
TAG CAVER Vol 8 Issue 3

TAG Caver is the official newsletter of the Sewanee Mountain Grotto & is published on a quarterly basis. Sewanee Mountain Grotto is a non-profit internal organization of the National Speleological Society dedicated to the exploration, mapping and conservation of caves. If you are interested in joining the Sewanee Mountain Grotto we invite you to attend one of our monthly grotto meetings. Meetings are held the second Saturday of each month at various locations in the heart of TAG. A typical meeting starts with a potluck dinner at 6pm CST, followed by the meeting at 7pm. On occasion we also have special presentations following our meetings. Annual dues are $10 per person and are due in January. Please email sewaneemountaingrotto@caves.org or one of our officers for more information. You may also visit our website at: http://www.caves.org/grotto/sewaneemountaingrotto.

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TAG Caver

Sewanee Mountain Grotto

Winter

Volume 8, Issue 3

Connect with the Grotto

If you are new to the Grotto, here are a few ways you can get to know other members:

- Join us on a Grotto Trip, Survey Trip or a cleanup.
- Sewanee Mountain Remailer. After you have joined the grotto, join our mailing list to keep up to date with cave trips and meetings.

Go to:

http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/sewanee_mountain_grotto and click join. Please provide your real name so we'll know who you are.

Facebook – Join our official unofficial Facebook Page to meet other area cavers and plan trips. Search for Sewanee Mountain Grotto under groups.

Grotto Merchandise: The Grotto has sold out of patches. We do still have plenty of KOOZIES for $1. Please contact Kristine Ebrey at kristine@visualworld.com

What's inside

SMG Christmas Party and Elections

December 9, 2017 Maureen Handler's House

Sneaky Santa Great Food Great Cavers

More Huautla 2017 Adventures

By Kyle Lassiter

This article is part 2 of my first expedition to Huautla in 2017. If you're interested in part 1, please see my prior article concerning the first week that I spent underground surveying in the La Grieta section of the cave system. This article will focus on my second week, where our expedition team spent our final week working on exploring and surveying several smaller local caves during day trips in the hopes of finding a breakthrough.

The expedition, which SMG proudly sponsors, is called "PESH". PESH stands for Proyecto Espeleológico Sistema Huautla, which translates in English to the Huautla System Speleology Project. Huautla de Jimenez is the mountain city which overlies the cave system, located in the rural mountains of central southern Mexico, in the northern region of the state of Oaxaca. The Huautla cave system and other nearby caves have seen off and on exploration over the last 40+ years, primarily by American cavers. This year was the fourth year in the current series of ten planned PESH expeditions, and as of the start of the expedition the cave stood as the deepest cave in the western hemisphere and the 8th deepest in the world: 1560 meters deep (5118 feet), with over 43 miles of surveyed passages between 21 known entrances. This makes it the longest of the 17 deepest caves in the world. To summarize, the Huautla cave system is a deep complex vertical maze, with many infeeding tributaries coming together deep underground to drain a large mountainous area. The current bottom of the cave is a massive deep sump that so far has been impenetrable, but there is more depth potential that can be realized since the resurgence on the Rio Santo Domingo is several hundred meters lower. The main objective of this year's expedition was to focus on leads in the La Grieta entrance of the cave system: the upstream "Refresher" lead heading farther north than any other known passages so far, as well as downstream leads which hadn't seen human eyes in over 40 years. However, other objectives included finding, exploring, and mapping other nearby caves in the region, which I helped with during the second week of my expedition.

After a "zonk" day Saturday (the day after I got out of a 5-day camp trip in La Grieta late at night), a few of us planned to go to Goat Cave on Sunday, located in the nearby San Miguel dolina. Four of us went: Fernando Hernandez, Lee White, Adam McLeod, and myself. We hopped in Bill Steele's van along with a few other cavers heading to town for supplies and headed for the dolina. After a short drive, Tommy Shifflett hiked up the side of the dolina with us and showed us where the cave was, before leaving us to our exploration. It is an open air pit completely hidden by a little patch of jungle in the middle of a cleared vegetation area for goat herding. The entrance pit is about 40m

Tommy Shifflet at the entrance of Goat Cave

deep with one rebelay. Our couple leads we were going to check were down 100m or so, near where the cave ends in breakdown with nice air sucking through various cracks. Beyond the entrance pit is a tight crack and

Tommy drilling in Goat Cave

a tight crack pit, both of which had already been enlarged by Tommy in prior years but were still quite tight. Below that are a few more short drops over flowstone and a couple climbdowns to the last pit. Lee and Adam both descended this last pit and couldn't find any leads that went, unfortunately. Thus we began to derig the cave, but did stop to survey about 40m or so of an infeeding side passage to complete the survey of the cave. We spent about six hours in the cave and exited near dusk. Our ride was scheduled for 9pm, so instead of waiting an hour for our ride, we began hiking the road back to camp, waking everyone on the way with barking dogs. I thought this hike at night on the road was a bad idea! We were picked up near the Plan Carlota (the village our expedition was based at) dirt road junction in Blake Harrison's diesel truck right on time.

The next day (Monday), most of the people at our expedition base got geared up to explore and survey two virgin pits high on the mountainside overlooking Plan Carlota. It was a misty cloudy day, very similar to weather you'd see in the Smoky Mountains. These pit locations were only recently made known to the expedition by the local town agente (like a mayor). While way high up on the mountain, thankfully they were on a local trail. The trail was mostly stone steps and in quite good condition. Lee White and I tackled "Pit 2", while another team worked on "Pit 1". Thankfully someone had a machete to clear back the jungle, else we might have never seen the pit! Much of the top of the pit was covered in vegetation leaning in from the sides, and even with the clearing we still had to rappel through a fair bit of jungle before we

Jungle covering Perro Pit

were in the clear. The pit ended up being a very decent 40m deep open air shaft, but was blind at the bottom. We renamed it Perro Plunge, since a friendly stray dog that hiked up the mountain with us kept getting too close to the pit ("perro" means dog in Spanish). A quick survey and derig and we were back at camp by dinnertime. Pit 1 was apparently less impressive according to that team when they returned to camp later on.

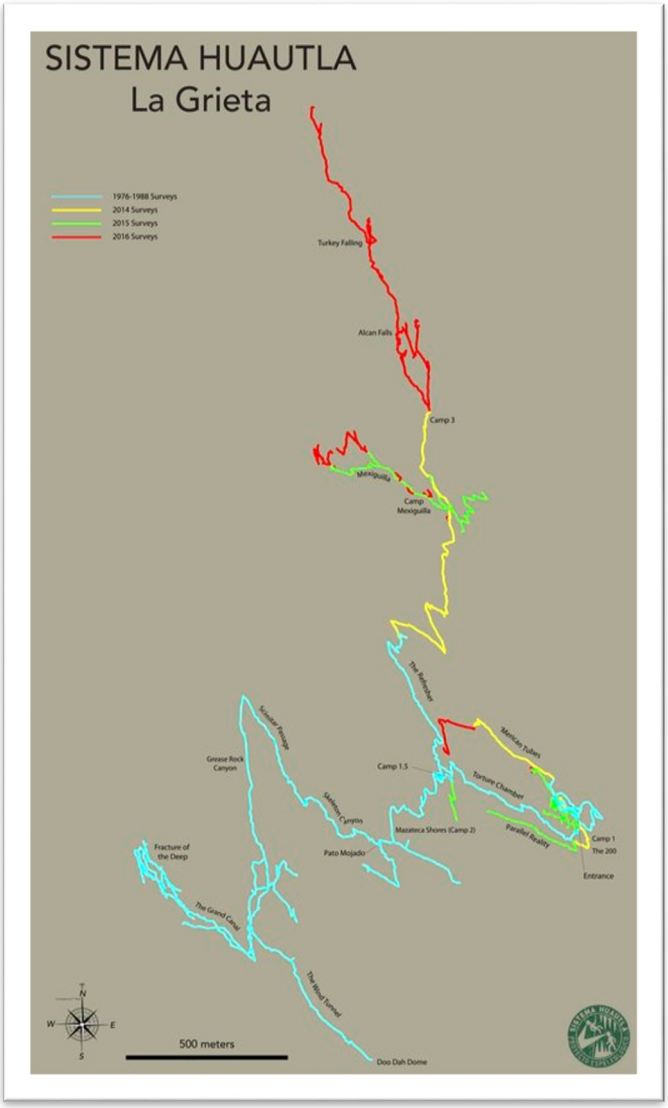
I got to bed early that night in order to be well rested for a big push trip the next day to Nita Ntau, a significant deep cave nearby that was explored in the

