line. I paused for a moment considering my options as the 37-degree cave air blasted me in the face. I knocked a few rocks down and could tell that another short pitch existed a few feet offset from the entrance drop. Without rope we were hosed, so I climbed back up.

As near as I could tell the cave was formed by snow melt snaking its way through a fault in the dolomite. The rock was razor sharp with no evidence of flowstone or formations. The cave appeared to be a tight vertical chimney that probably dropped to the granite formation that began at about 8500'.

With our caving adventure abruptly halted, a decision had to be made. Do we climb on all fours back up the 700' to the summit or do we blaze a 3400' trail down the mountain to Teton Village. We chose the latter. For 3400' we hiked with the fear of getting "cliffed out" and having to retreat back to the top and take the tram down. Luck was with us this day. Each time that it appeared we would have to turn around we were able to find an animal trail or other diversion that would skirt the obstruction. Some of the diversions were so steep that using saplings and sagebrush as "hand lines" were the only thing that kept us from descending the "fast" way. We took in breathtaking scenery and encountered a blue grouse and bull moose on our way down. At 6500' we reached civilization and hiked a 4WD trail down to a public road and on to the back deck of the Jackson Hole Ski Resort at Teton Village. Having descended 4100' in less than three miles, lunch never tasted better.

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## A GOOD WEEK OF CAVING

By Glenn Ledbetter

After a weekend off from caving, I was ready to get back into the groove and started Monday, the 10<sup>th</sup> after work with a ridgewalk to locate a seldom done pit. Langford Pit is a 169 footer with 160 feet of passage. Once plotted on the topo, we were off. Ten miles later, we were walking along a log road to the dot on the map. With little trouble, the pit was located and a return trip was planned for Wed., the 12<sup>th</sup> after work. On Wednesday, we were at the pit and rigged by 4:45. I was first down followed by Wendy. The first part of this pit is free to a large ledge and is against the wall for the rest. This pit is very pretty. Once on bottom, I found a register with less than 10 names on it in the last 10 years. Then, on the way back to the truck, I ran into the owner of the land you have to cross to reach this pit. I was informed that they did not want anyone crossing their land. I give them a copy of the Alabama landowner protection act and they seem to cool down a bit.

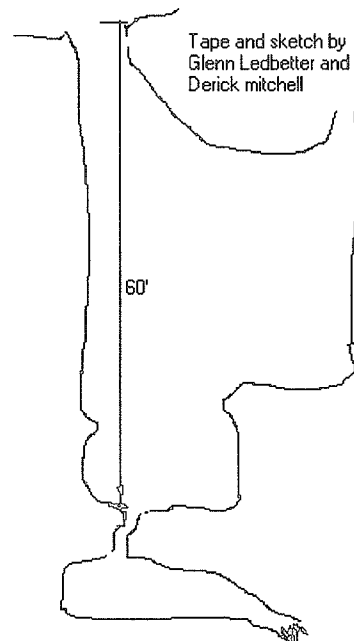
On Friday the 14<sup>th</sup>, a trip to War Eagle was in order, so after work, I met Jeff and Wendy. By 5:30, we had already bounced this fine 137' pit and were back at the truck headed home. Then on Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup>, Derick, Stick, and I made our way to Mandy's, 67 Dollar, and Holiday Hole. We were lucky to be able to drive through both gates and park right above Mandy's. Since Derick and I had been there before, we let Stick go first. I think he really enjoyed this 161' pit. Once done here, it was time to head to the truck and drive to 67 Dollar. Stick was ready to go first. We all bounced this 83' and headed back to the truck. We were then off to Holiday Hole, a fine 105' pit. This was my favorite pit of the day. The pit is located on a very pretty part of the mountain in a large sink and plenty of big trees around. Even Vic would have liked them. With all this, I ended up with 655' of rope work; not bad for a week of afternoon caving.

## STICK MISSED IT WELL

By Glenn Ledbetter

On June 11<sup>th</sup>, I met Gadsden cavers Jim Loftin, Mark Medlen, and Kelly Keener at their camp near Grant. The day before we enjoyed a trip to the pit entrance to Guffey Cave (see David Drake's article: *Rediscovering Dynamite*). Jim was told by the land owner of a sink beside a log road that looked to be a cave, so we headed off to check it out. We soon found several sinks that looked very digable. As we were walking along the road, I spotted a sink and headed that way followed by Jim. I then noticed a sink a little lower, so I told Jim to check out the first while I dropped off to the second. Just as I reached one sink I heard Jim yell, "pit." The pit had a entrance of 3' x 4' and appeared to be about 70' deep. We rigged the pit and allowed Kelly to do the drop first followed by Jim, me, and then Mark. Once on bottom, a tight climb down was seen and pushed by Mark. The climb down was about 8' followed by 20' of walking passage ending at a flowstone wall. After we returned to the trucks we looked in the A.C.S book and there were no known caves in the area of the new pit. On June 24, I returned with Derick Mitchell to tape and sketch the new pit. It turned out to be 60' deep with a 8' climbdown. We plan to walk this area after hunting season is over this coming year. If anyone is interested, just let us know.

### STICK MISSED IT WELL



## Another First

By Anne Farley

During the course of one's life, there are many "first events" that are unforgettable. Events such as your first day of school, first solo bike ride, a first kiss, even the first time to take the car out by yourself. July 29<sup>th</sup> has just been entered as another red-letter day as members of the Cullman Grotto introduced my daughter and I to the sport of rappelling and the wonderful thrill of a tyrolean ride.

It began Saturday morning as Crissy and I met Patrick, Harold, Shane, David and his youngest daughter in front of the Cullman library. After loading the equipment in the "bat mobile", we headed for Desoto Falls. The weather was perfect with just enough sunshine to make beads of sweat pop out across your forehead, and a cool enough breeze to make you really appreciative. The line for the tyrolean was pretty long and we spent about forty minutes listening to the instructors repeat the same message to each rider. "Keep your hand behind the pulley. Do not touch the rope." His instructions were fully ingrained by the time we made it to the front of the line.

There was a moment when I thought we might be turned away because of our lack of experience. The question, "Have you ever rappelled?" would require a little navigation so we

wouldn't look like the rookies we truly were. Sure, Crissy had done some climbing in Brevard, N.C. and took a R.O.T.C. course at USA. I had wandered into a cave in Mexico and did some hiking and para gliding in Venezuela, but repelling. . . Crissy went first and obviously passed the test. A few tugs on her harness and she was hooked to the pulley. From the way she slid across the rope and landed with ease on the other side, she looked like anything but a rookie. Shane and Harold followed making the ride look incredible easy. Now it was my time to hook up. Again, the instructions, "Don't touch the rope." Sounds simple enough. I was concentrating so hard on those words that I actually don't remember leaving the bluff. My first recollection of being in flight was seeing the mountain sides whiz by at an incredible rate of speed and the river disappearing from view as I approached the other side. The entire ride probable took about five seconds total--but what an awesome five seconds it was! After Patrick finished his ride, we rode to a ledge with about a 90 foot drop. Crissy and I tried to stay out of the way as the men worked like clockwork to secure the rope and pads. It was obvious they were very thorough and serious about what they were doing. That is especially helpful for first-timers.

I had watched about 18 hours of videos from the Grotto's caving trips in hopes of being better prepared, but I found nothing can totally prepare you for that first step over the ledge until you do it in the flesh. The descent was fabulous and provided such a thrill! Walking back up was a little more challenging, though, requiring more coordination than the video let on. Tired, but not spent, we agreed to go further into Little River Canyon and try about a 185 foot drop.

Again, the men rigged as we watched. Again the precision was impressive. The second time over the lip seemed much easier and certainly more enjoyable. The repel was smooth, even through the tree tops, and once on bottom, it was like being in a different world.

Crissy and Harold made the first ascent to the top and made it in twelve minutes. This is where running cross country really

comes in handy. Unfortunately, not everyone (including me) runs cross country. My climb with David by my side was quite a bit slower. About mid way up, we encountered a thunderstorm and David said, "We're going to have to climb a little faster." Yeah--right! The way I see it, those frequent rest stops are put there by God to make sure you take in all the scenery--and I intended to take full advantage of it!

After finally making it to the top, the men quickly began derigging. They didn't seem to mind that the rain by now was really coming down hard. In fact, their patience and encouraging words made all the difference in our experience and whether or not we would attempt this again. Now, I can't imagine not doing this again and missing out on the adrenalin rush. Thanks Grotto members for making this a day we'll never forget.



The Flowstone  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Sandra Ln. NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013

# The FLOWSTONE

September 2000

Vol. VII No 9

A Monthly Newsletter of the Cullman Grotto  
of the National Speleological Society

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TITLE PAGE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The FLOWSTONE is published monthly by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Items submitted for publication must be received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to be included in the following month's issue.

The Cullman Grotto will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of articles within The FLOWSTONE is allowed without consent provided credit is given to the source.

Membership to the Cullman Grotto is eight dollars (\$8) for individual membership or ten dollars (\$10) per family per year. Due are payable at the first grotto meeting of each year and includes the subscription to The FLOWSTONE. Subscription rate for nonmember is eight dollars (\$8) per year. See the editor for back issues.

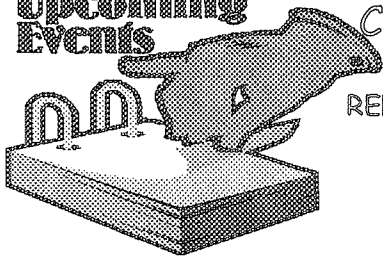
The Cullman Grotto meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Cullman County Public Library conference room, 200 Clark St. NE, Cullman, AL. All visitors and prospective members are welcome.

2000 OFFICERS

Chairman: Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 webcavers@hotmail.com	Vice-Chairman: Micah Sims 1431 Co Rd 827 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-8447
Secretary: Evon Thompson 378 Co Rd 395 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-1772	Treasurer: Tracy Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 tcavert@mindspring.com

Official Grotto Address: Cullman Grotto c/o Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 webcavers@hotmail.com	Newsletter Exchange: The FLOWSTONE Cullman Grotto - NSS 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 35055-6013 vertical@mindspring.com
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Upcoming Events



CALENDAR OF CAVE RELATED EVENTS

- June 10 8:00 am Grotto trip to Buggy Top Cave, TN. Meet at Cullman Library
- June 26-30 NSS Convention - Elkins, WV
- July 6 7:30 pm Grotto meeting at the library: On Thursday night due to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.
- July 8 8:00 am Grotto Trip TBA
- Aug 1 7:30 pm Grotto meeting at the library.

APPOINTMENTS

Advisor: Victor Bradford 8333 US Hwy 31 Hanceville AL 35077 (256)734-2809	Publications, Safety & Membership: Patrick O'Diam 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 3505 (256)739-0327 vertical@mindspring.com
Librarian: David Drake 110 Co Rd 1386 Falkville AL 35622 (256)739-0811 idopits@cs.com	

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Front Cover:

Patrick O'Diam rigging the main drop at Whiteside, NC. Photo by David Drake.

CULLMAN

## ECHO CHAMBER

GROTTO

## FROM THE EDITOR

Well, another month has rolled around and I still can not seem to get ahead. As a matter of fact, I can't even get caught up. I was hoping by now I would be caught up and getting ahead, but just as it was getting like that, my classes at the University of Alabama started up again. In about two weeks, I start teaching another class of Spanish to teachers at work. I really don't see any end in sight. Caving has been put on the back burner for now. I still sneak in a trip now and then, but it's not like I wish it was. I hope to make a few of the upcoming trips. I guess you have figured it out by now, but NO, I DON'T HAVE THE MEXICO VIDEO DONE YET! I'm sorry. Maybe it'll get done by the next trip there, whenever that is. I have not even looked at it in quite some time, but I will get it someday.

I would like to thank the people who contributed to the newsletter this month. I have not been able to put as much time in it as I would like. I had hoped to have a new format for this month; I updated my computer and got a lot of new toys on it, but haven't had time to set up a new format for *The FLOWSTONE*. I have been pleased with the changes I have noted so far. The last newsletter took over 7 hours to print alone with *several* more hours to put together. I have already seen an incredible difference in the speed of this new computer. It scans photos about 20 times faster, as well as does everything else so much faster, and best of all, I don't keep getting those little error messages all the time.

I will throw this out there for anyone who would be interested. I would like a break from the newsletter if anyone would be willing to take it over. I want to keep doing it until the end of the year, but if someone would like to take it over in January, I would love for them to do it. I guess *The Flowstone* takes about 10 hours on average to put together each month, but I always find myself trying to cram that 10 hours in the night before the meeting and with a zillion other things that need to get done. If no one wants the job, I will be happy to keep doing it for another year, but would enjoy a break. It's been two years now; I don't know how Dave did it for over 4 years as he was chairman. Anyway, if you are interested, let me know and I'll talk it over with you.

