

# T.A.G. GAWWOT



Sewanee Mountain Grotto  
Volume 6 Issue 1



## TAG Caver ~ Volume 6 Issue 1

### **Spring 2015**

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 editors for more information on the location of our next meeting. You may also visit our website at <http://www.caves.org/grotto/sewaneemountaingrotto/>

#### **2015 Sewanee Mtn Grotto Officers:**

Chairperson: Jason Hardy  
Vice Chair & Programs: Kristine Ebrey  
Treasurer: Blaine Grindle  
Secretary: Bambi Dunlap  
Member at Large: Hali Steinman  
Conservation Chair: MaureenHandler  
Survey Chair: Ben Miller  
Webmaster: Tina O'Hailey

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Email articles and photos for submissions to one of our editors. Content may include articles/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.



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Jennifer Denton  
playing around  
in the waterfall  
in Gourneck  
Cave, Marion  
County, TN.  
Photo by Mendy  
Thomas.



#### **Front & Back Covers**

**Front Cover:** Jason Hardy at the entrance to Waterworks Cave, Marion County, TN. Photo by Kelly Smallwood

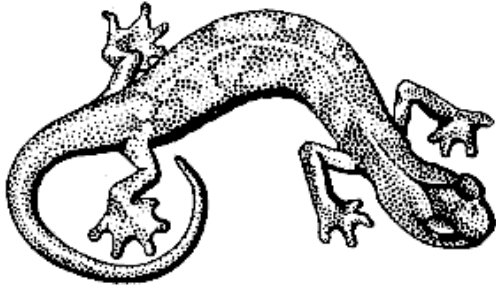
**Back Cover:** Thaddeus Arsenault playing around in the waterfall in Gourneck Cave, Marion County, TN. Photo by Mendy Thomas.

# Calendar of Upcoming Events

\*All times are CENTRAL\*

May 9, 2015 – **SMG Potluck at SERA**. There will be no meeting in May! Please contact Lynn Buffkin if you would like to participate in the Pot Luck at SERA on Saturday night during the event.

May 8-10, 2015 – **SERA Summer Cave Carnival**. (pre-registration ends March 8. Pre-registration cost \$30).  
<http://sera2015.subworks.com/>



May 22-25, 2015 – **Kentucky Speleofest**. Join the Louisville, KY Grotto for Speleofest on Memorial Day Weekend. For more information go to:  
<http://louisville.caves.org/speleofest.shtml>

June 13, 2015 – **Ropes Course & Practice**. In conjunction with the meeting there will be a ropes course the day of the June grotto meeting. It will be set up at Caver's Paradise. Please bring your own gear and lunch. It will be from 10am-5pm.

June 13, 2015 – **Sewanee Mountain Grotto Meeting** at the home of Chad Dubuisson & Juliette Rousseau. Address is 354 Wild Heart Lane, Sewanee, TN 37375. Pot Luck dinner starts at 6pm central, followed by the business at 7pm. The presentation will be on Fern Cave by Jennifer Pinkley.

June 26-28, 2015 – **Karst-O\_Rama**. Annual Caving event hosted by the Greater Cincinnati Grotto that takes place at the historic Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve. For more information go to: <http://karstorama.com/>

July 13-17, 2015 – **NSS Convention in Missouri**. Pre registration ends June 01. For more information go to: <http://nss2015.caves.org/>

## Connect with the Grotto

If you're 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.

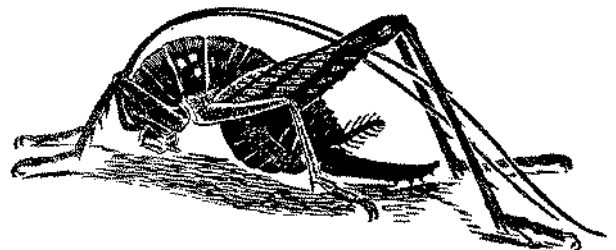


Sewanee Mountain Remailer

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](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 3" patches for \$5 and KOOZIES for \$1. Both items have our grotto logo on them. Please contact Kelly Smallwood at [rowland7840@bellsouth.net](mailto:rowland7840@bellsouth.net) to purchase.







# THE TAG SCOOP

**\*\*2015 Dues are due.** You can download an updated membership list from the Yahoo group. Membership dues are \$10. You can pay Blaine at a meeting or send them via snail mail. Send check payable to Sewanee Mountain Grotto, 669 Old Sewanee Road, Sewanee, TN 37375. Make sure to include your contact information (name, address, phone #, email address, & NSS #).

The NSS has recently launched the option to receive your monthly NSS News digitally! To opt in, please contact the NSS Office for more details.



The grotto recently recycled 999.6 pounds of Aluminum. This netted \$488.80 for the Grotto. If you are not already saving your aluminum cans, please do and make sure to drop them off at Maureen's.



*Photo by Maureen Handler*



# Russell Cave National Monument: More than just a cave

By Bob Butters - Published on [www.nooga.com](http://www.nooga.com) March 1, 2015



Tucked away in the pastoral Doran Cove at the foot of Montague Mountain, just west of Bridgeport, Alabama, and less than an hour's drive from Chattanooga, lies one of the quietest and lesser-known units of the National Park System: Russell Cave National Monument.

