



# TAG CAVER vol 8 issue 1





**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](mailto:sewaneemountaingrotto@caves.org) or one of our officers for more information. You may also visit our website at: <http://www.caves.org/grotto/sewaneemountaingrotto>.

#### **2017 Sewanee Mtn Grotto Officers:**

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Email articles and photos for submission to the editors (formats: docx, pdf, tiff, jpeg). Content may include articles and/or photos from non-members as well as other caving regions.

Statements and opinions expressed in the TAG Caver do not necessarily reflect the policies or beliefs of the Sewanee Mountain Grotto or the NSS.

Thanks to contributors: Kyle Lassiter, Ann Grindle, Kristine Ebrey, Shari Lydy, Peter Youngbaer.

Front cover photo credits: Kyle Lassiter. Top-Marty Abercrombie sketching in Nohoch Ak-tun. Left: Researchers Jason and Rachel from Texas A&M University at an entrance to Cueva Culebron. Right: Mayan ruins in Muyil.

Back cover photo credit: Julie Schenck.



## *TAG Caver* *Sewanee Mountain* *Grotto* *Winter* *Volume 8, Issue 1*

### *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 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/sewaneemountaingrotto> 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](mailto:kristine@visualworld.com)

### *What's inside*

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## *Cavefest update:*

Thanks to Facebook democracy, our theme color for this year is purple. Now for the theme... "Mysterious Realms of the Deep", or perhaps royalty or One Eyed Purple People Eaters! Time for another poll perhaps?? Kristine will make the call if there should be any discussion at the meeting, depending on time constraints. I'm fine with deciding it via FB poll again.

Donation letters are going out now; thanks Kristine and others!

Kyle is starting to reach out about t-shirt quotes, doing preorder like last year for polyester/cotton blend. Cotton available at the event.

Volunteers are needed for the Cavefest committee!

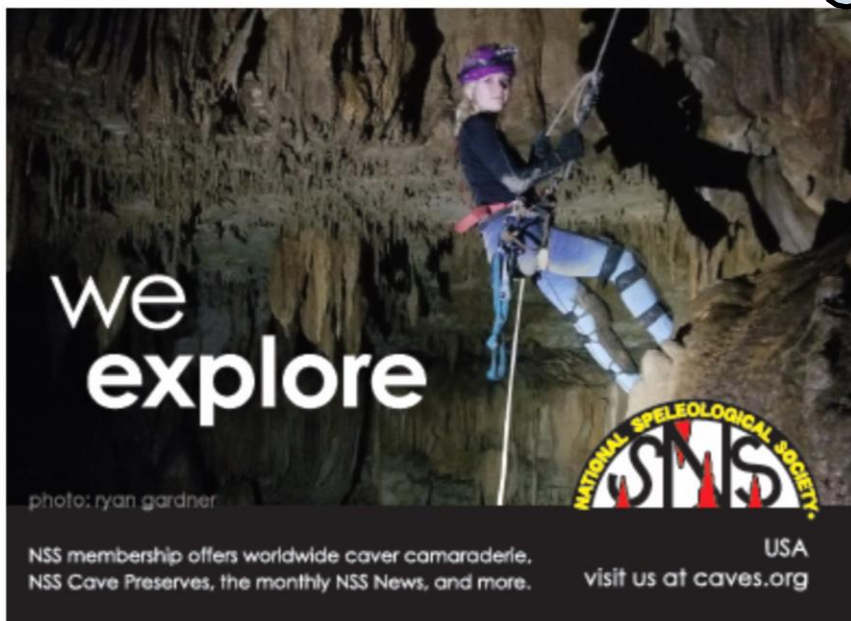
- Led Trips - open
- Pot luck -open
- Security -open
- Registration - Sue Milburn (thank you!!)
- Campground - Maureen (thank you!)
- Meat preparation- Cindy Ingram (thank you!!) - Cindy is requesting helpers
- Put up\Take Down Crew - open. Need a crew leader!

*From Kristine Ebrey:*

*NSS Membership  
Committee Chair*

*From Maureen Handler:*

*Our first donation is from the NSS. A  
limited edition beer mug for our  
donations to the building mortgage!*



# *Etowah River Grotto Trip hosted by Kristine Ebrey*

**April 13 at 10 am to April 15 at 1 am ———to be rescheduled**

**Etowah River Campground Rd, Dahlonega, GA 30533, United States**

Here are the details to the Etowah River Trip in April. The only question I have is on the campground between the 2 sections although I did find one. There is a excellent website <http://www.etowahwatertrail.org/> if you want to do more. We are paddling Tunneling for Gold and Big Savannah on Saturday and Dawson Forest on Sunday. I will attach the maps and descriptions in the comments. You can find all the info on the website above too.

Friday night campground:

Etowah River Campground

River Mile 13.30

Description Mile 13.3—(34°32'51.38"N 84° 4'4.73"W)—Etowah River Campground—This private campground of 28 acres hugs the east bank of the river for some 1800 feet. The Campground offers RV and tent camping, bath house with hot showers and laundry facilities. During trout season, the river banks will be busy with fishermen.

Saturday Put In:

Name Castleberry Bridge & Auraria

River Mile 23.26

Description Mile 23.2—( 34°28'21.71"N 84° 2'12.75"W)—Castleberry Bridge & Auraria

Saturday Take out and Sunday Put in:

Big Savannah - Dawson Forest

Name Take Out Site

River Mile 39.50

Description

Mile 39.6—(34°21'27.05"N 84° 6'50.63"W)—Mountain Stewards Launch Site—Built in 2009, this Dawson County maintained launch site is another feather in the cap of a community that promotes itself as an outdoor recreation Mecca. Like many of the launches along the Etowah, its development was a cooperative effort between a local government, a private landowner and a non-profit organization like the Mountain Stewards, an organization dedicated to restoring and building recreational trails in North Georgia. The Stewards have designed and constructed numerous boat launches and between 2005 and 2010 opened up some 34 miles of canoe trails in North Georgia, including this site. The launch cost approximately \$10,000 to construct.

Launch Site: This Dawson County facility includes a canoe/kayak launch, ample parking and a portable toilet. Other amenities include a covered pavilion, informational kiosk and benches and swings overlooking the river.