Patrick O'Diam

## T-SHIRTS

I hear that the summer of 2000 Cullman Grotto t-shirts are finished and will be available at the next few meetings. I think they are \$15 each or \$25 for two. I guess Vic could not wait and has already ran over and snagged his before we could.

## BIRTHDAYS

Only one birthday for this month and that would be of the sunflower girl herself, Wendy Bowen. Her birthday is on the 25 of September. When I asked Jeff how old she would be, he told me, but I will not print the number he said; we'll just let it go with the fact that she'll be a year older around the end of the month. We all hope she has a wonderful birthday! Be sure to read more about her in this month's Caver Spotlight and enjoy the poetry she has shared with us.

## ACCIDENT REPORT

While this does not have to do with a cave accident, it does have to do with a caver most of us know very well. Greg Thompson tried to exit through the windshield of a car this past weekend without much success. When the car went off an embankment, the driver got bruised up but no major injuries. She had on her seat belt. Greg, not wearing his seat belt, was not so fortunate. Apart from many cuts and bruises, he suffered a bad break to the arm and shoulder along with three breaks in his hip. He was taken to the Huntsville Hospital where he still is at the time of this printing. He underwent two operations on Sunday, September 3. He should get to come home latter on in the week. While he is expected to make a full recovery, it will be a long process. He will be in a wheel chair for a while and then undergo rehabilitation. On behalf of the Cullman Grotto, we wish him a speedy recovery and we are sorry this happened to him.

## LEDBETTER'S NEW CAVE RIDE

Don't you hate it when a friend gets a new vehicle. I am not talking about the envy or jealousy thing. I am thinking more about the hassles that come to the rest of us cavers who will be riding in Ledbetter's new to him Pathfinder. First will be the, no muddy butts in this ride statement, guess we will be reminded to bring a change of clothes every time we leave his house. Second will be the, I don't want to try that hill or trail in the Pathfinder statement, that means more walking on cave trips. Third will be the, be careful with that pack as you throw it in the back statement. Fourth will be listening to Glenn tell old Nissan truck caving stories. And last of all don't forget the hassle of thinking you see Glenn in the Pathfinder, only to be passed by a mother taking her daughter to dance class. If you want to add any more thoughts to this please share them with all of us. We must stand together in this thing, or maybe I should have said, sit together in this Pathfinder. Congratulations Glenn, we promise not to get biscuit crumbs in the floor or mud on the seat for the next few caving trips.

Submitted by Derick

## WHITESIDE ACCESS

While in NC doing Whiteside, we noticed a little sign saying the bluff was closed to climbers. We convinced ourselves that it meant rock climbers, so we went on. In the process of de-rigging, about 50' of rope pads fell being unretrievable due to being so tired. A week or two later, Scott McCreia and his group were there but didn't find the rope pads. He did forward the following information about the bluff: The ranger's office said that the mtn. was totally open now. The bluff usually opens on July 15, but the rangers said they were leaving it closed this year until Aug 15. You can call the Highlands District Ranger office to get updates on the closure status. They close the face for the nesting falcons and rappellers are very much prohibited during the closure. There have been threats of closing the face to everyone, climbers too, if regulations are not followed. There is a group of climbers that have been lobbying for years to leave part of the face open year round. This is a part that has never had a Falcon nest near it. They say it may happen next year. Unfortunately, this section is no where near the rap sites.

On the August grotto trip to Whiteside, NC, we had a rather pleasant surprise. On past trips, we had camped or had even gotten no sleep at all. This time, it was a little different. While talking with new member Anne Farley about the trip to NC, I didn't dream she would know where Whiteside was. When she asked, I said between Highlands and Cashiers, to which she said she had stayed in Cashiers before. To make a long story short, Berry and Connie McGriff own a home there and Connie (who we know through work at West Elementary) was gracious enough to allow us to "camp" there for the weekend. WHAT A TENT! It was so wonderful! We built a fire in the fireplace on the porch, listened to wonderful music, grilled out, pigged out, and had a wonderful time! It was so heavenly; none of us were ready to return home on Sunday morning. It was perfect. We would like to thank the McGriffs for their hospitality and willingness to share. It will be one trip that the grotto will always remember fondly.

For details about the bluff, see David Drake's article "Beauty and the Beast" in this issue.

## WHITESIDE - ROUGHING IT IN CASHIERS

## NEVERHOLE

by ddrake

*Disclaimer: I was the editor of our grotto newsletter for about 4 yrs. and struggled each month trying to find enough material to publish, so I can empathize with Patrick's monthly dilemma. That's why you continue to see entries from "Dave's caving journal" in The Flowstone. If you get tired of reading about my exploits, then I would encourage you to write about yours. I'd like to read them and I know Pat would welcome the material. The alternative is another article from ddrake.*

(You can pay me at the meeting Pat)

I met Glenn Ledbetter, Patrick O'Diam, Ann & Chrissy Farley, Harold Calvert, Jeff Lynn, Wendy Bowen and Stick Harper in Scottsboro at 7:15am, Sat. Aug 6<sup>th</sup> for a trip to Stevenson, AL and the Little Coon Valley before the start of hunting season. The plan was to bounce a pit called Little Coon Neverhole and then do a multi-drop called Stoned Well. If you have a relative that has "never seen a sinkhole" take 'em to Little Coon. Sinkholes dot the mountainside like acne on a middle-schooler's cheeks.

The hike into Neverhole is less than half a mile, mostly down hill. The pit is located in a small outcropping of Bangor limestone at about the 1000' contour line on the Eureka quad topo. The entrance is roughly 4' by 9' with a shaft that drops 143' to a large ledge and then another 20' to the top of a breakdown pile. The pit features a couple of extremely impressive and active, flowstone displays. The more impressive of the two starts about 20' from the top and extends 60' down the side of the shaft. In fact, care must be used not to touch the formation on the rappel in. It is reminiscent of the Super Formation in Ledbetter Saltpeter. Another formation at the bottom starts as drapery then

connects to the floor at the edge of several small pools (probably one big pool in wet weather).

Hiking down the breakdown slope from the landing area, a tight squeeze leads to a small dome room where 3 four-digit NSS numbers have been "carbided" onto the wall. A rusty Falstaff can was also found in the room. That brought on a beer history discussion between the olders and the youngers, who had never heard of Falstaff. Except for a 6" wet, inaccessible crawl, the cave terminates in the dome. Everyone but Glenn and Wendy bounced the pit. They had both done it previously.

While Neverhole was being yo-yoed, Glenn and Stick were digging in a 1' X 1' hole trying to open up what sounded to be a 15' pit with little or no airflow. I questioned why they would expend so much energy for what appeared to be so little return. Wendy replied, "Some folks just like to dig." I have no further questions, your honor.

Several in the group had places to go and things to do that afternoon, so we bid them adieu. Jeff and Wendy also were on a tight schedule but agreed to go with Glenn, Stick and I to try and locate Stoned Well. According to Glenn's GPS and topo, the cave was .84 miles from where we were parked and on the same elevation, 1100'. We began blazing a trail, sans gear, through thick under brush. Soon we intersected a logging road and headed up the hillside. As Jeff and I were bringing up the rear, we could see what appeared to be a large bluff face through the undergrowth. We scrambled for a better view and saw that it was at the head of a massive sink and there appeared to be a 12' by 12' cave entrance at the base of the bluff. We made our way over to the



bluff, passing a smaller, body-tight passage along the way. The hole we had seen was definitely an entrance but flowstone and breakdown blocked the passage some 20' in. Remnants of past fires indicated that it made for a nice shelter during hunting season.

As we started out of the entrance, Jeff pointed to a HUUUGE black void staring us in the face through the underbrush some 200' away. It reminded us both of something displaced from Mexico. I climbed down to a dry, but recently wet, run-off channel the size of the Snake River. The flow path ran along the bottom of an enormous sink and directly into the mouth of a massive cavern. The cave takes on so much water that 500-pound boulders and logs 16' long and 3' in diameter had been washed into the mouth of the cave. The air emanating from this gaping cavity was not only strong but it was frigid. The cave began as a 40' high, 30' wide open-air canyon. I was able to walk about 100' into the cave using natural light then had to wait for Jeff who had a handheld in his pocket. Apparently the passage continues beyond a duck under, however it is not negotiable due to an obstruction of logs and boulders. We think we now which cave it is but are

unsure as the map is missing from the ACS book. Whatever it is, the size of the borehole and the temp of the air indicates there is plenty more cave beyond the restriction and the potential exists for something deep. The entrance can be accessed via a climb down, which is the route I chose, or it can be rigged with a 60' rope.

After our exploratory effort Jeff & Wendy indicated that it was time for them to route. Glenn, Stick and I opted to head out with them.

When we arrived at the vehicles, Stick noticed that his billfold was missing. In unison we all chimed, "Stick, you don't go caving with your billfold in your pocket!" He assured us that it was the first time. We assured him that it would be the last time. You usually only have to lose a DL, Visa, Insurance Card, Cash, etc. one time to learn a lesson. He started out saying it had \$160 in it but by the time he and Glenn headed to retrace the route to Neverhole it had \$190 in it. Either way it'll be a big find for somebody. Anyone caving in Little Coon that finds a wallet belonging to Alan "Stick" Harper, I'm sure he would appreciate its return. We'll save locating Stoned Well for another trip.

## Beams Pit

by Derick Mitchel

Saturday morning, 8/26/00, Glenn Ledbetter and I went to Hytop, AL in search of AJK822, Beams Pit. The pit is on the Hytop topo but you are almost on the Estill Fork topo before you find the pit. We enjoyed the drive and made all the typical statements about needing to spend more time in the area. We parked and headed up the mountain, got on the right bench level, and found several sinks and karst features but no pit. I put a lot of trust in Glenn and tend to run on auto pilot when in search of our objective. I can find caves on my own but why spoil Glenn's fun; he is usually the lead man and I look at all the sidebar stuff. I was still confident in Glenn's ability to find the pit, but I was beginning to look at this trip as more of a ridge walk than pit bouncing trip.

BO, pit, I found it. Yes, it was up hill from where I was and it took two bos before I found Glenn. Beams Pit is about 20 feet across and the first pitch is 132 feet deep with one small ledge near the bottom. The pit reminded us both of Trenton Well, but not as deep. There are several LARGE death rocks that

look as if they might slide into the pit at any minute, the kind of slab rocks that have been that way forever and never will move, but what if? The cave continues for an overall depth of 160 feet and because of its shape, looked deeper than it is.

We packed our gear and headed down the mountain. We kept thinking that the area looked as if very few people were traveling the trails on the mountain. The rough roads and cut back trails are unpassable in a jeep or four wheeler. About half way down the mountain Glenn spotted orange tape right by the trail. The new dig was just big enough for a thin person to slide thru. The depth might be forty feet and there are several more digs in progress in the area. I guess the mountain is seeing more caving than we thought. When we got to the road we had to walk about half a mile to the truck. We had a nice walk by the creek and a good trip. This pit will probably be a return trip for the grotto. When we return we will park a little farther down the road.

## BEANS PIT AJK# 822

Glenn Ledbetter NSS 32198

On Aug. 8<sup>th</sup>, Derick Mitchell and I had planned on a day of pit bouncing but was undecided on where to go. When he arrived I mentioned to him I have been wanting to go to AJK 822 Beams pit. Since neither of us had been there, we were off. We drove up into Estill fork in Jackson county and parked along side of a gravel road and proceeded up the mountain. We spotted several sinks and possible digs along the way. Soon we were spread out and I soon found the pit. The

entrance is a large sink and 132' pit. Derick soon joined me and we rigged the pit on the low side. The pit is a really nice free drop and reminded both of us of Trenton Well. Once on bottom I walked down the tall canyon passage to the second pit 20' but did not drop it. Once out, we headed straight down the mountain and found a fresh dig which was marked with orange flagging tape. It appeared to be a pit of about 40', very tight, and appeared to have been worked hard with a hammer

to gain entry. The hike to and from was nice and the pit a true

classic in my book and very much worth a return trip.

## Beauty & the Beast

(Rigging Whiteside)

by ddrake

8/12/00

High atop the Appalachians and deep in the Nantahala National Forest lies a beast of stone, a monolith that has snatched the courage of daring souls and squashed it like a bug. Over the years this humbler of the brave has claimed the lives of many and maimed scores more. Its stature is second to none as it towers above soaring falcons and majestic pines making lakes appear as puddles and roadways as string. It can be conquered but never tamed. Even the fearless unwillingly bow to the 660' granite tombstone the world knows only as Whiteside.