1970s originally but was not connected to the main Huautla cave system. It has a huge room at the bottom you rappel into called the TAG Shaft, about 150m deep, named after the original explorers from TAG who worked on the cave. Our team's goal was to push two climbing leads and a dig at the bottom of this shaft, which is the current end of the cave, to see if we could get it to continue heading downwards and hopefully connect into the Huautla cave system. After a super windy hot morning in Plan Carlota, we were driven up to the sinkhole containing the cave, and we entered at 11am CST. We made good time through the cave, only slowed by a handful of narrow spots in canyons in the upper section. After about 10 short pits we arrived at the top of the TAG shaft. A Mexican caver named Alan and I took a moment to check out a side lead at the top of the shaft that was remarkably close (like 100 meters or less) to another significant deep cave in the area, called Agua de Carrizo. While a connection would have been momentous, our lead choked off very quickly. We descended TAG Shaft to join the rest of the team on the main leads at the bottom of the cave. It is a magnificent void, but rebelayed many times due to numerous slopes and angles, and has two wet sections. Once on bottom, we saw that a climbing team of Lee White and Steve Gladieux had begun ascending one wall of the shaft, with the goal of reaching a large balcony visible from below. After 30ft they found a small lead; Alan and I surveyed a small dome complex in there that did not go far. Alan then climbed up to join the climbing team, who eventually topped out and reached their balcony around 55m up in quick time. I joined Adam McLeod at the bottom of the shaft, who was working on enlarging a narrow canyon slot that takes most of the cave's water. It is a promising lead, but we ran out of time and materials after about 20ft of progress. There is probably another 20ft to go, and we think it opens up and we can hear an echo of some sort. Definitely hope to get back to it in 2018! The climbing team surveyed their large balcony that they reached, and found a waterfall coming from a different dome that sank into breakdown and could not be followed. They were out of rope so they could climb no further to investigate the water source, so they were forced to descend. So while there were no breakthroughs, there was plenty of progress made, and it was a pleasure to explore in such an awesome place as TAG Shaft. Since it was near the end of the expedition, we had to derig the cave for the year, which meant that all of us didn't get back to camp until around 2am CST.

The remaining three days of my expedition consisted of helping to pack up the expedition field house, organize gear, and travel back to Mexico City for my flight home. I learned there is a lot of work that goes into setting up and tearing down an expedition camp! In the evenings there was much beer consumed (13 pesos, or about 65 cents, per beer from the store next door!) and good food served in celebration of our accomplishments. Our landlords were very gracious hosts and cooked up a bunch of chicken for everyone one night. We joked that we hoped some of the chicken was from the annoying local rooster that would walk the streets at all hours of the day and night crowing! On the last night of the expedition after everyone was on the surface, the expedition leaders, Bill Steele and Tommy Shifflett, treated us to a fresh trout dinner at a local village. It was superb! They were grateful for a good expedition this year, with several more kilometers of passage surveyed, several new caves explored, and no injuries. We all spent the night in Huautla and then departed for home the next day. The bus I took to Mexico City was in the morning and was nearly empty, making for a much more enjoyable trip back to Mexico City this time than the crowded overnight bus I took to Huautla at the beginning of the expedition.

PESH 2017 was a life-changing experience for me, and I look forward to what next year has in store for the expedition! The list of objectives are endless, and in a region as pleasant as Huautla, I see no reason not to keep going back!

Looking down Perro Plunge



View from the hillside near Perro Plunge down to Plan Carlota

Final night trout dinner celebration

CIG and COG Weekend at Great Saltpeter Cave Kentucky

By Jeff Cody

Walk-out Entrance

The weekend of April 21 22 and 23 The Central Ohio Grotto was kind enough to invite anyone in The CIG interested to a weekend of caving in Rockcastle County, Kentucky. The "featured" Saturday cave was Pine Hill Cave. This cave is well known to cavers in the region and has been featured in past Speleofest and Karst O Rama guidebooks. This is a significant cave with over 5 miles of passage. Three entrances can be used. The large main horizontal entrance is very photographic. Two other pit entrances access the cave as well, Skylight Dome (125 feet deep) and the nearby Hurricane Pit entrance (around 30 foot deep) allows for a neat through trip out the horizontal entrance without climbing. My first trip to this cave was back in 1982 and I have made many visits since then. This has always been one of my favorite caves due to the nice main stream passage in the cave and also numerous tall domes. Not many caves around where you can rappel a hundred plus foot pit and walk out. Rockcastle County has always been my favorite caving county in Kentucky as there are many other caves. The horizontal entrance has always had easy open access as it sits close to the highway. The two pit entrances were open in the 80s and into the early 90s but has had limited access since then until a recent purchase by The Rockcastle Karst Conservancy. The county is interesting to me geologically as three zones meet in this county. The Bluegrass, the Mississippian Plateau and The Cumberland Plateau meet to provide a unique geologic setting. Great Saltpeter Cave and campground was used as the base of operations for the weekend. Great Saltpeter is a historic cave as it was used for saltpeter mining during The War of 1812 and also The Civil War. I am told it was significant source of saltpeter during The War of 1812, likely more than any other cave. The cave is currently set up like a commercial cave with lighting , informative signage and smooth walk trails. The cave and campground was donated years ago to cavers by the previous landowner. The previous landowners wishes was that cavers maintained the cave and land as a preserve. This is a fantastic asset to the caving community. This property also hosts Karst O Rama held each year in the summertime. The property has a large shelter house with electricity and Wi Fi complete with a separate full kitchen. A shower house is also on the property .This property sits in the area of The Daniel Boone National Forest between the towns of Mt. Vernon and Livingston Kentucky. This county is in southeast Kentucky south of Lexington and a bit north of the Tennessee line. Interstate 75 provides easy access to the area.

After several weeks of anticipation, my weekend began Saturday morning April 22 as I left home around 4:30 in the morning. I worked all day Friday and chose to leave early Saturday AM as opposed to a later arrival Friday night. I drove down by myself and also had a hotel reserved in the area for Saturday night. My plan was to stop on the way down for a hearty breakfast and meet the group at the cave as opposed to driving all the way back to the GSP preserve. 10AM was the meeting time set. It is about a four hour or so drive down from my home on the south side of Indy. I had rain during the latter part of my drive down and was wondering if the trip would be a go as I know this is a stream cave and I had seen flood debris in the past at the horizontal entrance. Most of the stream passage is large but there is a section of hands and knees crawl between the pit entrances and the horizontal entrance that I felt may sump. I had reserved a spot on the Skylight Dome to

main entrance trip. The COG had secured permits for trips into both pits that day and there were several groups going into each pit and also a group including some boy scouts going in and out of the main horizontal entrance. I arrived to the parking area for the horizontal entrance close to the original meeting time to some light rain. Soon others began to arrive. A van pulled up and told me to get in as they were going to shuttle people to the staging area for both of the pits due to limited parking. The parking spot is different now for Skylight Dome as compared to the early 90s when my last visit to the pit was. My trip consisted of myself, Scott Davis, Travis Tolliver, Brian Devine, Bethany Windmeyer, and Ana Scherschel. We were dropped off at a small shelter house near a home on

Skylight Dome Pit Entrance

the hillside. We changed and put on seat harnesses and left our gear bags at the shelter and started the short walk up the hill to Skylight Dome entrance. The rain had stopped by this time. We arrived at the entrance to someone staged there from the Ohio group to make sure everyone got down the pit safely. This pit is now gated and access is via a permit from Rockcastle Karst Conservancy. I was the last one down in our group. The pit was wet from the rain. The pit drops down about ten feet to a short offset then the rest of the way mostly free except for a major ledge around 50 feet or so off the floor. I was soaked by time I got to the bottom. I had done this same trip many times in the late 80s to early 90s and had never seen the pit this wet. I got off rope and got out of the spray zone and took off my vertical gear and stuffed it all in my pack and we were soon on our way into the cave.