Directions: The launch is located on Ga. 9 south of Dawsonville. From the intersection of Ga. 400 and Ga. 369 north of Cumming, turn left on Ga. 369 (Browns Bridge Road) and proceed one mile to Ga. 9. Turn right and proceed 7.8 miles to the Etowah River. Launch area will be on your left after the bridge.

Saturday Campground Sweetwater Campground



Map Zone Lake Allatoona

Name Sweetwater Campground

River Mile 98.60

Description Mile 98.6—( 34°11'36.21"N 84°34'33.76"W)—Sweetwater Campground—A Corps of Engineers Campground, the facility boasts of 151 campsites, hot showers, coin laundry, restrooms, beach and boat ramp.

Saturday Take out:

Map Zone Dawson Forest - Eagles Beak

Name Take Out Site (Fee)

River Mile 48.60

Description

Launch Site: A privately-owned boat ramp, there is a nominal fee for the privilege of using the site (paid on the honor system at a drop box located on the gate into the parking area). The site includes a paved boat ramp, ample parking and a portable toilet.

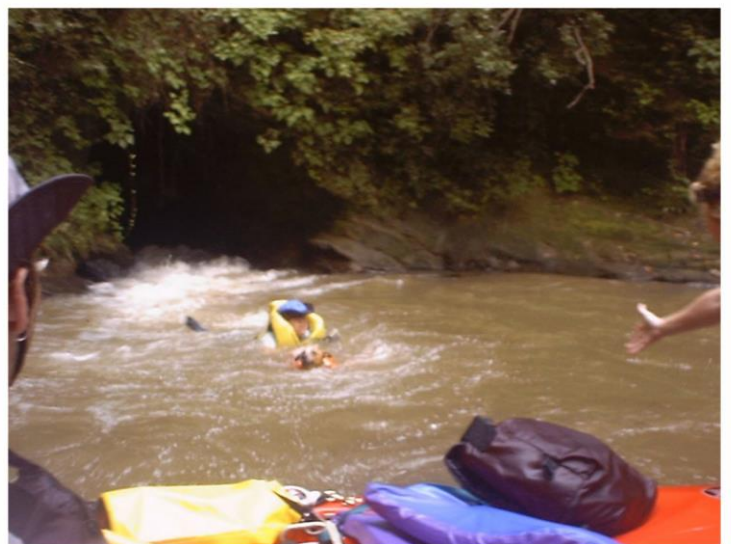
Directions: The launch is located on Kelly Bridge Road, west of Ga. 9. From the intersection of Ga. 400 and Ga. 369 north of Cumming, turn left on Ga. 369 (Browns Bridge Road) and proceed one mile to Ga. 9. Turn right and proceed 6.2 miles to A.T. Moore Road on left. Turn left on A.T. Moore Road and proceed 0.7 mile where A.T. Moore merges with Govan Road to become Kelly Bridge Road. Proceed from here 5.5 miles to Etowah River. Launch area will be on your right after the bridge.



*Entrance to Tunneling for Gold  
passage through the river bend on  
the Etowah River*

*Mine Tunnel and how not to  
exit (Shari and Shiloh 2003)*

*Photo credit unknown*



Below is a letter that the NSS sent out April 1 in its electronic newsletter. Coincident with that, the letter will be published on the NSS' WNS page, and on the NSS' social media. We appreciate the coordination of many NSS volunteers in getting the word out.

In addition to the letter, we are asking NSS members so inclined to contact their U.S Senators and Representatives to ask them to contact Secretaries Zinke and Perdue in support of the NSS letter. We hope you will do so, and feel free to add any particular local examples of how the closure and decon policies have been counterproductive to cave and bat conservation.

**The NSS' letter to Secretaries Zinke and Perdue will have more impact if the Secretaries also hear from Senators and Representatives that they would like to see them address the WNS cave closure policies. If you, as NSS members, contact your Senators and Representatives and ask them to contact the Secretaries and support the NSS' letter, that will help greatly. Cabinet officials prioritize responses to those politicians currently in office, so your asking your congressional delegation to support the NSS' letter will make this effort stronger. Thank you.**

**How to contact your U.S. Senators: [https://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](https://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)**

**How to contact your U.S. Representatives: <https://www.house.gov/representatives>**

Honorable \_\_\_\_\_,

As you know, the NSS has been intimately involved with the discovery and response to WNS since its arrival. We led in getting critical early research funded and carried out, and have assisted in many related efforts along the way. It has been a struggle on many levels, straining relationships in some cases, but all with the goals of cave and bat conservation foremost in mind.

At the 2016 NSS Convention in Ely, Nevada, the NSS Board of Governors adopted the following statement:

"The National Speleological Society supports recent published statements by Merlin D. Tuttle, Ph.D., entitled "White-Nose Syndrome: Origin, Impact and Management" (May 1, 2016) and "A Turning Point in Saving Bats from WNS" (June 7, 2016). Dr. Tuttle recommends focusing resources on helping survivors of WNS rebuild resistant populations and also protection from disturbance, especially during hibernation. Future research should "First, do no harm" and be minimally invasive. Emphasis should be on electronic monitoring in summer habitats to evaluate efficacy of conservation activities and to credibly support threatened and endangered listings. Cooperation with local, regional and national agencies to fully evaluate cave closure status should be an ongoing effort and, where possible, access to caves should be restored. Cavers are a critical resource to evaluating the health of bat populations and should be more fully utilized."

At the 2017 NSS Convention in Rio Rancho, New Mexico, those of us in attendance were inspired by Merlin Tuttle's keynote address during the Friday Awards Banquet, calling for a change in the policies and a renewing of the strong relationship with the organized caving community - which has proven time and again to be critical to cave and bat conservation and the protection and enjoyment of natural resources, both private and public.

We hope the letter and follow up action will be the next step in accomplishing exactly that. Personally, I hope we make enough noise to finally spur action - perhaps a meeting between the Secretaries, for starters, where we can discuss many more examples in detail (Hubbard, Wyandotte, Fern, Fort Stanton, NCRC, etc.)

In any event, thank you for your input, patience, and support.