Okay, enough of that crap. If you like big drops and the rush of standing on the edge of a cliff while staring at a valley floor 2500' below, behold Whiteside. Anyone who's done it and tells you they didn't get the willies at the crossover is either brain dead, blind or lying through their teeth. For those who have not or may not do the drop I'll try to tell it like it is. For those who have I'll try to recreate some memories.

Whiteside is not all there is to do in Nantahala National Forest as far as entertainment. Van Hook Glade is a nice camping area with well-maintained campsites, running water and bathroom facilities. Cliffside is a nice recreation/picnic area including a swimming hole in a spring-fed mountain lake. It's a great place to take the family and a great place to go after climbing Whiteside. There are also some hiking trails in this area. Dry Falls offers a short hike to a beautiful 75' falls. The path leads behind the falls and makes for some great photo opportunities. Probably the biggest draw in Highlands, NC is the downtown shopping district. It features dozens of souvenir shops, candy stores, boutiques, Inns and eateries. Those significant others who could care less about your caving adventures can have their own little ball.

Whiteside is located off of Hwy 64 about halfway between Highlands & Cashiers, NC. From Huntsville it's a scenic 4 to 4½ hour drive. Heading east, a right turn onto Whiteside Mtn Rd leads directly into the parking area. The customary National Forest Service latrine is located in the parking area, a toilet over a big hole (how graphic do I need to get here), no running water. The NFS has designated this area (parking, not the outhouse) as a Fee Area so a \$2.00 per vehicle charge is levied via an honor system.

The hike to the top of the mountain is just shy of a mile and steep in places. The trail loop is 2 miles. It is a very popular hiking trail and since the "back-up" tree is located trailside, a transient audience is usually there when you are doing the drop. Whiteside can be broken down into three sections.

**Section One (Upper):** This section is 60' in length and slopes 80 degrees to the rigging bolts for the main line. There are two

rusty bolts set in the granite at the top of Section One. Both appear to be in relatively good shape. The better of the two is the one nearest the trail. We rigged a 150' rope to the better bolt using a butterfly knot and a biner then used the aforementioned tree as a backup. It is not recommended to rig Whiteside with one continuous rope as the entire length of Section One would have to be padded, and keeping the rope on the pad and off of the rope-eating granite would be close to impossible. As it is, 50' of rope pads are needed so plan on a two-rope rig. The lowered end of the 150 was binered to the top end of the main line using figure eight knots with slack enough in the rope to allow one to rappel down to the Section Two rigging bolts. This is done so that upon de-rigging, both ropes can be pulled from the top. This rig works extremely well.

**Section Two (Middle):** The main drop. From the rigging bolts at the top of this section, it is 450' to a small ledge where the register is located and 600' to the ground. There are several bolts at the top of this section, but only 4 appear to be suitable for rigging. The others are questionable and don't look to have been used in years. The 4 main bolts are configured in this manner:

#2

#3

#4

#1

We used a 650' length of rope to rig Section Two leaving the bulk of the rope up top of Section One and sending one end down with the rigger. After the rope was secured the remainder of the rope was fed down the drop slowly. The main drop was rigged with an in-line eight to the bottom bolt (#1) going up to a figure eight on a bite at the upper bolt (#2). The weight distribution was about 60/40 with the weight on the lower bolt. The excess rope was tied off on bolt #3. A good self-equalizing knot such as a double eight is also a secure way to rig the drop. Either way will spread the load to more than one point of contact. The rigger usually biners in with a cows tail to one or two of the other bolts, as well as being safetied in to the 150. The main drop can be padded using 35' of rope pads but a continuous 50' length is recommended so as to make rigging a tad easier and quicker. It is also recommended that you tie the pads together up top so

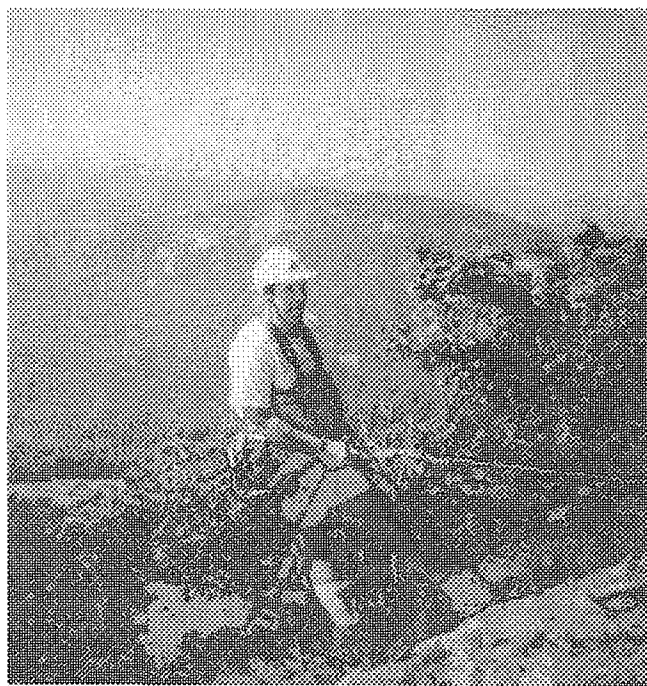
you can stretch them out along the trail and roll them up. Then, when you have secured the pads at the lip of the main drop you can roll the pads off the lip or let the first rappeller sort of walk the roll down by centering the roll on the top of his boots. First one down also gets the job of securing the pads. The wind at times is very gusty on Whiteside so heavy gauge string or small cord is needed for side-securing the pads to the permanent bolts that have been conveniently placed along the rock face. Allow an hour-and-a-half to rig Whiteside.

Using the two rope method requires a crossover to be negotiated at the bottom of Section One. The best way to describe the crossover area is to say that it is just a little bigger than the indentation made in a beanbag chair after someone has been sitting in it. Oh, and it's sloped, but the rigging bolts make good footholds. The crossover is best accomplished by wrapping off your rack and attaching a QAS above it while still attached to Rope 1. Next, unwrap the rack and remove it from Rope 1. Rig it into the mainline while the QAS is still attached to Rope 1. Note that the weight of the rope is significant and will tend to pull you off the bluff. Of course the QAS keeps that from happening. Once you have your rack rigged into the main line, wrap it off, then remove the QAS from Rope 1 and reattach it to the mainline above your rack. When you're ready, straddle the rope pads (or place the roll on your boots if you choose that option), remove the QAS and unwrap the rope from around your rack. Bon Voyage!

The first 35' is mostly against the wall. You will then come to what is another small lip. Here the bluff becomes undercut. This lip is the last point that needs to be padded. A 50-foot length of rope pad will effectively pad the rope from the main line rigging bolts to just beyond this second lip. As soon as you have crossed this feature, the rope generally tends to rotate you 90 degrees so that you are no longer facing the bluff but instead are looking out over a valley floor some 2400' below, RRRUUUSSSHHHHHHHH!!!

Section Three (Lower): After dropping 450' feet, all free, you can touch down and land on the ledge containing the register or you can do a touch and go and rappel on to the bottom another 150' below. Note: The main line often collects on the register ledge. The first one down needs to be aware of this and be prepared to stop and feed the rope down the remainder of the drop. The final 150' is against the wall basically. Actually, from the ledge to about 40' above the landing area you are 8"-12" from the wall as the bluff face begins to slope outward. For the final 40' the bluff flares more dramatically. The landing area is extremely small and in the midst of thick underbrush on a heavily wooded mountainside still some 1800' above the valley floor. So if you're considering hiking out...don't.

A ropewalking system is highly recommended for climbing out. It would also be wise to carry some water for the climb out. If you plan on doing the drop during the hot months it is recommended that you plan your climb early in the morning or late in the afternoon, although incidence of strong winds



David Drake, on rope. Going Down. Photo by Anne Farley.

and thunderstorms are higher in the afternoon. The sun reflecting of the light-colored granite face makes hyperthermia a problem during mid-day climbs. Early morning rigging usually ensures that you get the primary rig point (indicated by a short, 8 or 9' "security" fence). There are other places to rig Whiteside but padding is more difficult and the drop is not as free.

Bouncing Whiteside is not just a test of endurance but also a test of facing inherent fears present in all of us. Whiteside is not the deepest drop any of our group had done but it certainly ranks as one of the most intimidating. Patrick O'Diam, Harold Calvert and I had done the drop before. Evon Thompson had come willing before but had succumbed to the karma of Whiteside. She was not alone. Last year 12 came, all but 5 wilted. To her credit she came back this year and met the nemesis head on, then raised her arms in triumph.

Hiking back to the parking area, an awesome sense of accomplishment consumes all who partake. Victory brings with it a tremendous sense of pride in the fact that you have conquered another foe and have cheated death once again. Therein lies the beauty of the beast.

My thanks to Patrick who supplied much of the technical information used in this report; as he was the one who rigged the rope. I merely rigged the pads. Also, thanks to Harold who had the unenviable job of cleaning the gear off the bluff and Evon, who is often the only female on our trips, for putting up with my snide remarks about her taste in music. And finally, thanks to our support crew, Tracy Calvert, Greg (I'd have done it if I didn't have a bum back) Thompson, Ann Farley and Kayleigh & Carrieann Drake.

 FROM THE MAILBAG 

## BOLTS AND SURPRISE

Received by e-mail from Tim White

On Sunday John Hickman and I met Buddy Lane to place bolts to secure litter movement from the land bridge to the waiting room in Surprise.

When we got there we were very surprised (pun intended!) to see all the modification Randall had accomplished a couple weekends ago! On the HSV grotto trip to the Upper Cave, Randall took on the task of removing the obstacle that hindered moving a litter through the start of the "ledge" crawl. What a GREAT job he did! One can now easily get a SKED (and maybe a FERNO) through without effort. One more trip with the drill and a hammer and it will be freeway size!

On to the bolting report... We set 6- 11/16" dia. 5" long bolts (apx. size). The first 2 are on the left wall before the crawl starts. The next 2 are half way, on the large part of the ledge and the last 2 are at the end of the crawl on the land bridge. With this set up, we can now safely secure a litter and attendants the entire way. While there we removed all the old hardware that had been used for anchors. 1 stud bolt and angle hanger, 1 piton, 1 large ring, and 1 small ring that broke with very little pressure! I plan to have a info card heavy laminated and hang it on the first set of bolts informing folks who don't know that these bolts are for handline rigging and this is not the main rig point! Though with the size and quality of these bolts, any of the 3 sets could be safely rigged to, just would be a drop into the waterfall or something else.

Now that all this is done, lets plan on NEVER having to use any of it!!!!!!!

Be safe,  
Tim White NSS 26949

## UNDERGROUND FANTASY

By Wendy Bowen

Pits and passages,  
duck-walks and crawls,  
the journey to an underground world of fantasy begins.

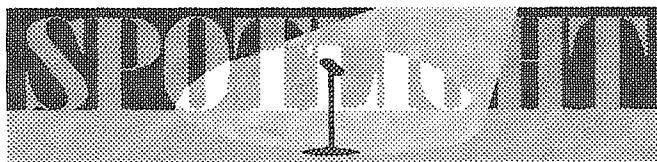
A world uninhibited by man,  
untouched by time,  
controlled only by the forces of nature.

A land that is not dominated by humans,  
but guarded by giant formations,  
towering over the virgin passages.

The palace is filled with beautiful formations.  
Crystal chandeliers illuminate the ceilings,  
water cascades over the flow stones into the rimmed pools,  
that line the helectite garden.

More passage ?  
Twist and turn,  
borehole ..... breakdown.  
The journey ends.

# CAVER'S



## Spotlighting Wendy Bowen

Interview by Patrick O'Diam via e-mail

Wendy has two children. Alysha, her daughter, is turning eleven this month. She has already done her first pit. She stated that she ties Aaron, her seven year old son, to a tree to keep him from going down his first pit the fast way.

*TELL US HOW YOU GOT STARTED CAVING, HOW LONG HAVE YOU CAVED, AND WHY DID YOU START?*

About 3 years ago Jimmy, a friend from work, Glenn, and my self were on break and they were talking about rappeling. They asked me if I wanted to go, I told them yes thinking the whole time, "there is no way in the world that I would do that." Then another year passed and they were talking about it again. Finally I agreed. I have been on rope for almost 2 years, and I am loving every minute of it.