From the bottom of the pit you do a short easy climb up to a mud bank then into a belly crawl . We reached the start of the belly crawl as the group with the scouts that came in the main entrance was exiting the crawl to see the bottom of the pit. I was glad to see this group. This told me the crawl in the stream was not flooded shut. I asked the trip leader how much water was in that crawl and he said a few inches, this was not anymore than normal. I had read the cave stream does not react as quick to rain as some would suspect. I also noticed the small stream on the surface near the cave did not have any water in it right before I parked. After this group was out of the crawl we all filed in. This crawl lasts for about 100 feet or so then into walking upper level passage. Some of this walking passage is along ledges exposed to the main stream passage about 30 feet below. In this section I showed the group the turn off to go out the Hurricane Pit entrance. After this there are several places to climb down to the main stream level. Once in the main stream you can simply follow the stream downstream towards the main entrance but you will need to know where to leave the main stream in the register room and then on to the exit. We decided to continue up stream to the more down cutting scallop passage. We followed this a few hundred feet to the neat small waterfall section. This area was pumping good at the time. The sound was incredible while climbing up the short waterfalls. We soon reached the obvious right hand turn to a deep pool of water , skirting around this pool then up a couple of short waterfall climbs then a short section of crawl into a nice dome around 100 feet or higher. At this point I turned up the spot output on my new El Speleo Lunatic cave light, the others were impressed. From this point we then went downstream toward the entrance. I showed the group where I had done the climb down from the upper passage on past trips as we passed this on the way out. Brian also showed everyone where the turnoffs to The Fountain of Youth and also Tower Domes intersection as we passed those. This section of the main stream passage is of impressive dimensions. From here we continued on to the midsection bypass. This is

a right turn (as you are heading downstream and out) right after the hands and knees stream crawl .The main stream continues on as low crawl in the water but this is easy walking passage, eventually past a

Hurricane Pit entrance.

dome about 60 feet tall then back down into the main stream passage. From here it is not too far to the climb out of the main stream up to the register area. This turn off is just past a stoop walk in the main stream. Once we got to where the register used to be I began to smell the outside air. From the register you go through a short crawl then you will soon see daylight from the large horizontal entrance. We all stopped for a bit and took in this entrance and a few photos were taken. After this you follow the stream bed up the hill then the group walked down the railroad tracks back toward where we left our bags with a change of clothes to wait on the shuttle to take them back to GSP campground. My car was parked along the highway near the horizontal entrance so I stripped down to my poly pro and drove back to where I had left my box to meet the rest of the group. By time I got their shuttle had already arrived. I changed and walked back up the hill with my camera to get a photo

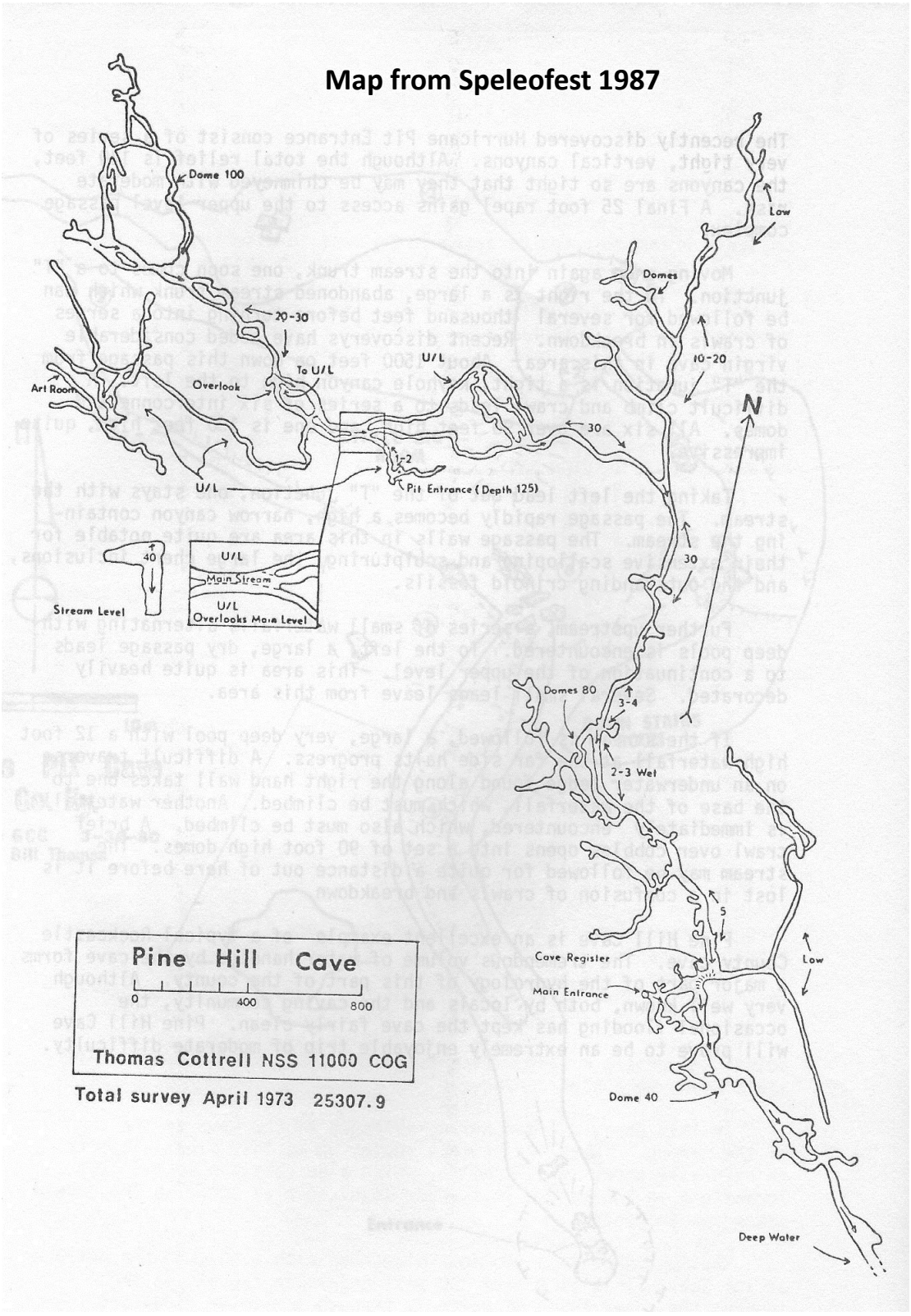
of The Hurricane Pit entrance. They all headed back and from there I drove a couple miles down the road to the hotel at the interstate exit.

I checked into the hotel around 4 PM after about a five hour cave trip. Took a nice hot shower then relaxed for a bit. I then went to the nearby Mexican restaurant and had dinner before driving about 10 miles or so to the campground where the others were camping. They were starting a fire so I hung out around the fire and socialized with the other cavers and had a few beers. The COG was preparing dinner for the group. After they all ate Wendy Orlandi led several of us on a guided trip into Great Saltpeter Cave. This was very informative as I learned much about the history of the cave. I spent much of this time with Robert Plumb as we discussed headlamps and flashlights. This trip was done in street clothes as this cave is set up like a tourist cave. After this trip I began to feel tired from getting up so early in the morning to drive down so I headed back to the hotel for much needed sleep. I slept in a bit Sunday morning and woke up to rain. At this point I was glad I was in a hotel and not a wet campground. I understand others went to Sinks of The Round stone Cave. I had seen this cave many times in the past. After the water leaves Pine Hill Cave it then flows in to Blue Hole Cave and eventually on to Sinks of The Roundstone Cave. There is also a 120 foot pit above Sinks Cave that does not connect. I had done this pit several years ago. After waking up I drove back home as I had a concert to go to that evening in Indianapolis. I got home around 2 PM and cleaned up my cave gear.

At this point I would like to thank The Central Ohio Grotto for hosting this weekend event. They went above and beyond to make this enjoyable to all. They secured permits for both of the Pine Hill pit entrances. They cooked breakfast Saturday morning for the group and also dinner Saturday evening at the shelter house. They had keg beer both Friday and Saturday night. They arranged a shuttle to take cavers from the campground to Pine Hill as parking is limited for the pit entrances. They set up tarps at both pit entrances so in case of rain we would not have to stand in the rain to wait to get on rope. They arranged to keep someone stationed at the top of Skylight Dome to make sure everyone got down safely and to manage the gate. They had both pits pre rigged. They led us on a trip into Great Saltpeter Cave Saturday night. They did all this to reach out to us in The Central Indi-

ana Grotto and were great hosts. They all worked hard to put this on and it showed. Wendy Orlandi took the lead on this and had help from others. The weekend had periods of rain but I had a great time due to their efforts. This event was well attended with many from both COG and CIG. In addition to myself we had Wendy Orlandi, Scott Davis, Travis Tolliver, Tiffany Poof, Rich Lunseth, John Hartung, Brian Devine, Bethany Windmeyer, Nathan Canaris, Matt Indrutz, Ana Scherschel, James Clemets, Robert Plumb, Don Ingle, Matt Pelsor, Sam Richey, Darryl Marsh, Charlie Vetters, and many others.