Sincerely,

Peter Youngbaer

# Quintana Roo

*By Kyle Lassiter*

Over New Years 2018, while most of North America was stuck in an unusually long and impressive deep freeze, a few cavers from TAG were caving in the tropics! Specifically, we were in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, on the Yucatán peninsula, most famously known for the tourist hot spots of Cancun, Cozumel, and Playa del Carmen. The peninsula is very flat with an elevation near sea level and is completely comprised of limestone and other carbonate rocks. Due to high rainfall and its proximity to the Caribbean Sea there is extensive cave development, with both dry and water-filled passages present. There is no surface water anywhere in the region, other than in collapsed cave passages and sinkholes called cenotes. These beautiful karst features were vital to the ancient Mayan people who lived in the Yucatán as it was their only source of water. Today cenotes are still used for water supplies but are also host to a thriving ecotourism industry up and down the east coast of the Yucatán. Tourists flock to these cenotes year-round to swim and snorkel in the comfortably cool and naturally clear, blue waters.

While cenotes are the most visible sign of karst here, there are many miles of cave development connecting these cenotes through dry, wet, and underwater passages. In general, the caves are formed from the slow draining of rainwater from the interior of the peninsula out to the sea. On topographic overlays, the cave systems resemble a dendritic river network. While the overall vertical development of the caves is very little due to the proximity of the sea, there are several levels. The deeper and now water-filled passages were generally formed when sea levels were lower and have now been flooded by the higher sea levels of modern times. The highest passages often have only a couple feet of overburden, and thus there are usually many entrances and sometimes you can cave for quite a distance without ever needing a light. Tree roots

penetrating the ceilings of these passages are a common sight. Peter Sprouse of Texas, along with many local cavers and cavers from around the world like ourselves, have been traveling to this area for over 10 years now in an effort to explore and survey the labyrinth of caves, and perhaps ultimately connect many of them. For example, recently a big connection occurred when divers joined Dos Ojos and Sac Actun underwater caves to make a combined Sac Actun system, now the 2<sup>nd</sup> longest known cave in the world. Sistema Ox Bel Ha, the world's 4<sup>th</sup> longest known cave, is also in Quintana Roo. Additional exploration may ultimately yield more very long cave systems.

My girlfriend Rebecca McNabb and I flew to Cancun on December 28<sup>th</sup> and were picked up by Chattanooga caver Marty Abercrombie, who had arrived a couple days earlier. We had a little trouble figuring out where the arrivals pick-up line was, but soon enough we were on our way south along the main coastal highway towards our destination, Paamul. Paamul is a gated beachside community inhabited primarily by expats and Americans, and several American cavers own dwellings there called palapas. Palapas are large covered spaces with no exterior walls, that were intended for camper trailers to be parked under during visits. However, most of the palapas have been modified to have enclosed living spaces, bathrooms, electricity, etc., making it feel a lot like a normal home under a tall thatched roof. Our gracious host was Texas caver Linda Palit, who charmed us with caving stories from all over and her two dogs. We were tired from our travels, so we went to bed quickly to be ready for caving the next day.

Our first day of caving started like most others over the next 10 days, with breakfast at the nearby taco restaurant Arbolitos. The food was outstanding with several dozen fillings and toppings to choose from. Marty and I loved it enough to make us think about

opening one up in Chattanooga! We met a few other cavers here and then drove out into the jungle on a dirt road to our first site, Nohoch Aktun. Maya for "Big Cave," we were there on special permission arranged by Peter with the new leasers of the property, who were working on developing it into a primitive commercial cave. Many caves in this region have been commercialized to take advantage of the available tourism dollars. This cave lived up to its name as its main trunk passage dimensions were quite spacious, over 100 feet wide and 25 feet high. We entered the cave through one large surface collapse, and with three teams surveying mapped upstream through a second large collapse and into continuing borehole to unknown entrances beyond. There were extensive thick calcite rafts on all the water in the cave. The sides of the main passage were a watery maze of columns with four to eight foot ceiling heights. Our teams worked in these mazes most of the day, and our sketchers really struggled trying to draw cave that seemed to have no walls! We surveyed many loops around large columns to help discern where the true wall of the passage was, an experience none of us from TAG had ever dealt with before. There were plenty of formations to admire here and at most of the other caves we visited, thanks to the thin roofs overhead allowing plenty of rainwater into the caves. We called it quits a little early on this day so we could drive back to the nearby town of Puerto Aventuras to hear a presentation about cave diving resources for rescues beyond sumps, at the local dive shop called "Zero Gravity." Several of these dive shops exist in this region, as the crystal clear warm waters provide world class diving and cave diving opportunities. Peter Sprouse has made good connections with the local cave divers, and now some of them help on surveying in the dry caves that they had been overlooking before. Believe it or not, Peter said that he has had to convince some cave divers that dry caves were even caves at all!

The next day we tried to return to Nohoch Aktun, but were turned away by a different group of people there

who didn't seem satisfied with the permissions we had acquired yesterday. So instead we drove back down the gravel road a short distance to a friendlier site, called Cenote Media Luna (Half Moon Cenote). When we pulled in we were greeted by a herd of dogs, including several rare Mexican hairless dogs. The land-owners were very friendly and already knew Peter, so they let us work on whatever caves we wanted to on their property. We initially walked a short distance to an entrance into the cave system Cueva Culebron, rough translation to "Little Snake Cave". Several dogs followed us into the entrance and hung out for a while. Ultimately Rebecca and Peter went to survey in other new entrances nearby, while Marty and I grabbed the main lead left from a prior survey trip and took off. Two researchers from Texas A&M University, Rachel and Jason, were with us today and many other days as well, studying the tree roots that are commonly seen in these caves. Cueva Culebron was especially prolific in tree roots, sometimes obscuring the passageway beyond. This cave ended up being a fair bit smaller than the quite large Nohoch Aktun but was still very pleasant. It was completely dry, and our lead was a significant wide and well decorated passage with multiple sky light entrances. The ceiling was not very high, and we did a fair bit of stooping and crawling in between standing sections. We left significant going passage when we exited around 5pm. We ate at a very American-style microbrewery restaurant called Cancun Beer Co., in the nearby city of Playa del Carmen. Unfortunately they were out of most of their microbrews! Thankfully they had a chance at redemption later in our trip.