*WHEN WAS YOUR FIRST VERTICAL EXPERIENCE WITH CAVING?*

The first time I went was in February of 1998. Me and Glenn met Jeff and Derick at Stephen's Gap. At first I wasn't sure about doing it, but when Jeff said the my butt wouldn't fit through the key hole, I had something to prove.

*WHAT PREFERENCE DO YOU HAVE IN CAVING?*

I like doing free drops, and multi-drops, but from my first and last experience at Norsmon's Well, I don't like the wet drops. I am going to have to build up my nerve to do that again.

*WHAT WOULD BE YOUR FAVORITE CAVE OR PIT?*

My favorite pit in the USA has to be Neversinks. This is one that I could do every week and never get tired of it, but my favorite pit in Mexico is Cepillo. It has the "House of Bamboo". I love the formations, and the drop.

*NOW YOU HAVE BEEN IN ON THE DISCOVERY OF AT LEAST ONE MAJOR CAVE. TELL US YOUR FEELINGS WHILE PUSHING VIRGIN CAVE.*

It is strange to go into a place that no one has been before. I have always been afraid of crawls, but when we got to the break down crawl in this cave, I didn't even think about it. I was wanting to see where it went, and I completely forgot about being afraid.

*WHAT WOULD YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR BIGGEST HARDCORE OUTING?*

I think that the new cave that we have found would be considered the biggest. It has a tough lip that has to be maneuvered, a walk through water, crawling through break down passages, and learning to turn your body into positions that you wouldn't think were possible.

*EVER HAD ANY CLOSE CALLS WHILE CAVING?*

The only thing that comes to mind is when Jeff, Glenn, Derick, and I went to Obscure Magnificence. When we first got there, Glenn went in first and said that it was going to be a tight squeeze, but we could make it. We all went down, but on the way out we had to take off our climbing gear and use our upper body to get out. Glenn and Derick were up top, and Jeff was down below. About a third of the way through this hole a rock slipped from above and hit my helmet and shoulder. Jeff talked to me to calm me down, and Glenn and Derick had to pull me out most of the way.

*WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR GREATEST CAVING ACCOMPLISHMENT?*

Climbing out of Golondrenas. This is something that I never thought that I would do.

*I RECALL THE FIRST TIME WE MET. WE WERE AT DOODLEBUG. HOW DID THE SUNFLOWERS COME ABOUT?*

I think it started with me and Jeff having a mud fight in the bottom of the pit, and it escalated into a sunflower seed fight up top. Then as we walked down the mountain I had extra weight added to my helmet.

*WHAT ABOUT MEXICO? YOU WERE ON THE SPRING BREAK 2000 TRIP. TELL US ABOUT THAT.*

Mexico is the most amazing place that I have ever been. I loved doing the caves, but the land, and the people made it an experience that I will never forget. I will always remember Golondrinas, not only for what I accomplished, but also for Jesus. He is a ten year old little boy that I played tic-tac-toe with while I was waiting for my turn to go down, and then when I made it to the top, he was waiting there for me.

*WHAT DO YOU SEE IN YOUR CAVING FUTURE?*

I think that I want to become more active in surveying. With the new cave that has been found, I think that I am going to get my chance.

*ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE TO ADD TO THIS INTERVIEW?*

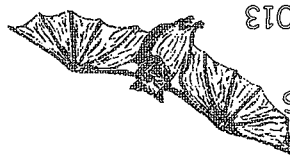
I would just like to thank every one in the grotto. Not only have I learned something from each person, I fell like I am a part of a caving family.

## Labor Day Fun

Jeff Lynn NSS 38192

Labor Day for Glenn Ledbetter, Wendy Bowen and myself was spent bouncing a very good pit. We headed for the mudcreek quad in search of a deep pit to do. We did a 219 ft. pit that was a true TAG classic right down the center of the pit, the rope had to be padded in two places up top but

after that it was completely freefall. Then we walked about a 1000 ft. east on the same bench and looked at another pit that sounded just as deep but was not a free drop. It was a great day but any time I get to go caving it is a great day! Hope to see ya out in TAG. Get out and go caving.



The Flowstone  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Sandra Ln. NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013

# The FLOWSTONE

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of the National Speleological Society

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TITLE PAGE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The FLOWSTONE is published monthly by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Items submitted for publication must be received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to be included in the following month's issue.

The Cullman Grotto will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of articles within The FLOWSTONE is allowed without consent provided credit is given to the source.

Membership to the Cullman Grotto is eight dollars (\$8) for individual membership or ten dollars (\$10) per family per year. Due are payable at the first grotto meeting of each year and includes the subscription to The FLOWSTONE. Subscription rate for nonmember is eight dollars (\$8) per year. See the editor for back issues.

The Cullman Grotto meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Cullman County Public Library conference room, 200 Clark St. NE, Cullman, AL. All visitors and prospective members are welcome.

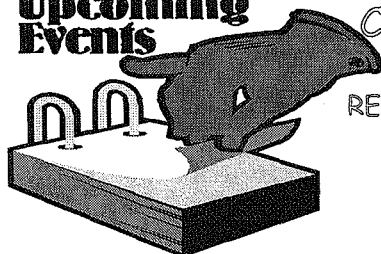
2000 OFFICERS

<b>Chairman:</b> Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 webecavers@hotmail.com	<b>Vice-Chairman:</b> Micah Sims 1431 Co Rd 827 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-8447
<b>Secretary:</b> Evon Thompson 378 Co Rd 395 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-1772	<b>Treasurer:</b> Tracy Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 tcavert@mindspring.com

*Official Grotto Address:* Cullman Grotto  
c/o Harold Calvert  
123 Co Rd 250  
Cullman AL 35057  
webecavers@hotmail.com

*Newsletter Exchange:* The FLOWSTONE  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Sandra Ln NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013  
vertical@mindspring.com

Upcoming Events



CALENDAR OF CAVE RELATED EVENTS

- Oct 5-8 TAG Weekend at Sequoyah Caverns  
All weekend
- Nov. 7 Grotto meeting at the library.  
7:30 pm
- Nov 11 Grotto Trip? TBA  
TBA

APPOINTMENTS

<b>Advisor:</b> Victor Bradford 8333 US Hwy 31 Hanceville AL 35077 (256)734-2809	<b>Publications, Safety &amp; Membership:</b> Patrick O'Diam 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 3505 (256)739-0327 vertical@mindspring.com
<b>Librarian:</b> David Drake 110 Co Rd 1386 Falkville AL 35622 (256)739-0811 idopits@cs.com	



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Front Cover:

Wesley Pinyan going over the 668' drop on the high side of Hoya de Guaguas in Mexico. Photo taken on Spring Break 2000 by Harold Calvert.



CULLMAN

GROTTO

## ECHO CHAMBER

## FROM THE EDITOR

First off, I would like to thank David Drake and Glenn Ledbetter for their contributions to this newsletter. Glenn has been wonderful to send in several reports of what he has been doing and I can always count on Dave to do a report when ever he goes somewhere. If it were not for them, this newsletter would have been much like the February newsletter where there were a few blank pages. I am very tired right now so whatever I have is going into this thing and that's that. I usually enjoy doing the Caver Spotlight and I do have several people who I still need to spotlight, but I just do not have the energy to do one of those interviews and type it all up. Maybe next month. . . I hope that some of you who have been caving will contribute soon to make the newsletter something interesting to read. Looks like there will be a new editor within a few months and I'm sure they would love for your help in making the newsletter enjoyable and entertaining. One person can not do it alone; it takes the help of all grotto members to make the newsletter one that we can be proud of. So, get up, go cave, and write about it!

Patrick O'Diam

## BIRTHDAYS

There are a few birthdays for the month of October. First, Alan Harper has a birthday on the 5<sup>th</sup>. If you are like me, you probably don't even know who that is, right? He is more frequently referred to as "Stick". Happy birthday Stick! On the 19<sup>th</sup> of the month, new caver Anne Farley who is officially a member now and loves all aspects of horizontal and vertical caving will turn f - - - never mind how old she will be. I'm afraid I'll get hit if I put it in print, and if you've ever been hit by her, you'll think twice before doing anything that will make her want to hit you again. (I do know how old she is - I heard just today, so if you want to know, I'll tell you in private.) At the end of the month, on the 29<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Glenn Ledbetter has a B'day. I told Vic that I guessed I would have to start caving with Glenn because at least Glenn can find the caves. Anyway, we all hope you all have a wonderful birthday!

## ACCIDENT REPORT

Have not heard of anything but the normal stuff for Bangor Cave that happens quite regularly. Let's keep safe out there.

## AJK#1749

By Glenn Ledbetter

On September 4 Jeff, Wendy and I decided to use the Labor Day holiday for a little pit bouncing. We met around 8:00 a.m. and were off in search of AJK # 1749, a 218' pit on the Mudcreek quad. Using the topo map, we were able to drive to within a half mile of the cave. We then unloaded the gear and started the walk. In just a few hundred feet in elevation, we were on the contact bench and spotted a large sink and thought we were there but the sink had a bottom. We spread out and soon found Fargo Well just a few feet away. We rigged the pit on the downhill side and I was the first down the super

shaft, a true TAG classic. Jeff was next, followed by Wendy. I climbed out first; while the others climbed, I went off in search of AJK# 1748: Wills Welch Well, a 400' deep multi drop cave. I soon found the entrance and returned to AL 1749 just as Jeff was taking his gear off. We were soon joined by Wendy and headed over to let them take a look at the other cave. None of us felt we had the energy to pull off another pit so we headed down the mountain and back to the truck. Just another great day of caving in the heart of TAG (Jackson County).

## A MULE NAMED CONLEY

By ddrake 9/9/00

As legend has it, the farmer had had one too many at the local watering hole when he and his mule decided to head back to the hacienda. This day they decided to take the short cut over the mountain. As they neared the summit the old-timer decided to stop and rest his mule and cool down a bit beside a gaping hole from which cool air emanated. Sometime between the process of

arriving and leaving, the inebriated one backed his mule off into the abyss. The mule's name was Conley.

If and when a book of TAG classics is ever published, Conley Hole will be listed among the first few pages. This is one magnificent pit. Should you have occasion to go, you'll find that the trip to Viola, TN is not a short

one (3 1/2 hrs from Cullman). Directions are complicated (turn right, turn left, turn right, turn left). The route is primitive (no trail). And the climb is often steep. But you will be favored to meet an extremely caver-friendly landlord, enjoy the all-day company of his faithful dog (we call him Blue), and bounce one of the best drops in TAG.

Conley Hole is a 163', Liberty Bell -shaped pit that begins as a 30' X 30' opening and ends in a one-acre room that happens to be decorated to the hilt. It is representative, on a smaller scale, of Sotano de Cepillo in Mexico. The drop will accommodate several ropes without fear of entanglement. We dropped two. The first 20' is against the wall. The pit then bells and the rope lands smack-dab in the middle of the pit on top of a 20' breakdown pile. During wet weather a large pool of water puddles against one wall. Massive amounts of wet flowstone cascade down from the wall above. Huge, active draperies hang in abundance from the ceilings and ledges. Also in this area are some legitimate mud stalagmites. Some have rocks sitting gingerly on top. Several rimstone dams and large pools of forming cave pearls and marbles grace the floor, so delicate foot placement is critical. A sewer passage that takes all the water entering the pit leads off from this area as a tight, wet crawl that may or may not be passable. Facing the pool, to the left is a two-story haystack formation that has seen quite a bit of traffic over the years. It does make for a nice perch to watch cavers bounce the pit. To the left of the haystack is a crows-nest loft that is attainable by climbing breakdown piled alongside the wall. The summit of this pile is 70' above the floor of the pit and makes for a great photography location.

Shortly after touchdown, I noticed a small Copperhead crawling amongst the breakdown. Shortly thereafter my brother Kuenn found a larger, water moccasin-colored

snake. We thought at first that they must have been washed into the cave, but decided later that they were there on purpose. Several salamanders and cave crickets called the pit home. The snakes were there because of the smorgasbord.

In addition to my brother and me, Patrick O'Diam, Ann Farley, Bernard Powell and Van Cain bounced the pit. We also put a local landowner's son down. While we were at the pit, the Hancock's, a father, his two older sons (30's-40's), and his grandson, showed up curious to see cavers at work and to inquire as to what was in the pit. Having lived nearby all their lives, no one they knew had ever been to the bottom. The younger son said that he had done some rappelling and frogging when he worked for the state. We asked if he would be interested in taking a trip to the bottom. He said he'd love to. He was absolutely in awe at what he saw and had a good climb out. We took some pictures of him on rope and promised to mail him the photos. He and his family members thanked us repeatedly and after the exchanging of phone numbers and addresses went on their way.