The oldest rock shelter regularly inhabited in the eastern U.S., Russell Cave has provided evidence of human use over thousands of years, beginning with Paleolithic spear points used for hunting mastodons, sloths and bison. From the more recent Mississippian period of 1,000 years ago, stone tools that were used in farming have been found. It is thought that during that era, the cave sheltered 15 to 30

residents at a time, who may have primarily lived in the cave during the winter and moved to villages along the Tennessee River in the summer.

The cave was named for Col. Thomas Russell, a veteran of the American Revolution who owned the property when maps were first drawn of the area in the 1800s. The first archaeological excavations were made in 1953. The National Geographic Society purchased the 314 acres in 1956, and the site was designated a national monument by President John F. Kennedy in 1961.

## The cave

A short distance from the entrance, a large spring feeds a usually-dry creek and flows into the left side of the cave. After 1.5 miles, it empties into Widow's Creek, a tributary of the Tennessee River.

Overall, the cave has 7.2 miles of passageways and five other entrances, and is the third-longest mapped cave in Alabama. Recreational caving is not allowed.

The right side of the cave is at a higher level and is basically a large room. A 0.14-mile elevated boardwalk leads from the visitors center to this part of the cave, where exhibits depict life as it was in the cave.

## A nature preserve

But Russell Cave National Monument isn't just about caves and archaeology. It's also site No. 44 on the North Alabama Birding Trail. Among the 115 species of birds identified at the cave are summer and scarlet tanagers, the yellow-billed cuckoo and wild turkeys. Most eastern species of warblers and vireos are seen during migration seasons.





*An armadillo encountered along the Ethnobotanical Trail. (Photo: Kim Butters)*

In addition to birds, white-tailed deer are common. And a couple of years ago, I ran across an armadillo while hiking on the mountainside. Park staff confirm they've seen fox squirrels, a larger species than the gray squirrel and one I rarely spot in this part of the country. A species of scorpion found in only one other known location lives in the cave, as do brown bats and northern long-eared bats. Several species of fish inhabit the cave stream. Bones have been found to indicate that porcupines and peccary once existed here.

A wide variety of plant life flourishes in the park as well. by their large cones, grow near the visitors center. Though they were once very common in the coastal plains of the

Southeast, it is estimated only 3 percent of original longleaf pine forests remain. A 2-acre native wildflower meadow is maintained near the visitors center, with spring being a good time to see wildflowers in bloom.

The paved Ethnobotanical Trail is steep in places but provides a number of benches for taking a rest. (Photo: Bob Butters)

### **Facilities and programs**

The friendly staff at the visitors center will answer questions and show a film of the story of Russell Cave on request. Ranger-guided tours of the cave, followed by demonstrations of prehistoric tools and weapons, are scheduled daily at 11 a.m. CST. You may have an opportunity to try your hand with a blowgun or, my personal favorite, the atlatl. The visitors center contains a small museum with examples of artifacts and a diorama of life in the cave. There is also a small bookstore in the corner, with a great selection of nature field guides. There are a number of picnic tables near the visitors center.

In addition to the boardwalk to the cave, there is a unique paved loop, called the Ethnobotanical Trail, on the side of Montague Mountain. The trail is an approximately 1.5-mile hike. Though short, the 500-foot climb makes it a bit strenuous. It can also be slippery when wet. The unpaved 0.15-mile Nature Trail cuts across inside the loop and provides a shorter and less strenuous option. A newer 0.32-mile trail, named for Chief Toocheater, who once owned the land as part of a 640-acre reservation, starts near the parking area and connects to the paved trail. This trail is currently unmarked, so ask park staff for more information. A trail map is available at the visitors center.



Russell Cave National Monument is open daily from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. CST, except for New Year's, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

*Bob Butters explores nature and the outdoors, primarily in and near the South Cumberland region, and publishes the blog [www.Nickajack-Naturalist.com](http://www.Nickajack-Naturalist.com).*



# Russell Cave Watershed Cleanup

We had a great turn out for the Russell Cave Watershed Cleanup on Sunday March 15, 2015. There were 26 volunteers who came out and helped clean up trash along Orme Mountain Road. The county has picked up all the trash but we do not have a total on the tonnage yet. The town of Orme provided the volunteers with Pizza after the cleanup. The next cleanup is scheduled for Sunday April 19. For more information about our cleanups or to participate, please contact the Sewanee Mountain Grotto Conservaton Chair, Maureen Handler.





# Stephens Gap Callahan Cave Preserve is open!

February 13, 2015 By Ron Miller



SCCi is excited to announce that the Stephens Gap Callahan Cave Preserve is now open for visitation! Under an access agreement with the owner of the property crossed by the hiking trail to the preserve, SCCi is now issuing permits to visit this unique place. Permit requests can be completed electronically; details are available on the SCCi Stephens Gap preserve web page. Visitors will need to complete and return a liability waiver and the Clean Caving Questionnaire with their permit request, and place the issued permit on the dashboard of your parked vehicle while you are visiting the preserve. Permit requests and questions about the permit process should be emailed to the preserve managers at [stephensgap@scci.org](mailto:stephensgap@scci.org).

As always, the SCCi has multiple opportunities to help support the recent purchase of the Stephens Gap Cave Preserve. To purchase either a slice of the 143' Vertical Entrance or a slice of the 100' walk down entrance of Stephens Gap, go here: <https://app.etapestry.com/cart/SoutheasternCaveConservancyIn/default/index.php>.