Map from Speleofest 1987



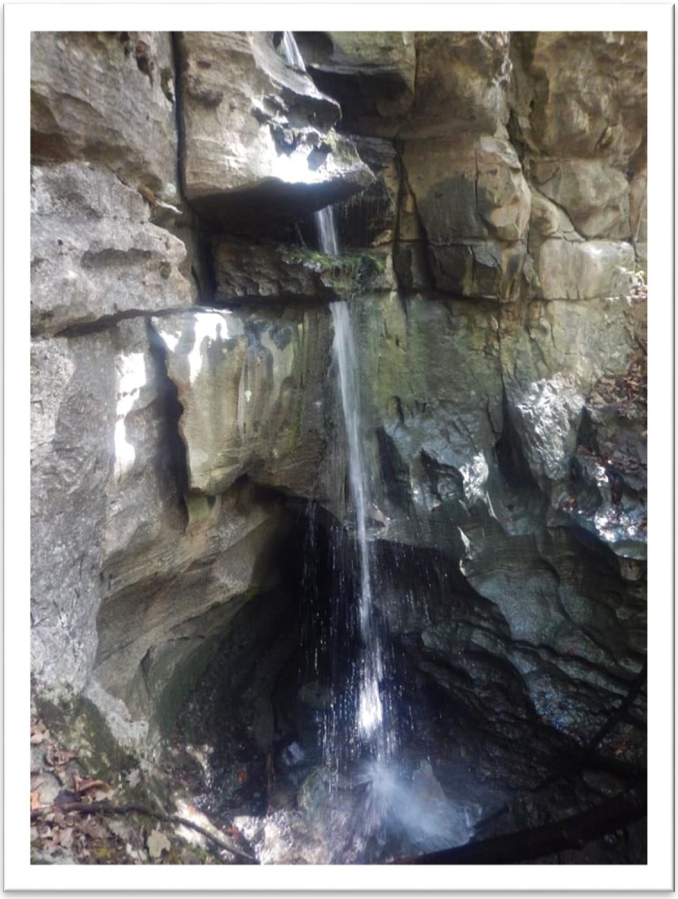
Dam Beavers! An epic Solution Rift trip…and rescue

By Kyle Lassiter

Solution Rift is a wet multi-drop cave in Fiery Gizzard Cove, TN, not far from Sewanee. It is on land of the late Charlie Smith, a longtime friend of cavers throughout TAG. His daughter Leanne has continued this legacy, and welcomed my group of friends on our now infamous trip on Friday, October 6, 2017, during the 40th annual TAG Fall Cave-in. We planned on doing a pull-down trip through the cave, which would consist of eight drops and several thousand feet of crawling to go from the high entrance to the spring entrance at the valley floor. The cave was surveyed by Sewanee Mountain Grotto in 2009 and 2010, and the resulting map was dedicated to the late Charlie Smith. The total depth of the cave is 429 feet, and the total length is just over a mile long, most of which is done on a pull-down trip.

My team for our Solution Rift trip was my father Mark, Alan Camp, Kitty Rose, and Susan Williamson. A couple others dropped out in the days before the trip, leaving us with no team member who had done the cave before. Still wanting to do the cave, but concerned about doing a pull-down trip in a wet multidrop cave without a knowledgeable trip leader, I headed down to Vendor Row at TAG to talk to a bunch of people who had done the cave before to see what their thoughts were. Everyone I talked to thought we would be fine going there with the group we had, since all the drops were well bolted, there were no side passages to get lost in anywhere in the cave, and recent dry weather meant the water levels throughout the cave would be no problem. Feeling confident, our group committed to the trip.

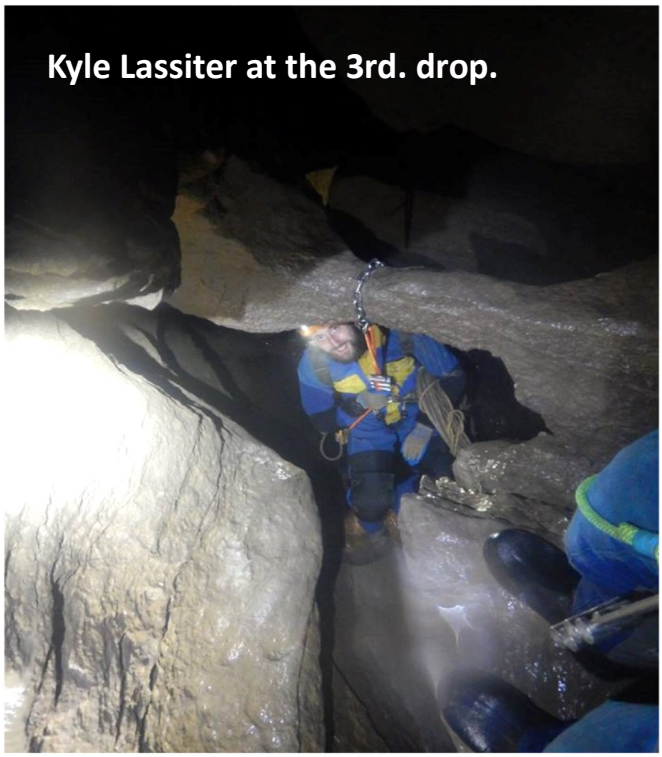
We left TAG around 10:30am, and after securing permission from the landowner and hiking up the mountain to the upper entrance, our trip started around 1pm. The big sinkhole containing the upper



Solution Rift Entrance

entrance is large and contains several other karst features and two other small caves. We headed into the Solution Rift entrance behind a cascading waterfall, and began our ill-fated adventure. It was a tough, adventurous trip through the cave before our troubles began. We enjoyed the first two short dry pits, followed by a couple hundred feet of wet, winding canyon to a 3rd short wet drop. We hated the “Hog Wallow” mud crawl that came after the 3rd pit, a tight and seemingly endless crawl that was probably “only” 300 feet long but felt like a mile. Thereafter the cave had a fairly long horizontal section of crawling and stooping passages that became well decorated with time. Eventually another short wet pit is reached that dropped us into the Hartselle shale. Next we navi-

Kitty Rose at the 2nd. drop

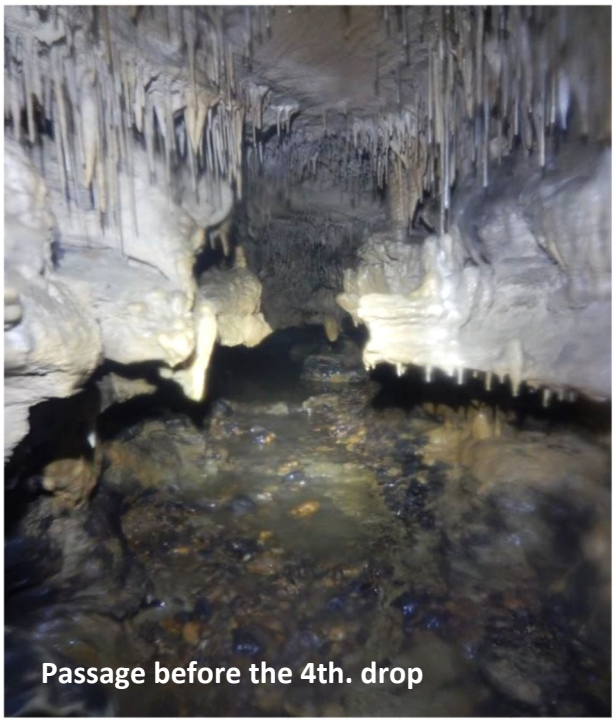


Kyle Lassiter at the 3rd. drop.

In the Brrrr Tubes

gated the “Brrrr Tubes”, a complex area of tight water-filled crawls that put us at the top of the beautiful 171 foot tall Confederate Well. The deep rim stone pools and flowstone in this pit are perhaps the best I have seen anywhere in TAG. Beyond were three more short pits and some neat solution features in the passages. That left us with the approximately 2,000 foot long exit crawl remaining between us and beer at TAG.