On New Years Eve we suffered through another warm pleasant day with highs in the low 80s while TAG was enjoying 10 degree weather. Marty, Rebecca, and I took the day off from caving to visit some Mayan ruins, first in Cobá and then Muyil. Cobá is located on the edge of a large shallow lake which allegedly has child-eating crocodiles in it, about an hour inland from the coast. We went early in the morning to avoid the crowds of the holiday weekend. We definitely beat



the crowds and literally had the place almost to ourselves for the first two hours of our visit. Today was the last day they were allowing visitors to climb the steps up to the top of Nohoch Mul ("Big Mound"), the big pyramid at the back of the site. It was probably 200 feet high and only cleared on one side, showing what the jungle had done to the site before restoration. The view from the top was worth the sweat to climb up it. We then toured the rest of the site, noticing chechem trees immediately adjacent to the trails. Chechem trees have a highly poisonous black sap that make poison ivy seem like a day at the park. I enjoyed Grupo Macanxoc, a separate cluster of ruins at the end of a sacbe (ancient Mayan road) adjacent to a marshy area and covered with many enormous trees. We then drove to the ruins in Muyil, south of the city of Tulum closer to the coast, in the afternoon. Muyil is well maintained like a park and is a UNESCO site. There were a few interesting ruins there and not many people. We paid an extra fee to walk a boardwalk out to the nearby lake, stopping halfway to climb a wooden observation tower. We also went into a short one-room cave next to some ruins by the trail. By this point we were tired from our tours, so we returned to Paamul and spent the rest of the afternoon on the beach with Linda and her two dogs, Lilly and Ixchel. Lilly entertained us immensely chasing pelicans in the ocean; she only has three legs and thus loves to swim more than anything! We ate dinner on the streetside patio at Mr. Trompo's restaurant in Puerto Aventuras (no relation to President Trump), a local favorite of our group that we ate at more times than I can count. Tonight we enjoyed a bottle of local Mezcal (an agave-based liquor like tequila) together, and then Marty and I headed to the beach to ring in 2018 by watching fireworks go off from the resorts on the neighboring island of Cozumel 15 miles offshore. Now that is a unique way to start a new year!

Our first cave of 2018 was at the nearby Kantun-Chi Ecopark, a well-developed cenote park. Peter had arranged with the owners for us to start mapping their

caves, and this was the first such visit. After getting a tour of the grounds and their five cenotes, we went to work mapping in their main cenote of the same name. The water was about 20 feet deep and overhung completely by the cave roof with a few skylights drilled through it. We were going to map a nearby dry section of the cave that was on their tour route first for them, but they kept delaying us while they were giving tours until the day had passed us by. Instead our three survey teams focused on other passages leading off from the cenote. Rebecca spent much of her day mapping the cenote itself from a kayak! Marty and I surveyed into a relatively tight water crawl lead that soon opened up into nicer passage. It was a typically wide passage with a moderately low ceiling and a variety of columns and formations, and a couple feet of water to wade through at all times. One side passage was very pretty with extensive stalactites that we took time to photograph. As usual we called our day around 5pm so we would have enough time to drink beer and eat tacos; this is vacation after all!

The next few days of our trip were remarkably cool for tropical standards, with highs in the 70s and lows around 60 with low humidity, thanks to the frozen tundra of the eastern US oozing southward. This made the jungle feel cool and comfortable compared to some of the caves we went to for the next few days, an odd juxtaposition compared to the normally sweltering jungle. One day a large group of us joined some cave divers from all over the world for a return trip to Cenote Media Luna to keep mapping the caves there. Marty and I returned to Cueva Culebron and surveyed all the way out to a large surface collapse which ended the cave. On the other side of the collapse the cave system continued, but since there was no dripline between the two entrances they are considered separate caves. At some point on our trips into this cave we must have laid in some sand that had tiny sand fleas in them, as over the next few days we became covered in bites that gradually became red and very itchy, lasting for many weeks and driving

us nuts. Even though we never saw them or felt them bite us, I will certainly be wearing bug spray next time I go into these caves!

On my birthday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>, Marty headed back to the US while the rest of us went to Santuario de los Guerreros (Sanctuary of the Warriors), a property with several impressive caves on it. The primary one was well decorated with higher ceilings than I was used to at this point and was totally dry. One of the dogs that lived there followed us well into the dark zone of the cave and hung out with us while we were surveying for quite a while. We eventually named it “BQ299”, after it hung out next to that survey station for a while. We also worked on connecting two caves next to and under the bathhouse but missed doing so by only about one meter of surface collapse. So it goes sometimes! We ate at Cancun Beer Co. again, and this time they had their microbrew Imperial Stout for me to enjoy. The next day American cavers Jen Foote and Kevin Manley joined our group, and we worked on sketching in Cenote Socorro and La Cola. These two caves were in remote jungle past the squatters village of San Carlos, that somehow got recognized by a government official and now even has a grand welcome sign. However, the residents only “possess” the land, they don’t “own” it, as indicated on the road signs seen at each parcel. Being farther inland, these two caves have more overburden, and thus have bigger passages with less entrances than the caves we had been surveying near the coast. They were also brutally hot and humid, as the fewer entrances reduced air-flow and trapped hot air in the caves. I’ve never sweated so hard standing still sketching in my life! I was glad to exit the cave into the cool jungle air. So cool, in fact, that the next morning’s low of 57 had all the locals shivering and remarking how it was almost record cold for the area. Felt pretty good to me!

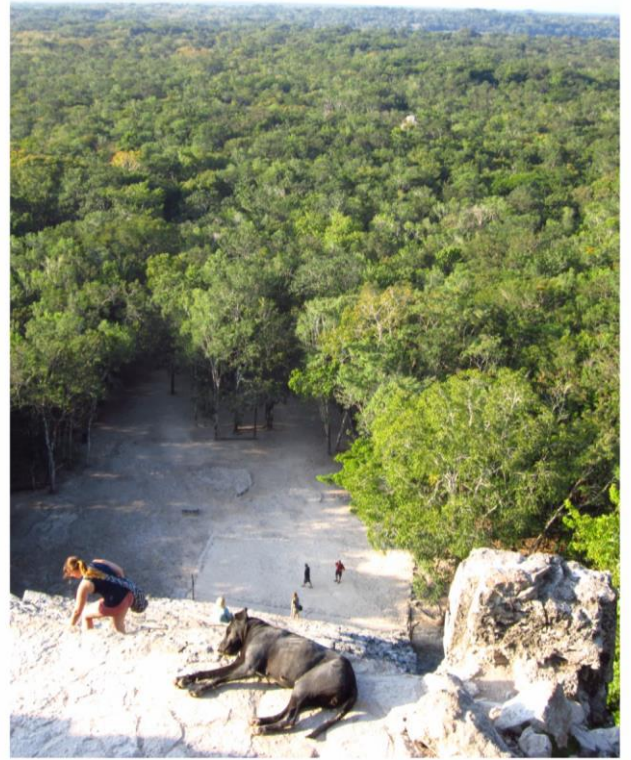
Our last two caving days were spent in the Jaguar cave system, an extremely nice system with four major segments that nearly but don’t quite connect. Peter has worked in this system extensively over the years since it is across the street from Paamul, and some of you