To buy a named feature of the Stephens Gap Cave, go to:

<https://app.etapestry.com/cart/SoutheasternCaveConservancyIn/default/category.php?ref=1290.0.18918585>

Stephens Gap is one of the most beloved caves in the southeast, with a beautiful pit that cavers love and a huge walk-in entrance that draws hikers, photographers, and outdoor enthusiasts. The SCCi is very excited to announce that we now own this fantastic cave! Located in the heart of Jackson County, AL, Stephens Gap is our 30th cave preserve! By purchasing this beautiful cave, the SCCi will ensure that it's protected and preserved for future generations of cavers, hikers, and photographers. This purchase was not cheap. We need to raise \$150,000 to cover the land costs, closing costs, and the funding needed to care for the cave in to the future. If you enjoy visiting Stephens Gap, or would like to visit it in the future, please join us in establishing our newest, and likely one of our most popular, preserves! Thank you for your support.

**Help us preserve and protect this beautiful cave!**

## **Preserve Information:**

**Acreage:** 77.8 acres in Jackson County, Alabama

**Property Managers:** Milton Polsky, Tom Whitehurst, and Aaron Polsky ([stephensgap@scci.org](mailto:stephensgap@scci.org))

**Access:** SCCi permit required to visit the preserve. Details are in the visitor use plan. NOTE: Persons without a valid SCCi permit who cross the private property between the road and the preserve may be prosecuted for trespassing, and could also jeopardize future access for everyone!

**Preserve Management:** Stephens Gap Visitor Use Plan

For more information about the Southeastern Cave Conservancy, please visit their website at [www.scci.org](http://www.scci.org)



Hi Members of the Sewanee Mountain Grotto,

By now I'm sure that you have seen the article on our 2014 trip to Laos, "More River Caves in Northern Laos", in the March 2015 edition of the NSS. The trip was quite productive, and we were able to map and photograph a wonderful river cave called Tham Nam Lod. We were also able to check out some other caves in the area. Another rewarding part of the trip, although it didn't involve caving, was that we were able to 'home-stay' in the nearby town, and see what local life is like in a Northern Lao village.

After the NSS article was printed, I realized that we forgot to acknowledge the Sewanee Mountain Grotto for their donation to the trip. I'm very sorry about this oversight--it also slipped past the proofreaders. Please be assured that the donation was very much appreciated. Most of the sponsorship money we received was used to pay guides, and it was nice to see that the money was going directly into the hands of the local people, who were also grateful for the extra income.

Again, thank you for your sponsorship of the 2014 Laos trip (part of the Northern Lao-European Cave Project. We hope to continue projects in Southeast Asia.

Nancy Pistole

A note from Angela Morgan: It is my fault that mention of the SMG's sponsorship was erroneously omitted from the NSS News article. I apologize to the SMG, and to Matt and Nancy, for not doing a more thorough proofreading job! Angela will be doing a presentation on the trip for the grotto later in the year.



*Matt Oliphant, Angela Morgan, and Nancy Pistole at the insurgence*

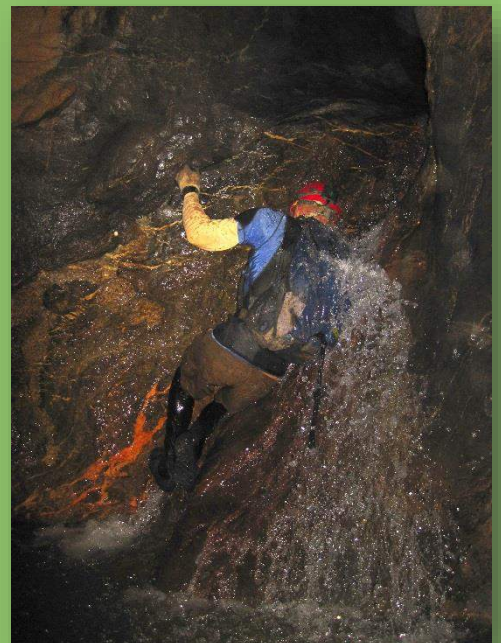


*Top Left: The Naluang village leader, who accompanied us in the cave. He would catch bats and place them in a small tube. Bats are a staple of the local diet.*

*Bottom Left: Typical scenery in the area*



*Right: Page Ashwell pushing a wet infeder.*







## Fenix E 99 Titanium micro flashlight

### By Jeff Cody

In 2014 Fenix introduced The E 99 Titanium micro flash light. This is a small light that can be used on a key chain or on a lanyard. I am writing this review for a caving newsletter because I always wear a small micro light on a lanyard when caving. I do this because I do not normally wear multiple lights on my helmet and carry my spares in my pack. In the event my primary were to fail, I use the micro light to dig in my pack to get to my spares. I also use this type of light in case I need to leave my pack behind in a cave to go check out

a crawl or a climb up to use in the event my primary were to fail , to get me back to my pack so I can then change over to a secondary light source . Prior to the E 99 Ti I had been using a Micro Mag light for this purpose. The E 99 Ti is a dramatic improvement over the micro mag. I received my E 99 Ti just prior to Christmas 2014 as a gift to me from my friends at Fenix. This light has my name engraved on the titanium housing.