The crawl was not too bad for a lot of it, as we were able to float through some of it and even stoop-walk in places. Unfortunately, the last couple hundred feet were a terrible one foot high cobble crawl that turned into a low airspace water crawl. Tough finish! We were all quite tired and ready to be done with the cave at this point. I was the first to reach the end of the crawl, indicated by the old concrete dam made by Charlie Smith decades ago. Beyond the cave opened up into big walking passage, and we knew we were only 100 feet from the exit at the dam. Our trip so far had taken about as long as expected, eight hours. However, as I walked towards what had to be the end of the cave, all I found was a nasty organic sump to my right and a collapsed dry passage adjacent to it. There was no exit! Since no one in our group had done the cave before, we were unsure as to what the problem was. We knew we had to be in the right spot though due to the concrete dam. We looked around the room for a while and even dug in a couple spots looking for leads out, but eventually we determined that some-how the spring entrance was collapsed or sumped for an unknown reason. We had not checked the spring entrance before our trip that morning, since dry conditions in preceding weeks guaranteed that water levels would not be even close to sumping the cave. No one I had talked to at TAG the night before had alerted me to the possibility of the spring entrance being sumped. But here we were trapped! As we sat around waiting for our shock to wear off a little bit, I started thinking about what could have caused us to be sumped in. I first looked at the sump, which was pretty stinky and full of debris from farming fields. This implied that there had to be a clear route from the surface through



Passage before the 4th. drop

Susan Williams, Alan Camp, and Kitty Rose staying warm at the top of Confederate Well-

Start of exit crawl

the sump to allow that debris to flow back into the cave, meaning the lower entrance probably was totally collapsed. I then looked at the concrete dam, and realized that the water below the dam was just as high as it was above the dam, which doesn't make any sense. It dawned on me then that something probably outside of the cave was backing up water into the cave, raising the water level and sumping the spring entrance. The first thing that came to mind that would cause this is a beaver dam. It fit the evidence we had in front of us, but it was hard to believe; none of us had ever heard of any caves in TAG being flooded by beaver dams.

Alas, as we discovered later it was not one, but two, beaver dams outside in the valley that had flooded us in the cave! Since we were on a pull-down trip, we could not retreat back through the cave to the upper entrance, so we were forced to wait for help to arrive. We decided we could wait there for about another 18 hours for help, but if none came by then to retreat back through the last 2000 foot crawl to an area that would not flood, due to heavy rain forecast with Hurricane Nate beginning the next night. We were all wearing wetsuits for warmth, and communally we had one emergency blanket and a modest amount of food and water in case of a long wait. By 10:30pm we were all huddled on the sloping mud banks on the side of the passage, hoping our friends at TAG would come to our rescue sooner than later. We unfortunately had told different call out times to different friends, so we weren't sure exactly when to expect help, but most of us were hoping to hear from somebody by the next morning.

As expected, several cavers at the TAG Fall Cave-in noticed that we had missed our call-out times, so a group of over a dozen cavers were assembled and put on stand-by for a possible rescue. Around 12am, a call was made to local SMG member Blaine Grindle to check and see if our vehicles were still on the property. When he confirmed that they

were a short time later, the group headed our way to begin the rescue effort. Kelly Smallwood organized two teams of cavers, one for each entrance. The upper entrance team, led by Jason Hardy, was to hard rig the cave from the top, while the spring entrance team was primarily going to check that the entrance was open, and to proceed into the cave as far as the bottom of the last pit if necessary. Local EMS was notified and arrived on the Smith property, and the local Chattanooga-Hamilton County Rescue Squad (CHCRS) was notified and placed on standby as well.

As soon as Kelly and the spring entrance team arrived at the spring entrance, it was immediately obvious to them that two massive beaver dams had swamped the whole side of the valley and sumped the spring entrance under several feet of water. Kelly immediately called the upper entrance team to come down and help destroy the beaver dams, which were the obvious reason why we would still be in the cave. After at least an hour of digging the four to five-foot tall dams were breached. Inside the cave, we were huddled together for warmth and trying to get a little sleep, but without much success. Around 4am, we first heard water flowing through a hole in the concrete dam, and then noticed the water level receding in the passage. Obviously ecstatic that something good was happening, my dad Mark headed down to the sump to check it out. A few minutes later voice contact was made with our rescuers, and we confirmed to them that no one was injured but we were a little hypothermic from our six hour wait. The cave continued to drain rapidly, and by 4:30am we were all able to swim out of the cave. Once outside it was surreal standing in a waist-deep lake as far as the eye could see; amazing what beavers can do! I never did see the beaver dams because they were so far down the valley. Many thanks and hugs were shared with our rescuers before we dried off and headed back to TAG. Since everyone was thankfully OK, EMS and CHCRS were called off. Dad, Alan, Kitty, and I went to Waffle House for “breakfast”, and I finally got to bed around 8am. What a day!

Obviously, first I must thank our rescuers, who stopped partying at TAG to come to our aid! To the best I can recall they are: Kelly Smallwood, Jason Hardy, Troy Fuqua, Matt Tomlinson, Zeke McKee, Lee White, Jason Lavender, Warren Wyatt, Chris Higgins, Rebecca McNabb, Blaine Grindle, and Matt Bumbalough. Without all this help I’m told that destroying the beaver dams would have taken a lot longer. We were fortunate to have so many good cavers concentrated in one place at the same time (TAG) who were able to come to our aid. This certainly minimized the amount of waiting our team had to endure before we were rescued. Special thanks to Kelly Smallwood and Jason Hardy who were expeditious in the planning of the rescue efforts, which also contributed to our relatively short wait.

So what lessons did we learn here? Check the lower entrance before doing a pull-down trip! Even if you can’t think of any reason it might be sumped or collapsed, do it anyways. While none of us on my trip knew it at the time, we have since learned that beavers frequently dam up this part of the valley, and the prior landowner used to be key in removing them often. It is ironic that our original trip leader who couldn’t join us, as well as all the people I talked to at TAG the night before our trip, knew about the beavers but forgot to mention them to us. They are also not mentioned in the TCS narrative for the cave, which also would have tipped me off (PS - it is now!!). We did not think we needed to check the spring entrance for being sumped due to the very dry conditions in the prior weeks, and indeed the cave was not sumped due to high regional water levels…but because of beavers. Finally, while we survived our wait in the cave with minimal hardship, we all wished that we had brought more emergency blankets and food with us to make the wait for tolerable. Also, once we were trapped, we realized that

different members of the team had given our different friends at TAG different callout times, so we were unsure when we could hope for rescue crews to arrive. Thankfully, they came sooner than later! Lesson here is to confirm with your team members what the callout time is going to be for the trip, should you unfortunately have to rely on it. Hopefully I never have to again…

All of us on the trip will never forget this day, or be able to live it down. Dam beavers!

Solution Rift—by Myrna Attaway

Back in the early 80's I got invited on a through trip to Solution Rift. After the obligatory breakfast at the TAG Restaurant the group headed to the Smith property.

I vividly remember Charlie Smith's father laying in a hammock on the front porch of his trailer. He directed us to where Charlie was working. Charlie was feeding his catfish at the pond that is near the current house. I had never seen catfish being fed. It both fascinated me and creeped me out to see all those fish heads and bodies rolling around fighting for food.

Buddy Lane kept talking about going to look at the spring entrance before walking up the mountain so Charlie let us drive down to the spring to park. You would think that would be a simple thing, but he only let us do it because Buddy knew the way. We retreated back down the road to a gate right where the road begins the curve. We took a meandering route through the field. Buddy stopped and showed us why. There are some giant sinkholes in the field that you could easily drive into if the hay were tall. According to Buddy, they don't go.

After looking at the spring entrance Buddy and Gerald Moni declared that the water level was fine. I asked what they were looking for. That's when I found out. They were looking for low water levels. Why you ask? Well it turns out that Jim Smith's wife had left him for a caver in Indiana and Jim had heard that they would be coming down to do the Rift. Charlie had a dam up in the cave he used to impound water for the dry season. The drain to the dam was a 4 inch pipe with a threaded end. Jim had called anyone he thought might be going to the cave and warned them that he intended to plug the drain with a screw on cap.

Buddy and Gerald figured that if he had plugged the drain the water coming out of the cave would be low and it couldn't possibly have had time to fill the dam, run over and bring the water level back up to normal. I trusted them, but there was still that back of the brain concern.

I say back of the brain because we knew that Charlie knew where we were going and we had given him a worry time of the middle of the night. Buddy's wife Lori decided she wanted to hang out at the spring so she was instructed to expect us about 6:00 pm, worry at 9:00 pm and call out rescue after 12:00 am.

I started the hike up the mountain fairly confident. Discussion ensued as you can imagine, fueling my nascent paranoia, but I kept it down. It turns out I wasn't alone. The rock climber types among us, Wm Shrewsbury being one, spent their time at the bottom of each pit looking for routes in case we had to come back out the hard way. After the third or fourth pit, there was no potential for climbing out. We were committed.

Now these were the days of ¼ wetsuits, cotton coveralls and carbide lights. Everyone had an electric light to use on rope, but that was usually all it was used for because they were battery hogs. I remember the rest of the cave as low, wet and painful. Those cobbles are not something you want to crawl over.