may have seen his presentations or writings on this work at prior NSS conventions and articles. Much of the nice part of Jaguar is walking passage with flat sandy floors and numerous entrances that really preclude the need for a light sometimes. The Mayans used this cave system often, as evidenced by rock animal traps and rock walls built for defense that remain to this day. We mapped in the Jaguar Maw cave primarily, in dry sandy crawling and walking passages. The numerous skylight entrances around our survey area kept the cave nice and breezy with fresh air, for very comfortable surveying. However, like in Nohoch Aktun, there were plenty of columns which challenged my sketching ability to the max! On our last day in Paamul we surveyed just a half day so we could have some more beach and beer time, and lament the plight of our frozen friends to the north.

Before we flew home, Rebecca and I spent our last day on a guided evening tour of Chichén Itzá, the most significant and famous Mayan site on the peninsula. Other than the uncomfortable two-hour ride in the back of a van across the featureless terrain of the Yucatán, Rebecca and I had a great time. Our tour guide was very enthusiastic, albeit we lost a little in translation. We arrived at the site just before sunset after the day’s crowds had left, giving us an unfettered view of Kukulcan, aka El Castillo, the main pyramid there which is one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World. It is built above and completely covers a sacred cenote. The Ball Grounds here are also the biggest in Mesoamerica. At night, Kukulcan and the other structures in the main plaza are illuminated with lights of varying colors, making for a surreal experience. Hundreds of iPods were available for self-guided tours, which we found extremely helpful. The grand finale was a light show on the side of Kukulcan. It lasted about 30 minutes and detailed the story of the Mayan people at Chichén Itzá and the history of Kukulcan. I recommend this evening tour to anyone who plans to visit Chichén Itzá. What a great way to end our adventure in Quintana Roo!



*Kyle Lassiter atop wooded observation tower near Muyil*



*View from the top of Nohoch Mul*



*Nohoch Mul in Coba*

*Photo credits: Kyle Lassiter.*

*Below unknown*

*Our survey crews at Kantun Chi:  
Marty, Kyle, Rebecca, and others.*







Photo by Marty Abercrombie

*Kyle admiring formations in Kantum Chi*



Photo by Kyle Lassiter

*Howling Man petroglyph in the Jaguar Cave system*



Photo by K.L.

*Mayan animal trap in Jaguar Paw*



Photo by Rebecaa McNabb

*Kyle in an interesting solution feature in Jaguar Paw*



Photo by R.M.

*Survey dog BQ299 in Ruta de los Guerreros cave*



Photo by M.A.

*Rebecca McNabb surveying Kantum Chi in a kayak*





*Light show on Kukulcan*



*Paamul beach*



*Linda Palit's palapa in Paamul*



*Chichen Itza illuminated at night*

*Photos by Kyle Lassiter*

# *Floyd Collins Crystal Cave*

*by Shari Lydy*

I finally made it back to a Speleofest at Lone Star Preserve over Memorial Day. If you have never been there, LSP is near Bonnieville, KY and is a great place, consisting of 128 acres of woodlands with facilities owned and developed by the Louisville Grotto. This year at Speleofest, there was a very special cave trip offered to Floyd Collins Crystal Cave. Everyone who was preregistered for Speleofest was entered into a drawing to fill 30 spots for a trip into Crystal Cave led by Bill Napper, John Benton, and Stan Sides who are all fountains of lore about Floyd Collins. The trip was on Saturday and the lucky winners names were posted Friday evening. I was jumping up and down and whooping and hollering when I saw my name on the list. We had to confirm our spot on the trip by midnight and then any vacancies were filled with a waiting list from the first drawing. It's amazing that half the people whose names were drawn in the first round didn't confirm, because this was really the trip of a lifetime. Crystal Cave became a part of Mammoth Cave National Park in 1923 and the only way you get into cave is to be a member of the Cave Research Foundation. Anyway, others not showing up for the trip was very lucky for my friends Steve Warren, Pamela Rough, and Bruce -- who made it onto the trip from the waiting list.

Unfortunately Floyd Collins is most remembered as being trapped in Sand Cave for 2 weeks and not for his discovery of the highly decorated Great Crystal Cave. Several books written about him as well as the VCR tape "The Story of Floyd Collins" which is the story of the attempted rescue of Floyd Collins from Sand Cave told through two screenplays aired by NBC in the 'fifties. There is "trapped", the classic book written by Robert Murray and Roger Brucker in 1979 that chronicled the ordeal to rescue Floyd from Sand Cave and the media circus surrounding the

rescue attempt that became the most sensational news event of the times. But first a little history about the area and events that ultimately led to Floyd Collins discovering Crystal Cave and later getting trapped in Sand Cave.

Mammoth Cave was discovered in 1797 and mined for saltpeter during the War of 1812. After the war, the demand for saltpeter started declining and Mammoth Cave began to be exploited as a tourist attraction. Tourism at the cave didn't really take off until 1938 when a rustic lodge, The Mammoth Cave Inn" was built and a freed slave, Stephen Bishop, became the most famous cave explorer and guide in Mammoth Cave. Gradually more tourists came to Mammoth Cave via expansion of steamboat traffic, connecting stage coach lines, and completion of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad to the cave entrance.

The Civil War hurt tourism at Mammoth Cave, but there was a revival in 1886 when a narrow gauge spur of the L&N Railroad was built right up to the entrance of Mammoth Cave. This was known as the Mammoth Cave Railroad and ran 9 miles from Glasgow Junction (now Cave City) to the cave entrance. As an old timer said, "God gave Texas oil and Kentucky Mammoth Cave. But he should have stopped when he finished and not made all those others."