The specs on this light are as follows according to the Fenix website. Three output settings, 4 lumen (30 hour max) 27 (4 hours 15 minutes) lumen and a high of 100 (50 minute max) lumen. The E 99 operates off one AAA battery. You can use both NI-MH rechargeable or regular alkaline battery. Maximum duration output is gained by the use of a good NI -MH rechargeable battery. It has a waterproof rating of IPX 8 meaning it is designed to withstand submersion in water of 2 meters for 30 minutes. Impact resistance is a drop of 1 meter. Construction is made of titanium 4 alloy. The head twists to access the three output settings. The LED is a Cree XP -E2 with a lifespan of 50,000 hours. The length is 66 mm and the diameter is 15mm and weight without battery is listed at 18 grams. Beam distance is 41 meters max. This light is capable of standing upright on a flat surface to use as a candle. This is a limited edition light. Price is listed at \$ 44.95 from fenixgear.com, this site sometimes offers discounts.

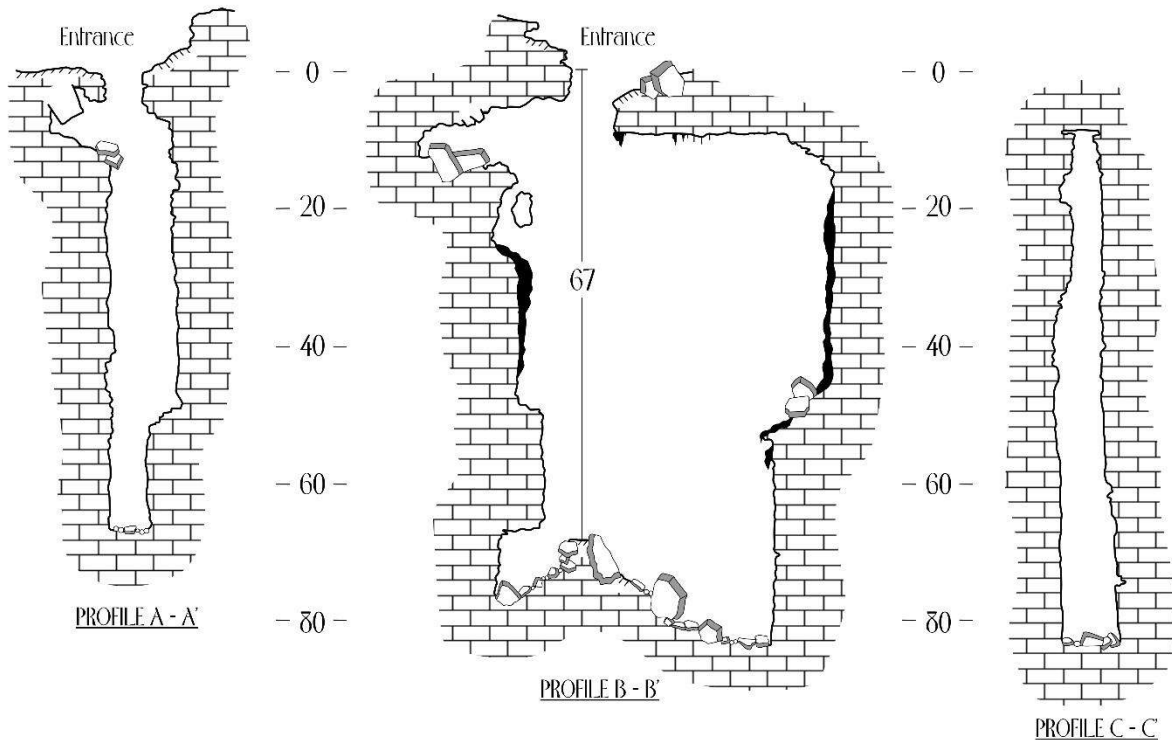
I received this light in December of 2014. It came in a gift box similar to what you get from a jewelry store. This package is fitting because to a caver and light junkie like myself, it is jewelry. I noticed it came with an extra O ring. This light appears to me to be a similar size as The Micro Mag Light that I had been using. I immediately installed a Duracell NI-MH rechargeable battery and ran through the output settings in my dark garage. I was amazed of the output you can get from such a small light. I found the output settings easy to get to by twisting the head the required number of times. I had to compare this to the output on The Micro Mag and as expected, there was no comparisons as the Micro Mag uses an old style incandescent bulb. I do not own any other micro flashlights so I did not compare it to others as feel comparisons to other types of lights would not be a fair comparison. I noticed the beam angle was wider than I expected from such a small light. This is obviously not a cave specific light but the IPX 8 water resistance rating and impact resistance should allow it to be taken in a cave. I feel wearing a micro light on a lanyard when caving is a nice accessory to have. I have taken this light caving a few times and like in my garage was amazed at the output of this small light. I feel this has enough output to get you out of a cave in an emergency .The price of 45 US dollars may seem a bit steep for a micro light but one has to remember this has a titanium housing and what I feel is incredible output for such a small light.





# More maps from Ben Miller & the DPAS Project

Ben Miller and crew continue to work on their project to map the deep pits in T.A.G. In this issue are new maps for Morgan Pit in Putnam County, TN and Good to the Last Drop in Franklin County, Tennessee. While on a camping trip a small horizontal cave was also mapped, It's Just a Mudhole, which is also in Franklin County, Tennessee.