The pit withstanding, the best part of a trip to Conley is the company of the Conley Hole cave dog. Rumor is that he will lead you to the pit, but anyone that knows anything about dogs knows different. Oh, he may take you there eventually, but first he's going to take you to everything that stinks on the mountain side. Dogs follow smells and they are proud of their finds. They want to show them to everyone (except other dogs of course). So don't go expecting ole' Blue to lead you to the pit. Know how to get there before you go and Blue will follow YOU to the pit, indirectly. When he does show up, he'll usually stay with you til you're ready to go. I think I speak for the majority when I say a day a Conley Hole is one of the best trips in TAG, thanks to a mule named Conley, as legend has it.

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## A GREAT DAY OF CAVING

by Glenn Ledbetter

On Sunday, September 10<sup>th</sup>, Andy Parr met me at my house at 12:30 for an afternoon of caving. We met some other friends, Wendy Bowen and her daughter, at Stephen's Gap and were off. The first place we headed was AJK.# 2677 Ventilation Shaft. We parked along the road and were getting the gear ready when the land owner walked up, Ken Kifer a former caver, now a long distance bike rider. He was very nice and told us of his journeys of bike riding to Canada and back. He also told of caving in the late 60's with David Teal and Marion Smith who were just kids back then. Then we were off.

We followed an old road around the mountain for about a mile

and found the pit just a few feet from the road. Ken was very surprised because he did not know the pit was there and thought he had seen every inch of the property. The entrance appeared to be a dig and looked very tight so we went to work trying to open it up a little more. That done, I rigged the rope and slid down the entrance crack to the edge of the pit. The pit is mostly a wall drop of 75' but had some very pretty formations. At the bottom, I walked up and down a very tall canyon passage with more small but pretty formations. Since I was the only one to drop the pit because of the entrance crack, I didn't look around much and never located the two 25'

pits listed in the ACS book. Mr. Kifer doesn't care if caver's come visit the cave but does not want anyone to go with out first getting permission from him, he lives in the old cabin near the road where you would park. Next we were off to AJK#197: Never Sink. This tag classic was wonderful as it always is. When we arrived there, some other cavers were there derigging. Soon we were standing on the bottom of this

wonderful 162' shaft.

The weather was great, the caves were good, the land owners wonderful and the company great. What else could a caver ask for on an afternoon of caving?

Bring on the next trip and get on rope.

## A Great Day Of Caving (Part II)

by Glenn Ledbetter

Sunday morning 9/17/00 was originally planed as a trip to Walking Fern to visit Whopper Well and Julie's Well, but since some friends of mine could not go we opted for some other pits instead. Stick (Alan Harper), Andy Parr and I got an early start and headed for a pit I have been wanting to do for some time now, Dick Pit AL#731. The hike was very nice due to the cool weather.

The pit is located just uphill from a very large sink. The drop is 120' free-fall. There was not much here in the way of

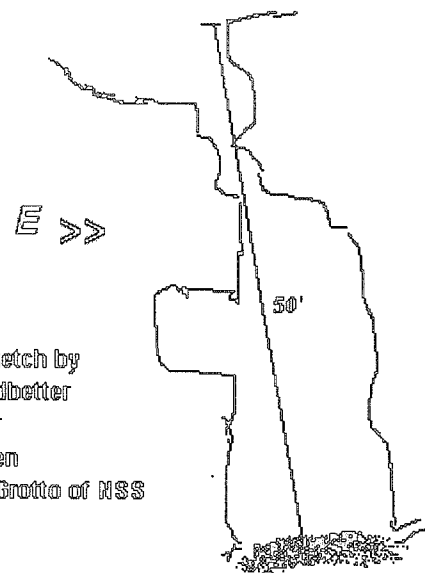
formations, but the pit is very pretty. We also looked at several other smaller pits in the area. That leads one to believe there is more to find here. Our next stop was AL# 1510: Harbin Pit, a 127 footer with lots of flowstone formations all the way down. Both pits seem to be seldom visited and are worth going to if you are in the Paint Rock Valley and looking for a short pit to bounce. We ended the day with a nice ride looking at the mountains, and as always the caves were great, the mountain hike nice, and the friends good.

## Silo Pit

by Glenn Ledbetter

On Sunday the 24<sup>th</sup> of September, I was met at my house by Andy Parr around 12:30. The plan was to meet Wendy and head for Bailey Cave #2 a 107' pit on the Princeton Quad near the Skyline Management Area. Soon we were at the parking area and unloaded the gear, then headed down the mountain to the point on the map. On our way down, we passed a nice sink with a cave entrance in the bottom but, we decided to pass it up and head for the original destination. Once we reached the elevation where I thought the cave should be, we split up to look. After about an hour, we gave up (can't find 'em all the time). We decided to go back and check the sink we passed on the way down. When we arrived, a rock was dropped and a echo returned. We rigged the rope and Andy was the first down followed by me. Wendy opted to wait till a return trip to the area to do it due to the thunder storm in the distance. The pit started off narrow, but belled out and was about 50' deep and 15' across in the bottom. Andy said it reminded him of what a grain silo would look like from the inside so that was the name. As we were packing the gear the rain came and made the walk back to the trucks a slippery muddy mess. When I returned home and consulted the ACS book I could not locate anything where the pit is. The pit is probably not virgin but doesn't seem to be on the survey. The day was almost a bust, the weather wet, the pits shallow but a day walking the mountains in Jackson County with good friends is always hard to beat.

silo pit



Tape & sketch by  
Glenn Ledbetter  
Andy Parr  
WM Bowen  
Cullman Grotto of NSS

# MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE CULLMAN GROTTO OF THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The regular monthly meeting of the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society was called to order on Tuesday, August 1, 2000 at 7:30 p.m. in the conference room of the Cullman County Public Library by Harold Calvert, Chairman. 15 were present.

The minutes of the previously monthly meeting were read. Motion was made by Patrick O'Diam to accept the minutes as read and seconded by Jeff Lynn.

The treasurer's report was given.

This year's grotto T-shirts will be available at the August

monthly meeting. They will be hunter green with tan print.

There will be a grotto trip to Whiteside on August 12<sup>th</sup>.

On September 9<sup>th</sup>, there will be a grotto trip to Conley Hole.

Discussion of the grotto picnic was tabled until the September meeting.

Several trip reports were given.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, the Chairman declared it adjourned.



The Flowstone  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Sandra Ln. NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013

# The FLOWSTONE

November 2000

Vol. VII No 11

A Monthly Newsletter of the Cullman Grotto  
of the National Speleological Society

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TITLE PAGE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The FLOWSTONE is published monthly by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Items submitted for publication must be received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to be included in the following month's issue.

The Cullman Grotto will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of articles within The FLOWSTONE is allowed without consent provided credit is given to the source.

Membership to the Cullman Grotto is eight dollars (\$8) for individual membership or ten dollars (\$10) per family per year. Due are payable at the first grotto meeting of each year and includes the subscription to The FLOWSTONE. Subscription rate for nonmember is eight dollars (\$8) per year. See the editor for back issues.

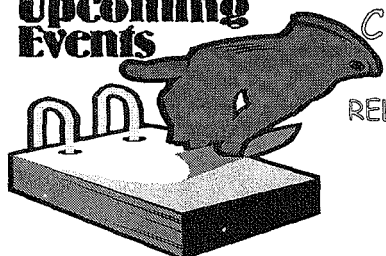
The Cullman Grotto meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Cullman County Public Library conference room, 200 Clark St. NE, Cullman, AL. All visitors and prospective members are welcome.

2000 OFFICERS

Chairman: Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 webecavers@hotmail.com	Vice-Chairman: Micah Sims 1431 Co Rd 827 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-8447
Secretary: Evon Thompson 378 Co Rd 395 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-1772	Treasurer: Tracy Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 tcavert@mindspring.com

Official Grotto Address: Cullman Grotto c/o Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 webecavers@hotmail.com	Newsletter Exchange: The FLOWSTONE Cullman Grotto - NSS 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 35055-6013 vertical@mindspring.com
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Upcoming Events



CALENDAR OF CAVE RELATED EVENTS

Nov. 24 TBA	Grotto trip - destination unknown. Discussion at the meeting.
Dec. 5 7:30 pm	Grotto meeting at the library.
Dec. 9 TBA	Grotto Trip? TBA
Dec. ? TBA	Beginner's Vertical Class - discussion at the meeting.
Jan. 2 7:30 p.m.	Grotto meeting at the library

APPOINTMENTS

Advisor: Victor Bradford 8333 US Hwy 31 Hanceville AL 35077 (256)734-2809	Publications, Safety & Membership: Patrick O'Diam 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 3505 (256)739-0327 vertical@mindspring.com
Librarian: David Drake 110 Co Rd 1386 Falkville AL 35622 (256)739-0811 idopits@cs.com	



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Front Cover:

Derick Mitchell on rope in Alabama's 292' Deep Well. Photo taken by Patrick O'Diam on May 1, 1999.

CULLMAN

GROTTO

# ECHO CHAMBER

## FROM THE EDITOR

Well, the meeting is in less than 20 hours, and I am just now starting. I will get this thing done thanks to the help of all the people who e-mailed their reports as long as I don't have any problems with the printer. If you are at the meeting and reading this, I'm sure it is hot off the press. If you are reading this a few days after the meeting and it came to you in the mail, I guess I had problems with the printing of the newsletter.

This has been a very busy month and I hate that I am not able to devote as much time to the newsletter as I would like. Maybe the new editor will do a better job than I have. I have let it slip up on me each month and rush to get it out. Sorry folks. I thought things were to calm down, but as soon as I finish one project, eight more come along. You will be happy to know that I have started again working on the Mexico Spring Break video. It'll be done by Christmas. (I heard that - really, it will be). Have many other big plans as well, but I don't know when any of them will come through, but I hope I can fulfill them all. Anyway, I hope you all have a wonderful month and get dirty for me.

Patrick O'Diam

## WEDDING BELLS WERE RINGING

Congratulations to Becky and Derick Mitchell who are currently in Mexico. . . bums! - more on that in this issue.

## BIRTHDAYS

The month of November holds the birthday for Arlon Baker on the 16<sup>th</sup> of the month. Evon Thompson has a birthday on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Also, I guess I will mention the long lost caver Brent Sizemore (he did come back last month) who's birthday is on the 19<sup>th</sup>. We hope you all have a wonderful birthday!

## ACCIDENT REPORT

Not heard of anything in the last few weeks, but have not have my computer on to have received any notice. The death of Joe Ivy as reported in last month's newsletter has been the most recent thin I am aware of. Reports and discussions of that are included in this newsletter.

## UPCOMING VERTICAL CLASS

For some time now, we have discussed having a vertical class fro beginners. Well, the time is getting near. The month of December should provide a chance for us to do this. Discussion of the event will take place at the Nov. and Dec. meetings and I should have information in the next newsletter.

## Rest in Peace

by: Derick Mitchell

This was a note that Derick sent out by e-mail at the beginning of hunting season. Glenn, we will miss you! Hurry back. (Ed.)

Long time summer-caver Glenn Ledbetter was last seen packing his cave gear into the closet at his Grant home on October thirteenth. At 12:00 AM October fourteenth, a man wearing green leaf clothing was seen leaving Glenn's home with a man from across the street. Glenn's Pathfinder was traced to a small camping lodge on Jacob's Mountain in Jackson County. Glenn's wife was contacted but she said this happens every year and ask his caver friends not to worry. She expects to see him sometime in early January. Any secret

cave leads can be sent to me and I will keep them for Glenn until our friend and fellow caver comes back to us. I know we all expected this but it still shocks us that Glenn would treat us this way. Try to forgive him and think of all the future trips that await us, his caver friends. If you wish to send his family flowers, please do so or a contribution can be made to the SCCI in Glenn's name.

While the above note may sound shocking, it is true. Every year around this time, we loose Glenn for the other sport that we can not get him to give up yet. We need not complain, for caves are always in his mind. While he is out hunting, he often is hunting more than deer. He tends to find many caves that are great and seldom visited. Better yet, when those green-leafed clothing are removed, he is great about taking the rest of us cavers back for a cave trip. He is off to a good start already and I hope you find many more caves (and deer, too). See you soon. (Ed.) Glenn did make the following response on the next page concerning his caving over the last year:

## Thanks

by Glenn Ledbetter

Well, as many of you know, hunting season is just around the corner, so I guess every one knows it's going to be slim caving for me here on out. I do plan on doing some short trips and after work trips. As I write this I'm thinking of all the wonderful places I have gotten to go and I would like to thank everyone who I have caved with over the summer, especially Derick, Jeff, and Wendy for who I can always count on to be ready to go anywhere and to Andy Parr, a old good friend of

mine who I think has the rope bug again; glad to see that. Also members of the Gadsden grotto who made so much happen in Thor. Also a special thanks to Patrick O'Diam and the Cullman Grotto for making a dream come true with the Mexico trip. I sure hope we all get the chance to cave even more next summer. I sure hope Paw-Paw keeps the beg also.