. Country folks living in the karst lands of central Kentucky knew of many holes and small caves on their land and used them as safe havens from storms, to cool their food, and to hide moonshine stills. As Mammoth Cave became financially successful, people saw that money could be made from caves, so hunting and developing them became a sideline to farming in the "uplands" where soil was poor and rocky. Thus started the cave wars in which locals were looking for a show cave of their own to



siphon off tourists from Mammoth Cave. Mammoth Cave was located on Mammoth Cave Ridge which was separated from Flint Ridge by narrow Houchins Valley. Salts Cave was discovered on Flint Ridge in 1875 and was plundered for native American artifacts and possibly mummified remains. In 1895, Colossal Cavern with 2.5 miles of passage was found on the south flank of Flint Ridge and the L&N Railroad acquired it for themselves. Their motivation was to find a connection to Mammoth Cave, which they thought might have passage close to Colossal Cave. Unknown Cave was discovered a mile and a half north of Colossal but neither cave connected with Mammoth. There was a lot of trespassing and secret cave searching and exploring going on.

During 1910-20, engineers and surveyors were hired by landowners in the area who speculated that Mammoth, Colossal, Salts, and Unknown might yet be connected. Enter Floyd Collins, who had given up farming for caving fulltime. A civil engineer named Edmund Turner boarded with the Collins family along with other landowners on Flint Ridge, convincing them to let him explore their land. Great Onyx Cave was discovered by Edmunds in 1915 and was quickly commercialized but there was controversy about the property boundaries and whose land passages might be underneath. Lots of outsiders and locals were digging holes everywhere hoping to break into new caves. In 1921, a new entrance was found to Mammoth Cave and this was located in between the entrance to Mammoth and Glasgow Junction which ignited ridgewalking in the area. Thus began the cave wars.

The Collins farm was on Flint Ridge, with Buzzard Cave known on their property and Salts Cave a mile away. Edmund Turner hired Floyd as a Salts Cave guide and Floyd got cave fever when Turner discovered Great Onyx Cave, which was west just down the ridge from the Collins farm. During WWI, Floyd was exploring caves or mining onyx. On a cold winter day in 1916-17, times were tough and Floyd was setting traps for

animals and noticed that one of his traps disappeared into a depression in which he discovered a blowing crevice. He started digging away and discovered a crawlway two feet in diameter and after 2 weeks, broke into a room 65 feet high encrusted with gypsum flowers, some of which were 18 inches long. Floyd called his discovery Wonder Cave but was convinced by a neighbor to rename it Crystal Cave. Thus the Collins family officially entered the cave wars. Unfortunately Crystal Cave was far off the beaten track, reached by an almost impassable road and 4.5 miles down the highway beyond Mammoth. Although Crystal Cave was highly decorated and beautiful, the Collins family didn't have much luck luring tourists to the cave because it was the last stop on the central Kentucky "cave route."

Floyd had a reputation for fearless caving exploits that we would consider reckless and dangerous today, but his family was used to his solo caving and long absences. One time his lantern went out in lower passages of Crystal Cave and he ultimately found his way out in the dark after 18 hours. He pushed passages where no sane person would go, similar to modern day "cavers". Crystal Cave was marginally profitable from 1918-1924, So Floyd negotiated with three of his neighbors to look for holes on their properties. He ultimately discovered Sand Cave down the road from the New Entrance to Mammoth which put it first on the road between Mammoth and New Glasgow. The name Sand Cave was a misnomer because it was narrow twisting crack leading downward at the back of an overhanging rock shelter, bounded by blocks of limestone with talus mud and rock fill. Floyd corkscrewed his way downward through crumbling passage, but only told his brother Homer about it. Homer warned Floyd "that holes a bad one and you'll get caught in there". Floyd later had a dream that he was trapped by rock fall and rescued by angels. At the beginning of the third week, he used dynamite to blast in the passage and brought out some stalagmites as proof that he had discovered bigger cave fur-

ther below. The next morning Floyd was eating breakfast with his neighbor Bee Doyle who owned the property. Doyle tried to warn Floyd that he thought the cave too risky and that they should give up the project. Floyd said "this thing will turn out. I jes know it" and off he went to Sand Cave, on the morning of that fateful day in January 30, 1925. When Floyd didn't show up a day later, Doyle, Edward Estes and his 17 year old son Jewell went to Sand Cave looking for him. Doyle and Estes got as far as the first squeeze and gave up. Jewell was not a caver but he was slender so he squeezed and twisted his way down to just before the final squeeze where he heard a faint cry from Floyd that he was hung up, to get some tools, and that he was cold and hungry.

A media circus and unruly crowds of curiosity seekers and onlookers congregated outside Sand Cave as Floyd lay trapped for 2 weeks. Floyd's brother Homer and reporter Skeets Miller made several attempts to dig Floyd out from the tight, wet miserable, body sized, downward sloping body-sized passage, bringing him food and water, between bouts of exhaustion until the situation seemed hopeless. After other ill-planned and half-hearted rescue attempts were conceived by self-appointed "experts" and failed, Floyd died after being trapped 2 weeks. His body was left in place for several months because no one could get to him from the original passageway or via an excavated parallel shaft that rockfall in the passage below Floyd.

Now to the trip into Floyd Collins Crystal Cave. On Saturday morning, we met at the pavilion at Spelofest and caravanned from LSP to the old Collins homestead, which is gated and within the boundary of Mammoth Cave National Park. Pam Rough rode with me. We parked at the site of the old Collins homestead. Bill Napper, John Benton, and Stan Sides spent about 45 minutes telling us about the history of the Collins farm and house and how Floyd found Crystal Cave. Then we followed a trail down through the woods a few minutes from the Collins house where we descended down a 20 foot deep rocky sink and into the cave entrance that was gated with a large iron door. Originally the roof of the dug entrance was blasted and the de-

bris used to fill in a pit just inside the entrance to make a level walkway. Stepping through the gate led into a totally excavated room 50 feet long x 20 feet wide x 15 feet tall. There is a rusted out remnant of Floyd's metal coffin barely visible amongst rocks on the left. From this room, we passed through two narrow, walking passages that were excavated through breakdown by the Collins brothers. This passage intersected Grand Canyon Avenue, a chamber 200 feet high, 100 feet wide, and 800 feet long that loses about 150 feet in elevation down to a flat area where Floyd's glass topped coffin and tombstone were originally located. We were told how Floyd's body was stolen from his coffin and the body disposed of over a cliff near the Green River on the Collin's property, then recovered, except for one leg.