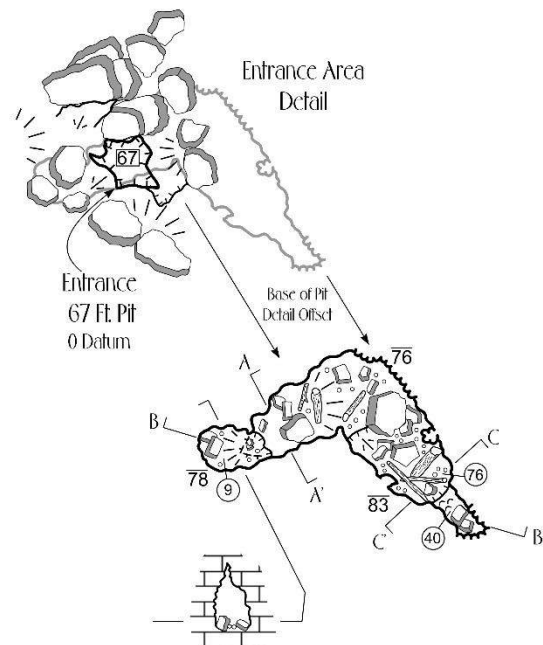
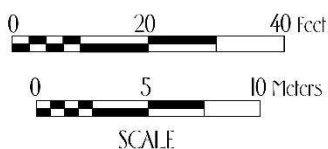
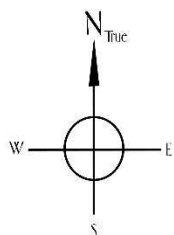


## MORGAN PIT Putnam County, Tennessee TPU 080

Suunto's Fiberglass Tape,  
& Leica Disto Survey Br.  
Clinton Barber  
Ben Miller

January 24, 2015

Total Horizontal Length of Cave: 4615 Feet (1407 Meters)  
Total Depth/Vertical Extent of Cave: 832 Feet (2536 Meters)



Drafted by Ben Miller, 2015

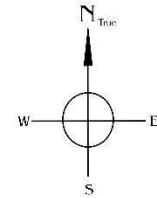


# GOOD TO THE LAST DROP

Franklin County, Tennessee  
TFR 238

Suuntos, Fiberglass Tape,  
& Leica Disto Survey By:  
Brian Ham  
Jason Hardy  
Ben Miller

January 11, 2015



0 20 40 Feet

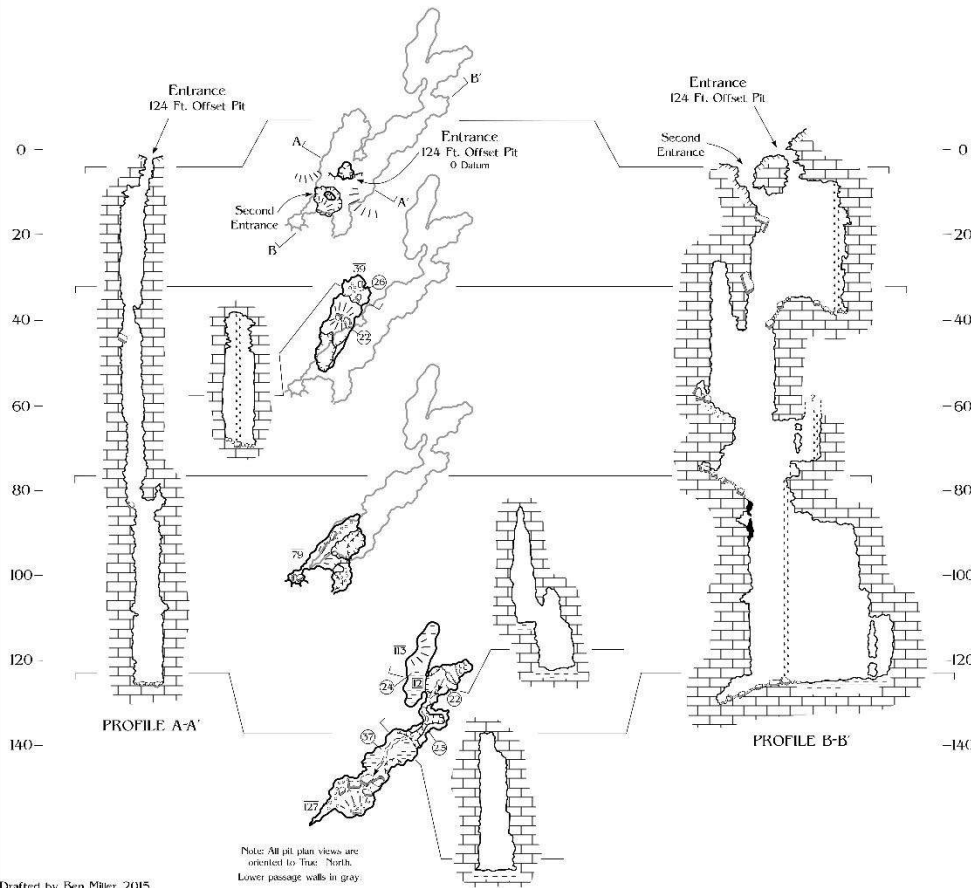
0 5 10 Meters

SCALE

All Ceiling Heights & Depths Are In Feet

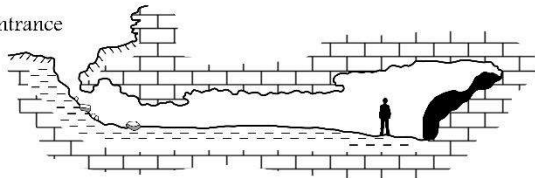
Total Horizontal Length: 122.2 Feet (37.25 Meters)  
Total Vertical Extent/Depth: 127.1 Feet (38.74 Meters)