LATER CAVER

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## The Surprise

by Wendy Bowen

The day began like any other normal caving day: wake up early, brush teeth, brush hair, put on clothes, grabs extra clothes, and meet at Stephen's Gap. Little was I to know that this day would be anything but normal. Something that I had only heard about, but never thought that I would see what was about to happen today.

I met Glenn at Stephen's Gap around 6:30. (When I got into the truck, Glenn threw some paper in the back; this should have immediately let me know that something was going to happen today.) The plan was to go to TAG and meet Evon and go to Bean Pit. When we got to TAG, we walked around for about two hours, saw David Teal, Kelly, and Mark, watched some people climb, and decided to go to the car to see if Evon had made it yet. When we got to the registration area, we were met by David, and we could see that Evon and Vic were going in to register.

We all went back toward Vendor Village and walked around some more. David said that he was going to get his brother-in-law a climbing system and some rope. Glenn was about his brother-in-law's size, so he was going to be the guinea pig. David found the system and the rope, and we were ready to gather everyone together and go to the pit. We found Evon and Vic walking down the Village, and we met up with Kelly and Mark a little farther down the row. Vic wanted to go into the SCCI booth and bid on some things, so we went and watched the climbing contest while we waited. As we were watching, Derick showed up and we were introduced to Mack Butler, Derick's boss. Derick couldn't go with us today. He had some more work to do.

With everyone ready, we were off to Scottsboro to get something to eat and go to Bean Pit. Glenn is the only one of the group that had been to this pit before; Vic said that it has been on his list for 26 years. Of course, we were all asking how the hike was going to be. Glenn informed us that it was like the hike to Neversink, just a little longer. (This should have been another clue; when Glenn says that it is not that much farther, expects at least one more mile. When he says that it is not that bad, expect some rock climbing.)

When we finally reached the parking area, we were all ready to bounce a pit. We changed shoes, got the ropes out, and with gear in hand, went UP the mountain. The hike to this was compared to Neversink, but I think that it was more like the hike to Doodlebug, without the 2 mile hike to the bottom of the mountain. We followed an old road and were told that when we got to the next bench we would turn left. David had taken the lead and I was following David. (This should have been another hint that something was going to happen; I am usually the last person.) When we got to this bench, we started seeing yellow flagging tape. We don't understand why yet, but if you follow yellow flagging tape, you end up at a pit. David and I kept looking for the tape, and he finally said there is a tree that has two pieces on it. I knew. WE WERE THERE. I ran ahead of David and threw my gear down.

The pit entrance is very nice. From the top, there is a slope that is about 15 feet long. Then, depending on where the rope is rigged, the drop can be mostly free fall, or all of the way on the wall. We had brought two ropes, and while the ropes were being rigged, Vic was planning on getting on rope. This is the thing that I never thought that I would see. I had heard him talk about it, but never thought that I would actually see it.

With the ropes rigged, Mark went down first, David, and then Glenn. Glenn climbed out, and for some reason, it sounded like he was using a frog. I guess it was just the way the acoustics were in the pit. Evon had started to get on rope #2 and when she yelled, "ON ROPE," David said something. We yelled, "What?" I could have sworn that he called my name and then said, "SNAKE," but everyone said that he didn't and Evon went down.

When David got back to the top, he told me that there was a snake, but everything was all right now. Then Vic geared up. I watched him as he was putting on his.... I guess you would call it a seat harness; it looks more like a piece of webbing with a carabineer hooked in it. He told me that I should never use a seat harness like this. It is very dangerous. He also told me that he has several more like this one at home, and he needs to retire this one too. With all of that said, Vic was on



rope.

When Vic reached the bottom, Kelly climbed and then it was my turn. I had a good rappel, as far as a wall rappel goes. When I reached the bottom, Evon told me that David hadn't killed the snake, but threw it down further into the passage. I decided that I was not going to look around this pit today.

Evon got on rope and was on her way to the top. Vic put on his climbing system and was explaining to me how the bungee goes across the shoulder. All I could think about was this looks very complicated. I don't see how anyone can climb with this. Then he was on rope. He started singing the theme to Cops, and was climbing very smoothly.

Evon yelled, "OFF ROPE," and I was ready to go. I climbed about half way up and decided to turn off my light. I kept noticing that the light was still on and I finally figured out that it was my side light. I had borrowed Glenn's helmet and I was

not use to how his light turned off. I thought that it was like mine and just screwed off, so I started twisting it. It is not like my light. When you twist it too much, it comes apart. Here I am on rope, trying to hold this flashlight together without dropping it down the pit, and I have to take off a glove, without dropping it, so I can actually feel what I am doing. Do you ever think that God needs a laugh so he puts you in an unusual position so He will feel better? I get that all of the time. Finally I got the light back together and reached the lip. David told me that I needed to untie the rope pad and bring it up with me. God needed another laugh, and I finally made it up the slope with the rope pad in hand, under feet, and around my arms.

With all of the gear packed and rope coiled, the words came from Vic's mouth, "Let us head down from this place." So it is said, so it will be done. SLAM!!

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## Beans is Good for the Heart

By ddrake

TAG Saturday found us jones'n for a pit to do, so Glenn Ledbetter, Victor Bradford, Wendy Bowen, Evon Thompson and I along with Gadsden cavers Mark Medlin and Kelly Kiner took off for a seldom done pit in the Skyline area called Beans Pit. We met at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual TAG Fall Cave-In earlier in the day and browsed vendors row looking for bargains of which there were many. I purchased a rack and a ropewalker for my brother in law in Wyoming, we mingled about talking to friends and acquaintances, watched some of the climbing contest, then walked back to registration where our vehicles were parked and left for Jackson County.

Somewhere past the Estill Fork Post Office, a dirt road follows the Paint Rock River along the base of a mountain to a pull-off at the foot of an old logging trail. With two, 300' ropes in tow, we started the lengthy and steep climb to Beans. Vic kept mentioning that this pit had been on his to-do list for quite some time and Glenn reiterated that we were "gonna like this one." Several small sinks and in-progress digs dot the mountainside so there was always something to "check out". Three quarters of the way up we began to see Glenn's yellow flagging tape and followed it to a large sink that is the entrance to Beans Pit.

Beans Pit is a 132' drop that will accommodate as many ropes as you want to carry up the hill. The drop is actually measured from a ledge some 15' below the rig point on the low side. The ledge is 30' below the high side rig. The best climb is from the high side of the pit, although the best

rappels are from the low side. A high side rig drops you right down the middle of the pit. Low side rigs place you close to the wall, however some free climbs are available at certain places on the low side near the big tree. The landing area, like a lot of TAG pits, is on top of a breakdown / debris pile. Close to 100' of large canyon passage leads to a 20' pit that is the termination point. Other than some flowstone around the 20' pit Beans doesn't offer much in the way of formations, but the canyon passage is impressive and looking back toward the pit from the canyon is quite spectacular and very photogenic.

This trip was significant in a couple of ways. *First-* it was the only pit I've done in several months where the temp outside was cooler than the temp inside and *Second-* it was the first time I've seen Vic on rope in over two years.

Having become accustomed to the Alabama heat, the cool temps of this October afternoon had us wimping early. We each bounced the pit once and routed. The only "incident" was the discovery of a 3' snake at the landing point of rope #2. I tossed him down the passage a few feet and he/she/it slithered off into the breakdown. I've seen three snakes now in the last two pits I've done. Due to the coolness of their surroundings on the bottom of a pit snakes are very docile and don't pose much of a threat. In fact, of the three, none have coiled or even seemed concerned with my presence. They just know where the eatin's good. And speaking of good eatin', while a trip to Beans may be good for the heart, just remember the more you eat...

---

The last reports had to do with some TAG caving during the TAG event. On the next page, we have a true story by Derick Mitchell about how others from the grotto were trying to purchase some caving items, but were not having much luck.

## Sell Us Something, Please!

By Derick Mitchell

On my way home from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual TAG Fall In, I could not help but laugh at the three or four cave vendors who have the most loyal customers in the world. When Patrick ran in to me, I was being harassed as I payed Bruce Smith for a piece of rope I don't need. Anne was running from tent to tent spending freely without any real help from the vendors.

Patrick was trying to buy the most expensive caving lamp made. Jeff was walking about free as a bird with money in his pocket talking about LED's and no one was paying a lot of attention to any of us! Thank goodness they don't put the hard sell on us; we would need a truck to haul the stuff home!

---

## THE SECOND TIME IS A CHARM

by Wendy Bowen

On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, Alysha and I met Glenn and Andy at the parking area for Stephen's Gap. We decided that we would head toward Big Coon Valley to bounce Dog Collar Pit. On the way the sky turned black and there was a very nice electrical storm being preformed before our eyes. We thought that we might park at Neversink until it blew over. The weather died down some and off we were again. When we finally reached the parking area, the bottom fell out. We sat in our vehicles for fifteen minutes and decided that this would be a return trip. We thought that if we went back toward Huntsville that the worst of the storm might be gone. War Eagle sounded nice. When we arrived at the parking area, MORE RAIN. All of that praying to the cave gods was not doing any good. They must have thought that we were going to McBride's. With the day shot riding from parking area to parking area we decided to call it a day. When I pulled up in my drive way, the clouds parted and the sun was shining. (Someone must have been trying to tell me something.)

September 30, 2000: The day began at three in the morning. I had to go to work. I thought that the whole day was going to be shot, but leave it to Glenn to make arrangements to go late if necessary. It was decided. I would meet Glenn at 12:00 in Woodville and we would travel back to Big Coon Valley to try this one more time.

When we arrived at the parking area there were No Trespassing signs all around. We kept moving a little further

down the road until we thought that we had found the perfect spot. No signs. With gear in hand we headed up the mountain. It wasn't that hard to find. We had the GPS, but it was 0.05 miles off, and we still walked right to it.

The rigging was a little tricky. There is a tree laying across the pit, and the closest live tree is almost 30 feet away. Have faith in Glenn. Where there is a will there is a way.

With the pit rigged Glenn was down first. You could hear the rope zipping, and then all of a sudden it stopped, then started back again. I was later told that the rope had a spot in it and he had to drop a bar to get going again.

"OFF ROPE" was the call. It was my turn. I got on rope, this was accomplished by hooking your safety in, getting the rope through the rack, and then swinging out on the tree that is laying over the pit. I had some trouble with my bars not spacing out far enough, so I dropped a bar and finished my rappel.

When I got to the bottom Glenn pointed out a hole that he had seen, but didn't think would go any where. We talked about the depth of the pit being 106' and the formations that lined the walls, there is one that we estimated at 40 feet long. Even though none of the formations glowed or twisted and turned, this is a pit that is worth doing. Never say that you can't go back.

---

The day before Derick and Becky got married, Derick sent out the following e-mail to the caving world. It was a sincere letter where it was obvious of is strong love for his soon to be wife. As I sit here an type this newsletter, Becky and Derick are off in Mexico on their "luna del miel." Becky and Derick were wed this past Friday night, November 3, 2000 at 6:30. I spoke to Derick shortly before the wedding and he was truly speechless. (I know you don't believe it, but he was.) The wedding was beautiful and minutes after the "I do's" were said, out came the caving helmets for the pictures. The rest of evening was spent by Cullman Grotto members Jeff and Wendy Ly. . . I mean Jeff Lynn and Wendy Bowen and myself, Patrick O'Diam, talking about caving plans in the future. Derick discussed some of his plans as well and the excitement for getting back involved with the underworld had us all ready excited to live in such a great caving nation. Derick, Becky, congratulations and we wish you the very best in your new life together.