Waiting at the bottom of Confederate Well I got kind of cold. Eventually we started out and I was in the lead since I was cold and ready to move. Buddy had pointed out the passage and said it was a straight shot. I rounded a corner and came to a stop. I heard Buddy from the back asking why we were stopped. I replied that I didn't know which was to go. His response was you just keep going straight. My question was "into the water?". Buddy came pushing through the line of cavers and I swear he got pale. You guessed it the passage was filled with water.

It was 3:00 pm and we were cold. Thank god for those carbide lights. Those of us that were cold used large trash bags with head holes cut in them to make tents and squatted over those lovely heat sources. I should point out at this point that several people had had issues with sump dives, as in they had died. I knew if it was going to require a sump dive to get out, I would just have to wait for someone to pull the plug and drain the lake. I was prepared to be there for a while.

Buddy and Mark Wolinsky may have been suffering from shriveledge but you couldn't prove it by me. Several people actually went searching, but Buddy and Mark made a big impression on me. It might have been because of how energetically they dove.

While the rest of us went into survival mode they started sump diving. They were my total heroes for that. In just 15 or 20 minutes they had found a nose groove in the ceiling that allowed us to exit without having to submerge our noses. Of course with my phobia I wasn't the first to volunteer to go out, but Buddy spent time with me after returning from finding it and explained how I needed to keep a steady speed to keep from getting a wave up my nose and how to stop and let it pass if it did happen. Of course my electric light went out ½ way through when I got the slosh, but Buddy kept his light in the grove and talked me through it.

I still have a crush on him.

Mark took the cap off and tossed it into the water. I was mildly pissed when I got to the entrance and found that with some creative duck walking we could have looked at the dam and only gotten wet up to our knees. That being said, it was also the days of caving in combat boots. Hiking to the upper entrance in wet combat boots would have been unpleasant.

Later that year a large flood came through and moved a sandbar across the outlet pipe permanently raising the water. I've been told Charlie breached the dam. He put in low water dams outside the entrance that raised the water level in the entrance passage so now you have to wallow in the water to get to the base of Confederate Well, but it isn't a nose channel.

Another blast from the past……..Charlie's Beavers!

By Julie Schenck-Brown

Hi Shari,

"So funny you remembered that photo as it was taken in March 2000! Left to right in the photo is Cherie McDee, Charlie Smith, Julie Schenck-Brown, and Anne Elmore.

The photo was taken during the Great Beaver Wars on TAG-Net as Anne Elmore decided to give Charlie a stuffed beaver. When Anne gave Charlie the stuffed animal, he exclaimed, "I want a photo with all my beavers!" So, we all sat on the couch with Charlie. Before the photo was taken, Mark Joop sat on the couch, but quickly moved away when he saw the look on Charlie's face, which was priceless!

Thanks for letting me share the memories!"
Julie

Bat Cave - Eleanor Wilner

The cave looked much like any other
from a little distance but
as we approached, came almost
to its mouth, we saw its walls within
that slanted up into a dome
were beating like a wild black lung—
it was plastered and hung with
the pulsing bodies of bats, the organ
music of the body's deep
interior, alive, the sacred cave
with its ten thousand gleaming eyes
near the clustered rocks
where the sea beat with the leather
wings of its own dark waves.

Below the bat-hung, throbbing walls,
an altar stood, glittering with guano,
a stucco sculpture like a Gaudi
church, berserk
Baroque, stone translated into
flux—murk and mud and the floral
extravagance of wet sand dripped
from a giant hand, giving back
blessing, excrement—return
for the first fruits offered to the gods.

We stayed outside, superior
with fear, like tourists
peering through a door, whose hang-
ing
beads rattle in the air from
one who disappeared into the dim
interior; we thought of the caves
of Marabar, of a writer who entered
and never quite emerged—
the caves' echoing black
emptiness a tunnel in the English
soul where he is wandering still. So
the bat cave on the Bali coast, not far
from Denpasar, holds us off, and
beckons ...

Standing there now, at the mouth
of the cave—this time we enter, feel
inside the flutter of those
many hearts, the radiant heat of
pumping
veins, the stretch of wing on bone
like a benediction, and the familiar
faces of this many-headed god,
benevolent as night is
to the weary—the way at dark
the cave releases them all,
how they must lift like the foam
on a wave breaking, how many
they are as they enter
the starlit air, and scatter
in wild wide arcs
in search of fruit, the sweet bites
of mosquito ...

while the great domes of our
own kind slide open, the eye
that watches, tracks the skies,
and the huge doors roll slowly back
on the hangars, the planes
push out their noses of steel,
their wings a bright alloy
of aluminum and death, they roar
down the runways, tear into
the night, their heavy bodies fueled
from sucking at the hidden
veins of earth; they leave a trail of fire
behind them as they scar
the air, filling the dreams
of children, sleeping—anywhere,
Chicago, Baghdad—with blood,
as the bombs drop, as the world
splits open, as the mothers
reach for their own
in the night of the falling
sky, madness in
method, nature gone
into reverse ...

here, nearly unperturbed,
the bats from the sacred cave
fill the night with their calls,
high-pitched, tuned to the solid
world
as eyes to the spectrum of light, gnats
to the glow of a lamp—the bats
circle, the clouds wheel,
the earth turns
pulling the dome of stars
among the spinning trees, blurring
the sweet globes of fruit, shaped
exactly to desire—dizzy, we swing
back to the cave on our stiff dark
wings, the sweet juice of papaya
drying on our jaws, home
to the cave, to attach ourselves
back to the pulsing dome, until,
hanging there, sated and sleepy,
we can see what was once our world
upside down as it is
and wonder whose altars
those are, white,
encrusted with shit.

Big Mouth Cave— A History

Compiled from several sources by Shari Lydy

From Caves in the Sewanee Area by H. T. Kirby-Smith, as typed from the hand-written journal with permission of Mrs. Kirby-Smith by Larry Mathews on March 28, 1984.

4/15/45 Big Mouth Cave.

This is in Paynes Cove above–Pelham. 2 or 3 yrs. ago Harvey & Douglas Vaughan&went up to this cave & partially explored it. We also explored a cave at this previous time where mouth is just along side the road on the rt. & in dry stream bed & goes down 10 ft. or so & then several big rooms are entered. Big Mouth Cave is at the end of this little cove off Paynes cove where the ridge separates it from Burris Cove. The mouth is down in a depression 20 feet below the valley. floor. The mouth is very wide being a fallen in side of a large solution channel about 15-20 feet high with the passages running to left & right. The one to the rt. was explored previously & was short & seemed to end in a rock fall.. Today we took the left hand passage & about 100 feet it turns to rt. & on left is a sand filled passage which we did not explore. The rt. hand or main passage is a channel in which water flows in high water & for the most part is fairly low. In it are numerous pools of water & here we found 5 of the large pink salamanders like those of Sinking Cove Cave only they are a little darker & have brownish spots on their sides. We caught 2 large Sjee(?) which Ned Mccrady is studying.

This part of the cave bares to the left & about 1/8 mile it becomes large & there is a large deep still pool in which we saw a 6-inch blind (white) fish probably Amblyopsis spaeleus which we dipped at but missed. There were also numerous small fish, Typhlicthys & numerous blind cray-fish. From here on there is a large solution channel, low in places. Just below this pool is a deep pool into which a huge flow of water enters & as below here the stream is large -- larger than Wonder Cave & in this first pool was another large blind fish. We went on down this big stream for about 1/4 mile & on the left was a dry solution channel cut off corning back into the main stream. Where we stopped was a deep pool -- over my head & here we could hear a large water fall. In the still parts of this stream were many blind fish & crayfish. There were also numerous small bugs in the air -- some brownish & some light green which got in our noses & mouth. Will explore later in dryer weather.

Trees are in almost full leaf.

11:00. In mouth temp	56°	
300 ft. pond water	53°	
air	53.5°	
First salamander hole	water	55° (600ft.)
	Air	54°
Big stream	water	54° (700ft.)
	air	54°

Out at 1:45 pm temp outside 79°

4/22/45 With Harvey & Douglas Vaughan. Took the left hand passage just inside mouth which is dry & which with only a little crawling came into main cave where the large stream begins. Saw no large blind fish. So on down to the deep hole & waded through & then crawled on down in a low water crawl area to the rapped which made the noise. Harvey & Douglas took a little, left hand crawling side passage which came out at the rappeds. Then on down a short distance toa deep still pool completely surrounded by smooth rock walls with the water going under somewhere. On the way out went through the salamander pools where we got 2 nice large specimens of salamander. Also found a large heavy femur bone which I have taken to Ned Mccrady.

9/30/45 With John & Harvey & back & saw the white fish which turned out to be a very pale chub with eyes. Also caught 3 blind fish & 3 blind crayfish. Also saw 3 sallys.