LEGEND	
	Passage Walls
	Lower Passage Walls
	Breakdown Walls
	Floor Ledge
	Ceiling Ledge
	Pit
	Breakdown
	Gravel
	Clay Fill
	Slope
	Flowing Stream
	Rimstone Dams
	Ceiling & Ledge Heights
	Depth Below Entrance

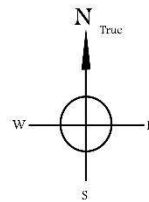


Drafted by Ben Miller, 2015

Entrance



PROFILE VIEW



0 20 40 Feet

0 5 10 Meters

SCALE

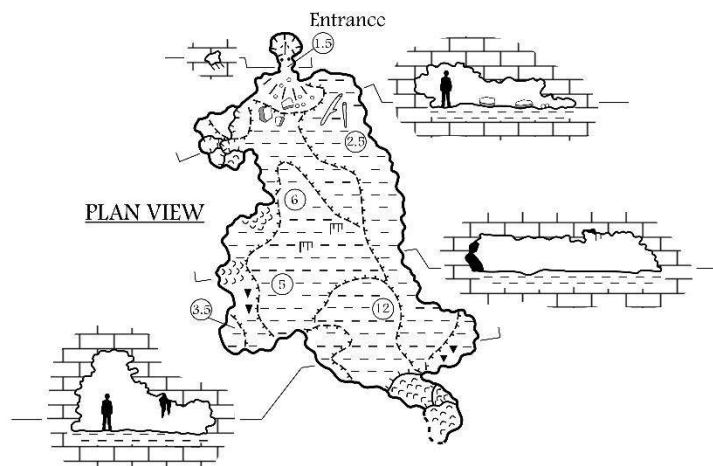
Total Length of Cave: 80.8 Feet (24.63 Meters)

## It's Just A Mudhole

Franklin County, Tennessee  
TFR 054

Suuntos, Fiberglass Tape,  
& Leica Disto Survey By:  
Kristine Ebrey  
Jason Hardy  
Paul Lundenburg  
Ben Miller

February 8, 2015



PLAN VIEW

Drafted by Ben Miller, 2015



## **Chattanooga Hamilton County Rescue Service Recognizes Five CHCRS members**

At their February EC Meeting, CHCRS leadership unanimously approved a motion by Captain Tipton to recognize five current CHCRS members with the designation of Life Membership. This honor is reserved for members who have consistently demonstrated exemplary service to the squad with considerable contributions to the success of the entire organization. These members have all served CHCRS for 20 years or more and their contributions to the squad are evident throughout our organization.

Dr David Wharton has served the squad as the Medical Director for more than 20 years while providing the Cave/Cliff Unit with the knowledge and leadership to allow our medics to practice advanced wilderness medical care in environments typically deemed unsuitable for ALS care. Under Dr Wharton's mentorship and supervision, CHCRS medical personnel have saved countless lives.

Lieutenant Brian Krebs has served the squad for 21 years as a member of the Cave/Cliff Unit. Under his direction as a Lieutenant, Brian has been instrumental in the training and development of dozens of current Cave/Cliff members.

Treasurer Bruce Smith has served the squad for over 30 years in many capacities, from Cave/Cliff Training Officer, to Vice President to his current position as Corporate Treasurer. Bruce's contributions to rope rescue alone is deserving of this honor as his dedication to the development and training of Cave/Cliff members has been instrumental in the team's long history of success.

Beth Elliot has also served CHCRS for over 30 years as a member of the Cave/Cliff Unit. Beth took over the reigns from Don Black, the first Captain of the Cave/Cliff Unit and she served as the Captain for many years. Beth was instrumental in the recruitment of Assistant Chief Lane and other legacy members to the squad.

Dennis Curry served the squad for over 20 years as Lieutenant of the Cave/Cliff Unit. During his tenure, Dennis executed many of the most difficult cave rescues in North American history. His contributions to the squad included the training, recruitment and mentorship of many of the team's current members and officers. Dennis' dedication to the development of his team members was instrumental in laying the foundation for which the current membership is building upon.

Please congratulate all five of these members for this well-deserved honor and thank them for their continued dedication to the Chattanooga - Hamilton County Rescue Service.

Chattanooga Hamilton County Rescue Service, Inc. (CHCRS) is a tax-exempt not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation dedicated to aid with cave and cliff accidents, vertical and technical rescue, search and rescue, wildland fire fighting with red card certification, rehab of fire and rescue personnel, SCBA breathing air replacement service in the field, hazmat decon, underground hazmat response, confine space rescue and automobile accident extraction.

For more information about the Chattanooga Hamilton County Rescue Service please visit their facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/ChattanoogaHamiltonCountyRescue> or their web site at <http://www.chcrs.org/>.



# Rock climber thanks rescuers who saved her after fall

Published by Chattanooga Times Free Press February 23rd, 2015 by Yolanda Putman in Local Regional News

Last year, Brittany Decker had spent hours climbing the Tennessee Wall in the Prentice Cooper State Forest when [she fell an estimated 40 feet](#) and crashed onto a boulder.