## Becky

by Derick Mitchell

I can't believe that in just a little over twenty four hours, Becky and I will be married. NSS#'s 45705 and 46599 will share the same address! You cavers know that I have a big mouth and talk way to much, in person and on the Net, but I am truly speechless when I think of what is about to happen. I can not tell you how lucky I am to have a girl like Becky! I started caving seriously right after I met Becky Buckner about four years ago. I had just divorced from a girl who got tired of competing with my hobbies and I was crushed and hurt. I have a compulsive personality and get distracted very easily. I met Becky and liked her, but for a long time I treated her like a hobby. I would spend time with her and then try to put her on the shelf while I went my merry way. Early in my caving career, Becky was my primary caving partner but because of her real life responsibilities, children and work, she could not always go caving. I started caving with a lot of you people and

it was great, but I left Becky behind too often. Becky always supported me and encouraged me to cave but my compulsive nature almost destroyed my future with Becky. This past April while climbing out of 'Drinus, I did some soul searching that led to two decisions. Shortly after my return from Mexico, I ask Becky to marry me, she said yes. The second decision was to give my life back to God and thank Him for the blessings and protection I receive from Him every day! I was a very strong Christian at one time, but in the last few years I have done very little praying, except on rope. I want to make changes in my life and be a good husband and strong Christian. I thank all of you for your friendship and support. I will see you >ON ROPE< soon. Becky and I will be in Mexico next week but please include us in your caving plans.

Thank You Becky Mitchell! Praise GOD! On Rope!

## FROM THE MAILBAG

The next article discusses some of the happenings with the recent fatality of a well know Texas Caver. I knew Joe Ivy. . . he was a great caver. Make you stop and wonder. . . . .

If you want more info about this accident, see me at the meeting - I have a long detailed report.

Taken from an e-mail of an article in the San Angelo Standard-Times:

10/02/00 Mam Dies In Cave:  
Austin man falls 60 feet during spelunking outing.

A rescue team recovered the body of an Austin man Sunday evening who fell 60 feet to his death in a cave the day before.

Joe Ivy, 35, was exploring a cave about 30 miles northeast of Ozona with 16 other members of the Texas Speleological Association when the accident occurred, according to a release from the Crockett County Sheriff's Department. The spelunkers were about 300 feet underground when Ivy and a few others decided to climb a peak in attempt to locate an underground stream.

Ivy lost his hold and fell 60 feet, receiving critical

injuries upon landing. The release indicated the accident occurred around 7:30 p.m. and Ivy died about 30 minutes later.

A body recovery team from Austin began attempting to remove Ivy's body Saturday night, but didn't recover it until around 5:30 p.m. Sunday, according to the sheriff's department. His body will be sent to the Medical Examiner's Office in Bexar County for autopsy.

Officials indicated that one of Ivy's counterparts was able to ascertain Ivy was dead shortly after the accident, though it took the recovery team much longer to remove his body. Workers spent Sunday night cleaning up the scene and continuing to investigate.

Grotto member Houston Harding had this to say about it:

Joe Ivy was a very prominent TX caver who's done more hard core caving than all of us put together and multiplied by 10, Esp. Mexico caving. 0-9 Well is a pretty popular cave in South TX that obviously has pits, etc.

This kind of crap really, really makes me wonder how much we should push it, as Joe certainly was a better caver than I am now or likely ever will be. I know it was a dome climb but it was about 40' any way you cut it. Be careful down there.

Houston

# Are We Willing to DIE in Order to Truly LIVE?

Thoughts on caving by Matt Harris

Yes, how far will we push it? Is a 20' free climb too much? With mud? Overhung? Is it too much if there is going passage behind it? Virgin?

What about a small crawling lead? 8000' back in a cave that is cold, wet, and crawly. Where there is no chance of a rescue before death from hypothermia?

Good bolt? Questionable bolt? Bad bolt? Long run out? I won't fall. How far will we go to find new cave? Put up a new route? Go where no man (or woman) has gone before? Is it worth your life to be the first? The best? Would your children agree?

On NPR not long ago, a poll of US Olympic athletes was cited. The question was: "If there were a drug that would guarantee you the gold medal, but would kill you in 5 years, would you take it?" 50% answered "Yes".

What is our life worth? Where are our priorities? Survival at any cost? Discovery even in the face of death? How badly do YOU want to be the best? The first? The only? If you had the opportunity, the skill, the dedication, would it be worth it to you?

The recent ones: Alex Lowe, Sheck Exley, Ian Rollins, yes -

Joe Ivy, Anatoli Bourkreev, etc. all those who have died in the pursuit of something greater? than themselves. Was it worth it?

Shall we survive? Shall we LIVE?

Does the human spirit perish without people who are willing to risk it all in the pursuit of the unknown? The undone?

Are we a generation of thrill seekers?

Are we deprived of the great crises; the wars, the great trials and tribulations of our parents? Must we therefore seek out danger in ways that are frivolous? Are they frivolous? Are we preserving what is human about humanity? The greatness of humanity?

Do we merely want the appearance of danger? Or do we want the real thing. Where is the line? Do we draw it? Or is it drawn for us?

How much risk are we really willing to accept to LIVE? To avoid the boring, stultifying death that comes from the failure to stimulate the human spirit?

Are we willing to DIE in order to truly LIVE?



The Flowstone  
Cullman Grotto - NSS  
700 Sandra Ln. NE  
Cullman AL 35055-6013

# The FLOWSTONE

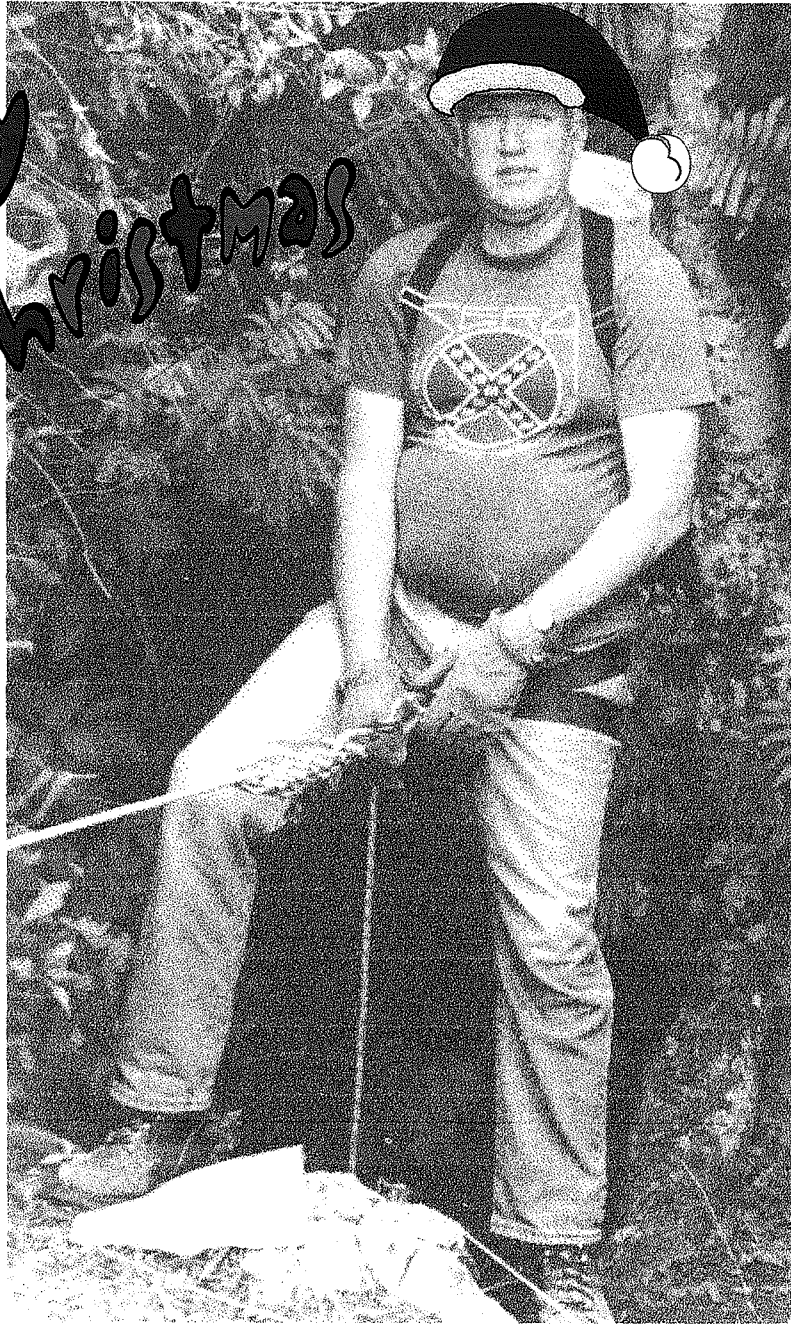
December 2000

Vol. VII No 12

A Monthly Newsletter of the Cullman Grotto  
of the National Speleological Society

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Merry  
Christmas



TITLE PAGE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The FLOWSTONE is published monthly by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Items submitted for publication must be received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to be included in the following month's issue.

The Cullman Grotto will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of articles within The FLOWSTONE is allowed without consent provided credit is given to the source.

Membership to the Cullman Grotto is eight dollars (\$8) for individual membership or ten dollars (\$10) per family per year. Due are payable at the first grotto meeting of each year and includes the subscription to The FLOWSTONE. Subscription rate for nonmember is eight dollars (\$8) per year. See the editor for back issues.

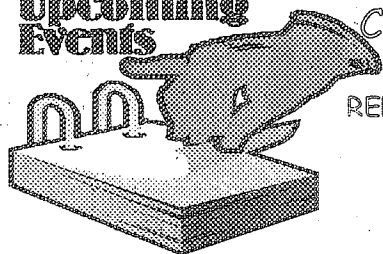
The Cullman Grotto meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Cullman County Public Library conference room, 200 Clark St. NE, Cullman, AL. All visitors and prospective members are welcome.

2000 OFFICERS

Chairman: Harold Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 webecavers@hotmail.com	Vice-Chairman: Micah Sims 1431 Co Rd 827 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-8447
Secretary: Evon Thompson 378 Co Rd 395 Cullman AL 35057 (256)739-1772	Treasurer: Tracy Calvert 123 Co Rd 250 Cullman AL 35057 (256)287-9770 tcavert@mindspring.com

Official Grotto Address: Newsletter Exchange:  
Cullman Grotto The FLOWSTONE  
c/o Harold Calvert Cullman Grotto - NSS  
123 Co Rd 250 700 Sandra Ln NE  
Cullman AL 35057 Cullman AL 35055-6013  
webecavers@hotmail.com vertical@mindspring.com


Upcoming Events



CALENDAR OF CAVE RELATED EVENTS

- Dec. 5 Grotto meeting in the Cullman Public Library Conference Room. 7:30 p.m.
- Dec. 8 Beginner's Vertical Class - West Elementary School Gym 6 - 9 p.m.
- Dec. 9 Grotto trip to Fern Cave. Discussion in cave depending on participants. 8:00 a.m.
- Dec ? Grotto Christmas Party at the house of David Drake TBA
- Jan. 2 Grotto meeting in the Cullman Public Library Conference Room. 7:30 p.m.

APPOINTMENTS

Adviser: Victor Bradford 8333 US Hwy 31 Hanceville AL 35077 (256)734-2809	Publications, Safety & Membership: Patrick O'Diam 700 Sandra Ln NE Cullman AL 3505 (256)739-0327 vertical@mindspring.com
Librarian: David Drake 110 Co Rd 1386 Falkville AL 35622 (256)739-0811 idopits@cs.com	

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Front Cover:

Jolly ol' Saint Vic

Victor Bradford on rope at Cepillo, 414' deep pit in Mexico, New Years 1998.

CULLMAN

GROTTO

# ECHO CHAMBER

## FROM THE EDITOR

Well, I guess this will be the last time for quite a while for me to sit down the night before the meeting and try to pull together a newsletter. I believe that Wendy will be taking over the job of newsletter editor for the next little while. I am sure that she will do a wonderful job with the newsletter. We just all need to be sure and do our part to keep information coming in to her. Along with this change, it also looks like there could be several other changes coming up within the group. The December meeting will be when the elections for the 2001 year take place and there are several new people nominated for office. I hope we all are supportive of the new people that will be running the grotto if big changes take place. I hope you all have a wonderful holiday season. I have enjoyed working to pull this newsletter together for the last two years. I hope you have enjoyed reading it. I would like to thank all those who have helped out over the last few years. I could not have done it without your help. Now, lets get out and get dirty! See you deep underground.

Patrick O'Diam

## VERTICAL CLASS

Well, at last minute, we have secured a place indoors to hold the vertical class we have been talking about for some time. This will be a basic beginners class for vertical work and will focus on climbing techniques and methods. The price for the class will be \$5 per person. No gear is needed; we will provide the equipment for this training and advise for your own personal climbing system. If you have your own gear, bring it. We are lucky to have the gym of West Elementary School to use. Those outdoor training sections in the winter can be a bit cold. Class will be this Friday, December 8<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 - 9:00 p.m. in the gym. Drive around back until you see the bat stickers. We'll be inside.