11:00 AM outside	80°	
200 yds. inside	56°	
big stream water	58°	
air	58°	

Photo credit: TN Aquarium

TN Cave Salamander

Gyrinophilus palleucus

In 1994, TN Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) listed the TN cave salamander as “threatened” due to habitat destruction and water pollution.

BIG MOUTH CAVE GD2(TCS Narrative file)

Burrow Cove 35-19-57.8 1030ft 10000'
93SE 85-49-35.0 Monteagle Limestone 50'

Big Mouth Cave is located on the north side of Payne Cove, near the mouth of Limekiln Hollow in a large sink. The sink and cave name is marked on the topo map. Big Mouth Cave is aptly named. The entrance was formed by the collapse of one wall of a large gallery at a point where the gallery makes a sharp swing which brings it close to the surface of the hillside. The cave is located 300 yards west of the mouth of Big Room Cave (GD3) and is part of the Big Room Cave system.

The mouth, located on the north side of an elongated sink, is 140 feet wide and 20 feet high. There are two forks. The southeast fork is 375 feet long, 40 feet wide, and 12 feet high, ending in a breakdown. The other fork extends north-northwest for 425 feet to a low, wet crawlway. A wet-weather stream enters the sink and flows into this part of the cave. About 250 feet from the mouth a left-hand passage opens. It runs parallel to the stream channel and intersects it 1000 feet inside the cave. According to Dr. E.R. McCrady of Sewanee, Tennessee, it is possible to travel for some distance in this branch and finally to reach a large underground stream. This lower stream passage is only accessibly during dry weather. It is probably that this may be the same stream that is observed in Big Room Cave and that its debouchment is at Sartain Spring.

The Tennessee cave salamander (*Gyrinophilus palleucus*), southern cavefish (*Typhlichthys subterraneus*) and the stygobitic blind crayfish (*Cambarus australis*) inhabit the cave stream. Pickerel frogs *(Rana palustris)* were also observed in the cave. (Barr, 1961; Gerald Moni, 2015)

Bluegrass Underground finds new home in Grundy County
Posted on Tuesday, August 22, 2017 at 12:27 pm Tullahoma News

Bluegrass Underground, the subterranean concert series that has entertained music lovers for nine years in the Volcano Room underneath McMinnville, announced their new home on Friday. The Caverns at Big Mouth Cave, in Pelham at Payne's Cove, will begin hosting the series beginning in March 2018. Grundy County Mayor Michael Brady is excited about the opportunities Bluegrass Underground will bring to the county.

Farewell

Big Mouth Cave

Photo credits:

Chuck Sutherland

Care2 SAVE OUR COVE By Crystal N.

As of 8/18/17, it was publicly announced that a music venue called "Bluegrass Underground" will be moving from McMinnville to the Big Mouth Cave in Payne's Cove Tennessee. This is a peaceful place to raise a family. If this venue and all it's projected 1,000+ attendees and 60+ yearly shows come to this small cove, ALL the lifelong residents will pay the price. The traffic will disrupt our lives which will force the county to try and widen the roads which will consume more of our land. This once peaceful area will be subject to thousands and thousands of new strangers every year, many of which will be right near our homes. Statistics show with any mass grouping, crime and theft rates rise. However, this is just the start, if this venue gets a foot hold in Payne's Cove, they will eventually want more and more land to build on and add to their profit. This venue will NOT help the residents of Payne's Cove! It will, in fact, destroy our quality of life and everything our families have worked so hard to obtain. Please help us in saving Payne's Cove. They have already begun digging out the Big Mouth Cave with heavy equipment, and we fear much of the exhaust seen coming from the entrance and the destruction of the structures inside may have already harmed many of the animals that call it home. The cave was home to many bats and a threatened species of cave salamander. Please sign this petition, spread the word and help save our cove! They will not profit from our destruction. ** Update ** The cops came out today 08/21/17, the venue will be proceeding no matter if anyone likes it or not. I was told that they had an Environmental Study completed and that I could search for it if I wished. I'd still like to see this study as would others. I thank you all for your support.
www.thepetitionsite.com/514/263/889/save-our-cove

From JamBase:

EMMY-winning PBS live music television series *Bluegrass Underground* today announced the show has found a permanent home. The Caverns, which is located within the base of Monteagle Mountain in Tennessee's beautiful Cumberland Plateau, will host the program starting in early 2018 as per an announcement by *Bluegrass Underground* Creator and Executive Producer, Todd Mayo. The Caverns is said to, "boast singular natural acoustics and will accommodate many more subterranean music lovers in response to increasing demand for tickets to Bluegrass Underground and for other live music concerts across expanding genres" according to a statement. "This is a dream come true to find a cave system that expands and improves the live and televised musical experiences of underground performances we have been curating since 2008," Mayo said. "Our new home at The Caverns will enable us to add infrastructure with permanent power, professional audio and lighting with enhanced food and beverage concessions that have never before been possible, including a longtime request from our patrons: cold beer."

Producer Todd Jarrell explained how the new venue will benefit the television show, "In the past, we taped the entire 12-episode season over one weekend due to the difficulty and expense of bringing literally tons of cabling and show gear a quarter mile into the cave. But The Caverns' permanent infrastructure presents us the flexibility to match calendars with some of the world's greatest performers, enticing them underground to offer our fans a 'deep down' lifetime experience throughout the year."

According to sources close to Bluegrass Underground, as of November 18, the entrance room of Big Mouth Cave has been excavated 6–8 feet down and out to the cave walls of the large entrance room and a sump pump is removing seepage. Development of "The Caverns" is moving rapidly forward.

From the Grundy County Historical Society:

Pelham Valley Places

By Janelle Layne Taylor

"Lying at the base of the Cumberland Plateau in Grundy County, TN, is the fertile Pelham Valley made up of various small communities of Providence, Valley Home (also known as Cross Roads or Mt. View), Pelham, Payne's Cove, Layne's Cove, Burrows' Cove, and Bell's Cove. There are many hollows and lesser known coves and communities. These are as follows: Piedmont, located right at the base of the Cumberland Plateau along Highway 41 before it ascends the plateau; Roberts' Cove, part of which is called Hawk Hollow or Brown's Hollow (Another part of the same cove is also called Bonner Hollow.) Trussell Cove, located behind Mary Elizabeth Shelton's home in the larger Bell's Cove; Smith Hollow, located between Valley Home and Payne's Cove where Ronald & Mary Winton now live; Parmley Hollow, located across the ridge and northeast of Smith Hollow, Procter Hollow, located behind the Donald & Donna Givens home; Limekiln and Spring Hollows, north of Roberts' Cemetery in Payne's Cove; Orchard Hollow deeper in the head of Payne's Cove, Sugarcamp Hollow , up from Big Spring and just off the Clouse Hill Road leading up the plateau and even further into Payne's Cove is an offshoot of that cove that leads to an area called Hurricane Cove; Granny Hamby Hollow, along the Elk River south of Alma Woodlee's home; Campbell Hollow, due north of Elkhead Church of Christ, Indian Camp, Billy, Negro Den, Basin, Cane and Graveyard Hollows in the head of Burrows' Cove, Sugar Mill Hollow between the Elk River and Ray Meeks' home in Burrows' Cove and Still House Hollow just off Highway 50 as it ascends the Cumberland Plateau from the valley floor. These communities, hollows, and coves are located on the easternmost edge of the Eastern Highland Rim at 1020 ft. above sea level. The coordinates for the area (intersection of U.S. Highway 41 and Highway 50) are 30 degrees 18 minutes 36 seconds North latitude and 85 degrees 52 minutes 52 seconds West longitude.

The Elk River is the principal stream flowing through the area. It has its beginnings in Burrows' Cove at Elk Head where it flows from beneath the Cumberland Plateau from several springs, the principal one being Blue Spring. The river is also fed at its head by Laurel Creek from the plateau and Jay's Creek, which flows from Campbell Hollow. As the river continues its swift shallow movement downstream, it receives the waters of the Sartain Spring located at the base of Payne Ridge. The ridge which divides Payne's and Burrows' Coves. The Elk receives the waters of Bailey Branch, which flows from Bonner Hollow into Bostick Creek, which flows from Roberts' Cove and crosses Highway 50 near the Winton Cemetery. Cold and swift, the water's movement continues on downstream until it is joined by the waters of Dry Creek flowing out of Payne's Cove. The name of the creek indicated its usual condition until spring rains come. When there is water in Dry Creek, people say, "the creek's down"! The aforementioned confluence is right at the Cheatum Oliver Bridge that spans Elk River. Prolonged periods of rain cause considerable flooding along the Payne's Cove Road. The Elk courses its way on to Valley Home where U.S. Highway 41 crosses it. Just a little further downstream is Bell's Mill, a favorite swimming hole and baptismal spot, as well as the site of an old mill where grain was ground using the power of the moving water. In the early days, this was also the site of a ford or crossing place for travelers coming to Pelham on what is now called Paul Parks Road. On downstream from Bell's Mill, the Elk is joined by Caldwell Creek, which is fed by Henley Creek and Gilliam Creek, near Providence. The Elk continues on its way and is joined by Patton Creek, flowing from Tarry Cove, where Elsie Brothers now lives, shortly before it finds its way to the Franklin/Grundy County line at the bridge on TN Highway 50 near the Tyson Hatchery. (The hatchery sits just inside the Franklin County line.)