From this point, facing into the cave, the Grapevine passage that ends in big wet breakdown and 2 pits was on our left, while we continued on to the right toward Sally's Room, and past the State Monuments and Valley of Decision. We followed the trail up and down, between boulders and breakdown, with walls coated in varying amounts of white to dusty gypsum and crystal flowers, to a big slump in the floor with huge limestone slabs known as the Devil's kitchen. . Unfortunately, a lot of the gypsum crusts and flowers were removed from the walls, when Floyd owned the cave as well as after his death. This route is collectively known as the Gypsum Route and continued about 1.7 miles. There was more crystal and gypsum, a rock cairn built by Floyd, and several other named formations and landmarks named by Floyd on the old commercial route such as Sea Turtle Crystal Spring, Animal Figures, Christmas Tree, Crystal Ledge, Crystal Palace, Frost Room, and Rose Garden. We continued on to Scotchman's Trap, which was pushed by Floyd and led to the lower reaches of Crystal Cave. The Cave Research Foundation C3 expedition in 1954 connected Crystal Cave to Roppel Cave via a tough 15 hour trip and rediscovery of Floyd's Lost Passage below Scotchman's Trap. We were in the cave about 3.5 hours and turned around at this point. Back at the intersection in the

Grand Canyon Avenue where Floyd's coffin used to be, anyone who wanted to could follow the trail upward 150 vertical feet to the Helictite Route. This passage was originally filled almost to the ceiling with clay and rocks and was excavated 5-6 feet tall by 2-3 feet wide for over a mile by Floyd. Floyd's wheelbarrow was still recognizable near the start of the Helictite Route. The abundance and variety of helictites was awesome. I turned around after 20 minutes and headed back to the entrance. It was mind boggling to me to have essentially walked with the spirit of Floyd Collins in Crystal Cave.

Outside, John and Bill led us to the Mammoth Cave Baptist Church and cemetery where several members of the Collins family are buried. This was also the final resting spot for Floyd after the family wanted a decent burial for him after his body was stolen from Crystal Cave. We stood at his gravestone and marveled at his life and times.

From here, we followed the road out past the Mammoth Cave Visitor's Center and decided to drive into Horse Cave and visit the Hidden River museum which also has an extensive collection of Floyd Collins memorabilia and vintage newspaper articles about Crystal Cave, and particularly about Floyd being trapped in

Sand Cave. We didn't have time to tour Hidden River cave but the sinkhole is about 3 stories deep. You can take the elevator down to the entrance for the commercial cave trip or pay to Tyrolian across the sinkhole or rappel down to the entrance.

Then it was back to Bonnieville and LSP. Getting into Crystal Cave was a once in a lifetime opportunity for me since you need connections in high places to gain access now, and that special permission is very hard to come by. I wish we would have had time to check out the entrance of Sand Cave on park property. In 1977, Bruker and other CRF cavers were granted permission by Mammoth Cave National Park to cut through the gate at Sand Cave, with the purpose to explore, map, analyze, document artifacts, and reconstruct how Floyd Collins became trapped and try to determine if rescue was possible in 1925. Even by caving standards now, Sand Cave remains a horror hole. My next trip to the Mammoth Cave, I'll go look at the entrance to Sand Cave and contemplate the agony experienced by Floyd as he laid trapped and dying alone for several days, in agony and darkness without a human touch or even a human voice to offer some comfort. I will also remember him as the Greatest Cave Explorer for his daring exploration and commercialization of Crystal Cave.

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*John Benton and Bill Napper—our tour guides*

*Collins Homestead near Crystal Cave*



*Entrance to Crystal Cave*

*Pamela Rough entering the dug entrance of Crystal Cave*



*Floyd Collin's original casket in Crystal Cave*







*Grand Canyon Passage drops down*



*Gypsum Passage*



*Gypsum*



*Gypsum flowers*



*Rock Christmas tree  
stacked by Floyd Collins*

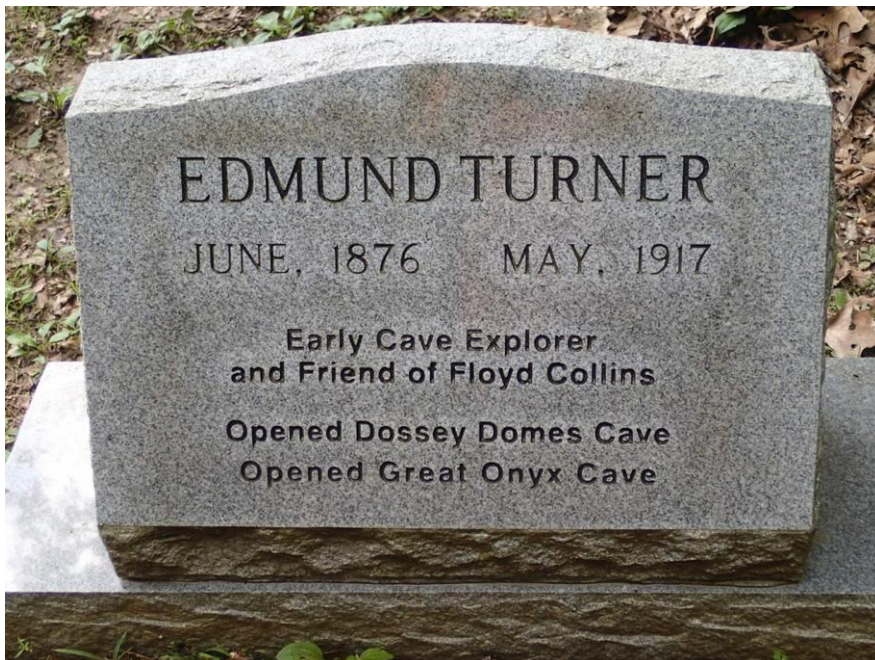


*Dug way to Heliictite Passage*





*Floyd Collins Headstone at the cemetery  
next to the Mammoth Cave Baptist  
Church*