## BIRTHDAYS

The month of December holds only a couple of birthdays that I am aware of. The birthday of Gary Phelps has already passed us by on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the month. We hope you had a wonderful day Gary up there in the cold land of cheese. The Penguin (Tracy Calvert) has a birthday on the 13<sup>th</sup> of this month. We hope she has a wonderful day.

## CHRISTMAS PARTY

The grotto will be holding its annual Christmas party again this year, but exact date is yet to be determined. Looks like we will have the chance to trash . . . I mean enjoy ourselves in the home of David Drake. Thanks Dave for letting us into your house. The exact date and time will be set up at the meeting or call David or Harold for details.

## ACCIDENT REPORT

A woman was found at Bryant Cave after calling 911 on her cell phone. Seems she was left there by some people, but later news casts led to suspicion as to the truthfulness of her story. It seems she was seeking attention. Also a very large cave party led to many drug related arrests. These stories can be found in the Mailbag section of this newsletter.

## GROTTO TRIP

This month's grotto trip will be on December 9<sup>th</sup> to Fern Cave. We will be visiting different sections of the cave depending on the experience levels of trip participants. More details at the meeting.

## Caving With the Dogs

by Anne Farley

In the short amount of time I've been exposed to caving, there is one thing I've found that is always constant--expect the unexpected. Early one frosty Friday morning Patrick and I set out to find a cave to spend some time in. We finally settled on Limrock and got more than we bargained for. We were outnumbered by a barage of dogs that comically appeared to be a very unlikely quartet. One that

Anne with Rocky deep within the cave of Limrock Blowing, November 10, 2000.



caught our attention immediately was a huge rottweiler that immediately took to Patrick. He was accompanied by a poodle, a basset hound, and a collie mix. I'm sure we made an interesting spectacle as we paraded towards the cave.

Once inside, we found the collie deserted us, but the other three never left our side. They climbed where we climbed and waded where we waded. Even in the deepest water, they never wavered. At one point, Patrick had to perform a cave rescue when the poodle (who we named Avalanche) and the rottweiler (hence known as Rocky) became tired of swimming and had trouble making it up on the ledge. Setting Avalanche up on dryer land wasn't much of a problem, but boosting Rocky from behind was another matter. All I could think of is "If Vic could see us now". Rumor has it that one of Vic's dogs tried to do a little facial reconstruction on Patrick once, just for looking at him the wrong way. Well, Patrick definitely got a good look at this dog, only from the south end.

The dogs were so intent on staying with us we actually had to

alter our plans. We came upon about an 8 foot drop and very narrow passage and knew it would be dangerous for our canine friends. The basset hound (who we called Shiloh) was very skilled at maneuvering ledges and trails, but this path, we knew, would be too much, even for him. We decided to turn around and head back, rather than risk it.

Taking our time, we stopped for a break and had the three literally eating out of the palms of our hands. It was worthy of a photo session as each one vied for just one more snack. Once up and moving again, they wasted no time in leading us out.

Although the trip did not go exactly as planned, Avalanche, Shiloh and Rocky certainly did provide us with plenty of entertainment and some good memories. My second grade students listened more intently than usual and hung on every word as I told them about our trip and escorts. Dogs do have a way of bridging the generation gap and adding a twist to what might have been just an ordinary trip.

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## Giving Thanks at Thanksgiving

By Patrick O'Diam, NSS #35852

At this time of the year, the holidays have a way of making one reflect on the blessings they receive. As I reflect back on the past year, I recall many wonderful caving trips. It's hard to believe that I somehow crammed 45 trips into my busy life. It seems this year has been one of my slackest years ever, and I guess it has been. I feel very blessed to have got to cave as much as I did this year. I have definitely set some memories in stone to look back on for years to come. One of these events took place over the Thanksgiving weekend and I will look back on it as one of my roughest cave trips ever. There are but few things that can top a nice, long, muddy, hard-core cave trip: the all you can eat seafood bar at the restaurant on the way home, the hot bath that takes place after the trip, and the soft, warm bed to lay your head in for the night. On the holiday set aside to give thanks, I found more to be thankful for: true friendship among my caving buds. This tops any of the other adrenaline rushes or thrills I may get from exploration. This friendship is what keeps me going strong in the sport, striving and longing to return, explore new passages, push my body to the limit. In so doing, I am also able to spend time with a group of people that I am thankful for and that I feel privileged to call my friends.

As I sat off for Georgia around 6:00 in the evening after just finishing eating my fill of a fine Thanksgiving supper, I tuned in the weather on the CB radio. Looked like the rain was not going to hold off, and the temperature was just warm enough to keep the precipitation in the liquid form. Jeff and Wendy were already at the camping spot for Ellison's and they had a nice fire going when I arrived. I quickly had to find more clothes to put on my cold body. I got my tent set up and we sat around the fire for a while before the cold chased us into

our sleeping bags. The rains started around 2:00 in the morning and continued for the remainder of the trip.

Hunters woke us up early in the morning. I was sure that other cavers would be joining us, but they stayed away. As I started digging things out for breakfast, Wendy informed me that we were going into town for some Mexican food. Town was just a few miles away so we took off and spent some time shopping before finding a Mexican restaurant. It was about this time, I started feeling bad. I didn't ever eat much of my meal at all. I had a fever and just didn't feel well at all. Jeff took me to a pharmacy where I got some stuff that I hoped would hold me over and we returned to camp. The rains continued to fall. Harold, Evon, and David were not to meet us until later that night, so I took a nap for a few hours. When I woke up, I felt much better and was ready to go.

The rain continued to fall heavily as I got all my things together. I wanted to make it to the entrance before dark, but that did not happen. I started off, rope and pack in tow, with a rain poncho over everything. The Blue Hole seemed quite low for all the rain we had been receiving. About 1/3 of the way up, I collapsed on the ground. Jeff and Wendy soon joined me and I gave Wendy a good scare which could have been much better had I had the energy to move. Jeff took the rope and a short way further found me on the side of the trail sick. I decided to turn back, yet I hated to. They were going to explore other parts of the lower cave where I had never been before, so I went against my good judgement and continued up the mountain. The normally 45 minute hike took an additional hour that night.

Just inside the entrance, I was able to warm up and get dry.



The passage which often is knee deep in water had no water at all in it at this time. After a little rest, we continued on down the passage toward the Warm-up Drop, a 124' drop that leads on to Fantastic. At the top of the Warm-up, we rested for quite a while. I was feeling much better at the time, so I decided to go ahead and go down. As we were rigging, we heard a noticeable increase in the amount of water that was going over the pit. As I reached bottom, I was surprised to find that there was no water where the rope landed as there always had been in times past. The water was some 15 feet away on the other side of the pit. I had never seen water there before, and Jeff commented on that as well when he reached bottom. We moved on to the Nuisance Drop where you must climb up 18' to go to the Attic. We took our time hoping the others would soon join us.

When we reached Fantastic, the 586' drop was as impressive as ever. Water could be heard below crashing into the pit. The rope was rigged and we sat down to wait for the rest of the group to arrive. Because of my sickly feeling, I knew I was not going to do the pit, but I fully expected the others to go down, that is until we heard the waterfall pick up considerably and start surging. Sometime around 11:00 at night, the others arrived. They had even drug along good ol' Micah which surprised us all. I was curled up in a little ball the time, not feeling my hottest. I recall hearing bits of the conversation as they contemplated going down. We were informed that the dry passage we had walked down several hours before was now several inches deep in water and that the waterfall was raging at the bottom of the Warm-up where the rope lands. This was bone dry just 2 hours before. When the rope was inspected and it appeared that people were climbing on it from the movements it was making, everyone decided that the waterfall was too strong and none would attempt the drop. As the rope was pulled, it was discovered that the rope was in the waterfall for quite a ways. I was rather surprised that everyone in the group used good judgment and knew their limitations. It's rare that cavers make it to that point and then back out. It made me think about the sensibility the people in our group have. I guess it was a good thing I was feeling so bad. I'm sure if I felt good, I just could not have stood it without going down to see how heave the waterfall was. I guess I need to still learn a lot from my caving friends.

It was on the way out that I was able to truly appreciate the way cavers help each other out. By this time it was well after midnight and we all seemed to bunch up at the bottom of the Warm-up Drop. I found a rock and curled up to take a nap until it was my time to climb. I was not feeling well at all at this time. Micah gave me a shake a little later and told me it was about my turn. I started to climb; the more I climbed, the more I hated life. I was very sick, and came close to passing out. I was about at the point of calling up and having the ones up top pull the rope on up with me on it. I did make it to the top, and several people came to my aid to detach me from the rope and get me in a safe spot. I managed to curl up in a little ball again and fall asleep.

The next little while is not too clear for me. I seem to remember bits and pieces of conversations. When I came to, my gear was off me, it had been packed away, and my pack was nowhere to be seen. The pit was de-rigged and Harold was waiting on me. He told me the others had headed on out and had all the extra gear with them. It was about all I could do to make it down that passage without a pack, but it sure was nice of all the others to pitch in and help out. When you have your own pack along with several hundred feet of rope, the last thing you want is another pack to try to get out of the cave. As we caught up with the rest of the group, they were all working to get out of the cave. I never heard one complain about having to take my pack. I'm sure they were under their breath - I know how heavy that pack was - but they were wonderful to help out in such a way.

The dry passage we had walked down earlier was truly ankle deep or better as we exited. The cold night air met us at the entrance but we were relieved to find that the rain had temporarily stopped. We exited at 2:30 where the wind was howling loudly and strongly. My wonderful cave friends still continued to carry my stuff down to the car. I offered to take a pack several times, but was always turned down. I guess it was a good thing; I nearly did not make it myself. Several people offered to help me in different things which truly touched me. It was not "every man for himself" like so commonly practiced in the world today. I was able to crawl into my tent around 3:30 in the morning as Harold, Micah, David, and Evon headed for some food and then for home.

I slept for several hours, shivering with cold at times and sweating with a fever at others. I finally got up around 10:30 and packed everything away. A quick look at the Blue Hole showed me just how much water had been in that cave the night before. The Blue Hole was several feet deeper and wider. I returned home and went to bed, but I would receive phone calls from time to time checking up on me. I stayed sick in bed for a few more days, but have finally fully recovered. As I was in bed, I reflected several times about what great friends I have within the Cullman Grotto. I am glad to call these people my friends, and know they will be there if I ever need them. On second thought, seems several of them passed right by David on the way home in the wee hours of the morning when he had a wreck and tried to flag them down. They left him on the side of the road, stranded, in need of medical attention. They didn't even stop. Lot of help they gave him! I guess in the darkness and with their sleepiness, they did not realize it was David. I did hear that this same group later the next day went with their husbands and wives to visit with Dave and see if there was anything they could do. I guess they made up for it. ☺ I truly am impressed at the quality of people we have in the grotto, the friendship we enjoy together, the willingness to help one another in times of need. For my caving friends, I truly am thankful. Thanks guys for your help and support on this trip, and on the many others over the years.



## FROM THE MAILBAG



### 800 party all night in Tennessee cave

RUTLEDGE, Tenn. — The "Rave in the Cave," an all-night dance party in a cavern, drew 800 people and resulted in one drug overdose and 22 drug-related arrests. Partygoers brandishing baseball bats confronted residents upset over the party, but police kept the two sides from coming to blows. The party was held Saturday at Indian Cave, which is on private property and was leased by the landowner for the rave.

*From wire reports*

### Rescuers trace woman to cave by tracking cell phone signal

The Blount County Sheriff's Department is investigating how and why a woman woke up confused Sunday afternoon in a cave near the Smoke Rise Community.

The woman was rescued by personnel from the West Blount Fire and Rescue after authorities tracked her cell phone call made to emergency officials.

Capt. Adrian Booth of the West Blount Fire and Rescue said her department received a call around 5:30 p.m. that a woman in her early 20s was missing somewhere in Blount County.

Mrs. Booth said the woman had called Blount County 911 with a cellular phone.

"She wasn't sure where she was," Mrs. Booth said. "She

didn't know how she got there, but she felt like she might have been in a cave."

Mrs. Booth said her department dispatched personnel to the area's three caves after receiving the missing person call. Meanwhile, 911 officials were tracing where the cellular call originated.

By the time rescuers got to the front entrance of Bryant Cave, officials told them that was where the strongest cell phone signal was coming from, Mrs. Booth said.

The woman was taken to Medical Center Blount in stable condition, Mrs. Booth said.

*Brett Blackledge  
and Malcolm Daniels*