She cracked her skull, broke several ribs and fractured four of her vertebrae. One of them burst into multiple pieces, she said.

Life Force flew her to the hospital, where she remained for nine days while doctors performed major surgery fusing her vertebrae back together with titanium.



*Brittany Decker, 24, survived an estimated 40 foot fall from the Tennessee Wall at Prentice Cooper State Forest. She talks with Brad Tipton, captain of the cave/cliff/technical unit of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Rescue Service and the first rescuer on the scene after she fell. Photo by Yolanda Putman/Times Free*

A year later, on Sunday, the Kennesaw, Ga., resident and her climbing friends went to the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Rescue Service in Lookout Valley to thank rescuers for her survival. Decker brought a financial donation and at least six dozen homemade cookies.

"Things could have ended very differently for me," said Decker, now 24, fully recovered and climbing again.

Brad Tipton, captain of the cave/cliff/technical unit of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Rescue Service and the first rescuer on the scene after she fell, thanked Decker and her friends for the contribution. "Without donations there would be no Chattanooga Hamilton County Rescue," said Tipton. Decker's accident happened at the Tennessee Wall, known to some climbers as the T-Wall, a fiery orange sandstone cliff northwest of Chattanooga along the Tennessee River. She started climbing the T-Wall at about 9 a.m. on February, 2014. She climbed safely all day until around 6 p.m., when she slipped, wearing no helmet.

She joked with Tipton about her rescue. He knew she was badly injured, he said, but he thought she would be OK because she was so spirited. Lying on the boulder, Decker couldn't move and thought her friends and rescuers were holding her down. She angrily told Tipton to get off of her and insisted on walking despite debilitating injuries, said Tipton. Tipton said he has done about 30 rescues around the Tennessee Wall since he joined the rescue service about 20 years ago at age 18. He is one of 38 volunteers in the cave/cliff/technical unit. Tipton said he does the job because he likes climbing and because he hopes someone would help him if he had an accident. Decker's friends called media Sunday to spread the word that Chattanooga Hamilton County Rescue Service is operated solely by donations and volunteers.

The rescue's annual budget of \$50,000 purchases medical supplies and equipment to help save climbers and cavers like Decker. To make donations to the Chattanooga Hamilton County Rescue Service, visit their web site at <http://www.chcrs.org/>.



# Field Excursions: Hikes galore at the Great Stone Door

By Bob Butters Published Sunday, September 7th 2014 on [www.nooga.com](http://www.nooga.com)

The South Cumberland State Park comprises 24,550 acres divided into several units scattered over four counties in Southeast Tennessee. The largest of these units is the 18,000-acre Savage Gulf State Natural Area in Grundy County. Owned by the state since 1973, it protects one of the last-known strands of virgin timber in the eastern U.S. and contains over 50 miles of hiking trails. Several trails, providing a half-dozen or more hike options, can be accessed from the Stone Door Ranger Station.

One of Savage Gulf State Natural Area's primary geologic attractions, the Great Stone Door is a 10-foot-wide, over 100-feet-deep crack in the sandstone bluff that rims Big Creek Gulf. Along with Savage Gulf and Collins Gulf, Big Creek Gulf helps form a crow's foot-shaped maze of canyons, or "gulfs" as they're known in this part of the country, which drains into the Collins



*The Stone Door Overlook. (Photo: Bob Butters)*



*The Great Stone Door. (Photo: Bob Butters)*

River. The Great Stone Door has been used for centuries as a means for people and animals to get up and down over the bluff. Native Americans used it before the arrival of European settlers. It's also rumored that bison used it when they inhabited the Cumberland Plateau before the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

Hikes available from the Stone Door trailhead range from less than half a mile on wheelchair-accessible pavement to long, strenuous backpack treks and various levels in between.

Here are several options I recommend for day hikes.

## Stone Door Trail

At just less than a mile each way, this easy trail, paved for the first 0.2 miles to the Laurel Gulf Overlook, takes you to the Stone Door, with great views from the top of the bluff. This trail also passes a walk-in campground.

## Big Creek Rim Trail

Beginning at the Stone Door, this trail follows fairly close to the bluff for 3.2 miles to the Alum Gap Campground, passing several scenic overlooks along the way. This would provide an 8.2-mile out-and-back hike.

## Big Creek Gulf Trail

Dropping down through the Stone Door, this 4-mile trail has a somewhat-rugged descent to the bottom of Big Creek Gulf, then follows Big Creek, eventually ascending out of the gulf using an old logging road for a more gradual climb, ending near the Alum Gap Campground. From here, you'll probably want to take either the Big Creek Rim Trail or the Laurel Trail back to your starting point. This would be a 9-mile hike if you return on the Big Creek Rim Trail, 7.8 miles if you take the Laurel Trail back to the ranger station. A recommended side trip is the 0.4-mile spur trail to Ranger Falls, reached 2 miles after you've left the Stone Door. As this involves crossing Big Creek, it can be tricky in times of high water, but the creek is usually dry at this point. At 2.6 miles from Stone Door, a short spur trail leads to the Sinks, where the water of Big Creek usually disappears underground.