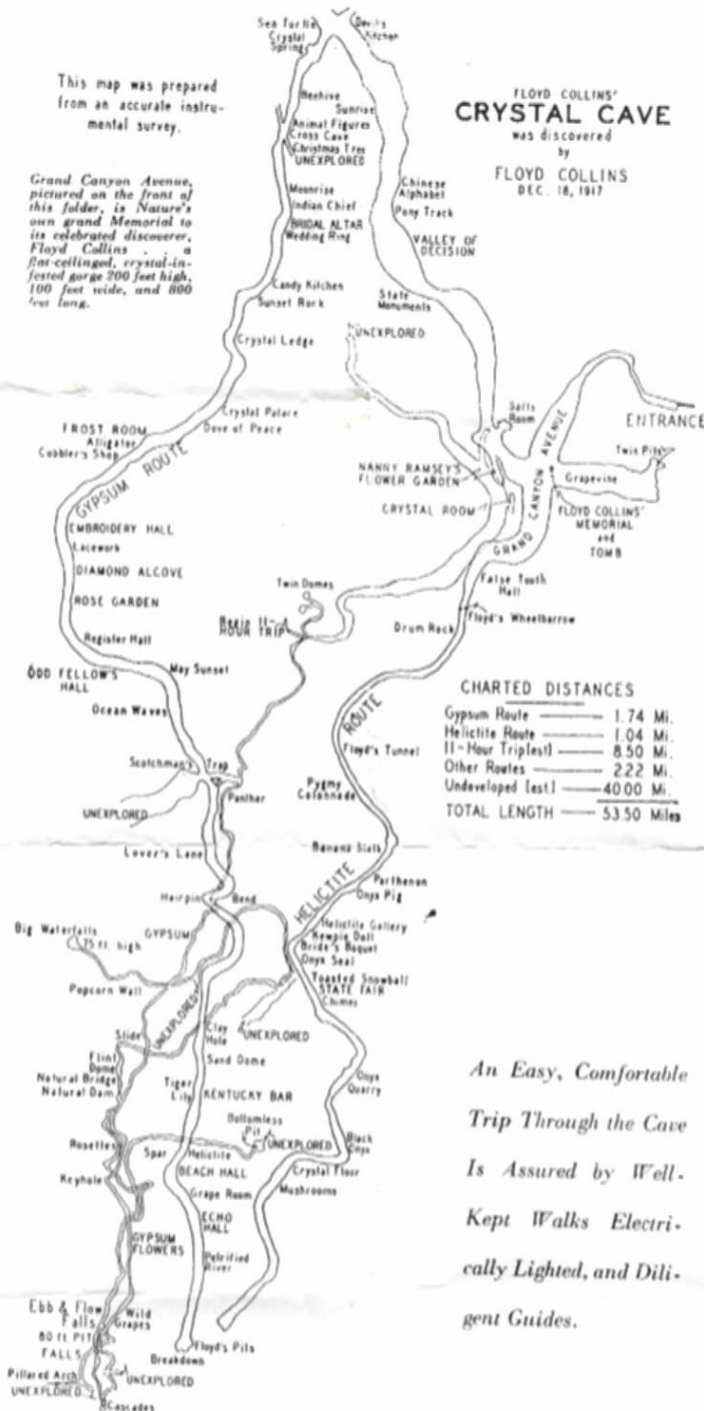
Discoverer of Great Onyx Cave and

This map was prepared from an accurate instrumental survey.

Grand Canyon Avenue, pictured on the front of this folder, is Nature's own grand Memorial to its celebrated discoverer, Floyd Collins - a flat-ceilinged, crystal-infested gorge 200 feet high, 100 feet wide, and 800 feet long.

# CRYSTAL CAVE

FLOYD COLLINS' was discovered by FLOYD COLLINS DEC. 18, 1917



An Easy, Comfortable  
Trip Through the Cave  
Is Assured by Well-  
Kept Walks Electrically  
Lighted, and Diligent  
Guides.



## Yellow Jacket Pit

By Ann Grindle

On a bitter cold January 13, I left our house to meet Doug Strait in Monteagle. Stephen Collins was to meet us in Altamont and John down at the church on Northcutt Cove road. As I drove on Stagecoach road, I sure wondered about my choice of vehicle.... icy conditions after a little snow overnight. Would Northcutt cove road be treated with salt? Would I get down there in my Toyota? Luck was with us and that road was fine. Whew!

We suited up and headed to Yellow Jacket Pit, and left coats, hats and gloves in a plastic bag up top, near the pit entrance. WE all wanted to be the first one down, into the warm cave, since it was currently windy and 18 degrees! I got the honors, and oh how the warmth was welcome!

Our goal was to explore an upper lead that Blaine, Leslie, and I had seen on a previous trip. Took me a little while to find the second pit, but soon we all got down that small, corkscrew shaped pit. Left our gear and toured the area to the left, where there is a hanger for a 30 foot drop that leads to a dead end room (we discovered on our last trip). Went back past our gear and into the main , large passage. Soon we came to the possible upper passage. Rocks were stacked there, to assist someone in getting up there, but it just was not high enough for us to safely get up. Doug gallantly offered his shoulder for me to stand upon. And I found some decent handholds and got up there! Went left and after some up and down mud deposits and a 30 foot crawl, I came to a little opening on my left and I popped my head into there and I could see the rope and our gear! So we now had a way to get up into this new area without the sketchy climb up. I hollered to everyone and turned around and went back through the crawl and stepped across the sketchy climb-up ( a little hairy!) and into some canyon passage that kept going. Soon, John was behind me. It was twisty and solutioned and slender and came to a low crawl. But after a body length, it was standing again. Kept going! Saw two stacked rock piles, so it was not virgin. Another short crawl, then standup again. Passage probably went for 400 feet. And was still going, when I turned around at yet another low spot. John and I went back through and soon joined Doug and Stephen. Doug was interested in seeing

where we had gone, and I wanted to see if there was more where I turned around. Turns out I was very near a dead end when I had decided to leave! But we chimneyed up to look at the passage above and it was



*Gear coated with mud from Yellow Jacket*

simply a higher route of what we toured below.

I took everyone to see the rest of the big passage. Saw some pretties and went to the end. Not as much passage as I had remembered. I offered a tour through the main cave passage, but several had had their fill. Another time.... We got out of the cave and it was still bitter cold. Hurriedly dressed and had our after cave beverage and headed home





**Kristine pays up**