The area on Highway 64 and 50 at the Franklin/Grundy County line was formerly known as Patterson Ford because a large tannery operated by the Pattersons was located there before it was destroyed by Union troops in the Civil War. The Elk continues on to form the Woods Reservoir near Tullahoma. Flowing southward, the Elk continues to Fayetteville, TN, then into Alabama where it shortly joins the Tennessee River on its way to the Ohio River. The

Ohio releases its flow to the Mississippi River, which, in turn, flows into the Gulf of Mexico.

The Elk (Chuwalee to the Indians) River's course is 100 miles in length and is navigable as far as Fayetteville at the mouth of Mulberry Creek in Lincoln County, TN.

No lakes are located in Pelham Valley; however, one large marshy area known as Goose Pond is located on the property of Bill Henley in the Valley Home community. In the recent past the Goose Pond has been a popular spot for mud bogging.

Many caves are located in the valley. Probably the best known is located at the base of Cedar Ridge and is called Wonder Cave. It was open to the public for years while R.M. Payne and later the Jonah Raulston family owned and operated it. In recent years under the ownership of Bruce Born, the cave has been closed, and the buildings guarding its entrance, once buzzing with tourists, have fallen into disrepair. Other large caves in Pelham Valley are Trussell Cave, located at the mouth of Trussell Cove, Saltpeter Cave and Big Mouth Cave, both located near the Roberts' Cemetery in Payne's Cove. Neither of these caves has been commercialized. Many smaller caves are located throughout the area. Big Spring in Payne's Cove flows from one such cave. Partin Spring in Bell's Cove is another. Crystal Cave is a smaller cave just down the road from Wonder Cave. Having once been under water, this region is underlain by large quantities of limestone, a sedimentary rock formed by the skeletal remains of tiny marine animals. (David Taylor found a shard of limestone on the ridge behind our former home place, which had the perfect fossil remains of a shark's tooth embedded in it.) Limestone reacts with acid formed in the soil. The acids eat away the limestone. From that activity, caves and sinkholes are formed.

The fertile soils of Pelham Valley are valuable resources. They are made up mostly of yellow and red clays, which were formed under mixed, deciduous forests. Present day crops include soybeans, wheat, corn, cotton and hay crops. Vegetable gardens are commonplace. The growing season is around 200 days.

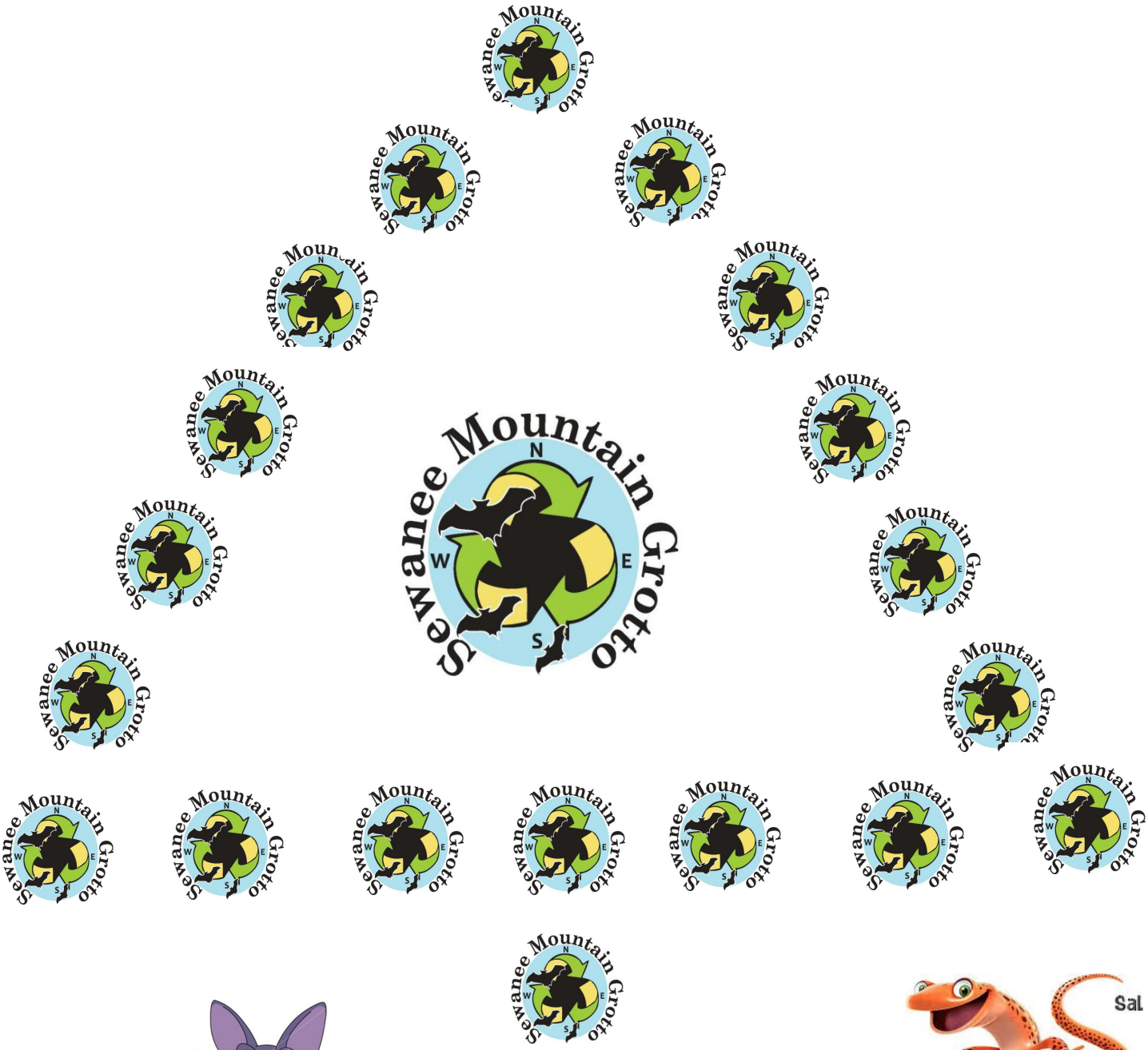
Precipitation in this part of Tennessee averages 52"-56" annually. Temperatures rarely go below 0 F.; however, during January of 1985 temperatures dropped to a record –22 F.

Summer temperatures in the high 80's and 90's are not uncommon. Occasionally we have unusual weather such as was experienced in April 2007 when, even tree leaves were frozen as they were coming out in their spring ritual. Weather records indicate that this was the first time such an event as this had taken place since 1910. Everyone wondered if the trees would recover; however, most of them put on new leaves and returned to their spring glory.

Quarrying of limestone was a viable business in areas near Wonder Cave close to the Edna Parks property and on the Jack & Janice White property along White Ridge Road.

Grundy County operated a quarry at the back of Gwendolyn "Benjie" Davis Benjamin's residence back in the 1920's and '30's while the state of Tennessee quarried rocks to build Highway 41 from the area behind the former home of David and Janelle Layne Taylor (now owned by Dean and Betsy Braseel Nunley), next door to Ms. Benjamin's during that same time frame. Other quarries were located on the Bell's Cove Road near Fred Layne's residence, and on the same road at the Grover & Margaret Partin home place, and near the Coffee County line on property now owned by Eddie & Sharon Patton. The most recent quarrying operation in Pelham Valley was on the side of Burrows' Cove Mountain on property owned by the Elmer and Elva Woodlee family. This quarry operated in the late 1950's and early '60's.

Present day Pelham Valley is served by three major highways. These are Interstate 24, an east/west route linking Chattanooga and Nashville, U.S. Highway 41, a north/south route also linking Chattanooga and Nashville, and Tennessee Highway 50 which links Decherd and Altamont. "



Merry Karstmas to All