### **Laurel Trail**

At 2.9 miles, the Laurel Trail goes from the Stone Door Ranger Station to the Alum Gap Campground. It takes a more inland route, going through less dramatic, slightly rolling forest terrain. The Laurel Trail makes a good return option for either the Big Creek Gulf Trail or the Big Creek Rim Trail. For the latter, that would make a 7-mile hike.

### **Connector Trail to Cator Savage Cabin and Sawmill Campground**

For those looking for an even more rugged hike, the Connector Trail splits from the Big Creek Gulf Trail 0.9 miles below the Stone Door and crosses the area where the three gulfs meet and where the Sawmill Campground is located. A good 8.6-mile round-trip day hike would be to have Cator Savage's cabin as your destination. Cator Savage, a descendant of Samuel Savage, for whom the gulf is named, built his cabin in approximately 1910.

### **Recommended shorter hike**

For those looking for something more level and in the 5-mile range, I recommend taking the Big Creek Rim Trail for 1.6 miles beyond the Stone Door to the Sinks Overlook and retuning via the same route. The overlook is unmarked on the trail but is described on the trail map.

Finally, an added bonus to any of these hikes would be to take the 0.3-mile loop trail from the ranger station to Laurel Falls.

For more information about the park, go to: <http://www.friendsofscsra.org/>

To download a trail map, go to: <http://www.friendsofscsra.org/savage-gulf-trail-map.pdf>



*Looking up Big Creek Gulf from the Sinks Overlook. (Photo: Bob Butters)*



*Looking up Big Creek Gulf from the Sinks Overlook. (Photo: Bob Butters)*

Good trail maps can also be picked up at the Stone Door trailhead, as well as at the South Cumberland State Park Visitors Center in Monteagle.

### **Directions**

From Tracy City, follow Highway 56 north for about 20 miles through Altamont and to Beersheba Springs. Watch for the brown sign for Stone Door. Turn right, and follow Stone Door Road for about 1.5 miles to the ranger station. For tech users, the Stone Door Ranger Station street address is 1183 Stone Door Road, Beersheba Springs, TN.

*Bob Butters explores nature and the outdoors, primarily in and near the South Cumberland region, and publishes the blog [www.Nickajack-Naturalist.com](http://www.Nickajack-Naturalist.com).*



# Northeast Alabama Black Bears

Published by [www.courierjournal.net](http://www.courierjournal.net)

By Tracy Nelson, Wildlife Biologist, Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries | March 6, 2015

Confirmed black bear sightings have increased significantly during recent years in several counties in northeast Alabama. Black bear sightings are up because bear populations are increasing in Tennessee and Georgia, which forces individual bears to spread out in search of suitable habitat. Migrating bears from Georgia and Tennessee are establishing home ranges and maintaining breeding populations in Alabama. Since bears are now reproducing in northeast Alabama, bear sightings are occurring year-round.

Since 2005, there have been more than 250 confirmed black bear sightings in Etowah, DeKalb, St. Clair, Jackson, Cleburne, Calhoun and Cherokee counties. Some of these sightings were the same bears seen

by different individuals, but many were different bears. Observations from private landowners and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries employees indicate these bears have established breeding populations. Several female bears have been observed with cubs, and now these cubs have matured and are breeding in nearby areas. So far, these bears have not presented any problems or threat to anyone who has encountered them. Wildlife's first response is usually to get away from humans as quickly as possible, and so far, these black bears have demonstrated that behavior.

If there are bears in your area, you may have to take some temporary measures until the bear moves on, such as keeping garbage cans in an enclosed building. Do not leave pet food or any other type of food scraps outside that may act as a bear attractant. When bears become accustomed to eating garbage and associating food with people, it then leads to a dangerous situation. The objective is to avoid these situations.

Most problems associated with bears occur at two specific times of the year. The first is early spring when food is scarce. This causes bears to travel farther distances searching for nourishment. Bear activity also increases in late summer when food supplies have dried up and the hard mast such as acorns are not yet available. Once the acorns begin to fall, bears return to their natural habitat.

Black bears are back in northeast Alabama, and we can coexist and enjoy their presence as long as we use a little common sense.

To report a black bear sighting in northeast Alabama, contact Little River Wildlife Biologist Tracy L. Nelson at [Tracy.Nelson@dcnr.alabama.gov](mailto:Tracy.Nelson@dcnr.alabama.gov) or 256-643-4149 Ext. 11.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources promotes wise stewardship, management and enjoyment of Alabama's natural resources through four divisions: Marine Resources, State Lands, State Parks, and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. To learn more about ADCNR visit [www.outdooralabama.com](http://www.outdooralabama.com).



*Bear photo courtesy of Gary Tucker, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*



## Rare salamanders found at Mayhaw WMA in Georgia

Mayhaw Wildlife Management Area in Miller County produced something this year not seen in the Georgia wilds in more than a decade – reticulated flatwoods salamanders.

The first find was Feb. 8. ABAC forest resources lecturer Daniel Sollenberger and three students sampled a pond at the southwest Georgia WMA suggested by student Blaine Tyler, also a Nongame Conservation Section employee. “Maybe we’ll find a flatwoods,” Sollenberger remembers musing.



They did, netting a larva that nongame senior wildlife biologist John Jensen confirmed as the endangered species. After 13 years trying to find the salamanders in Georgia, Jensen thought droughts that sapped the temporary, fishless ponds these sallies need for breeding had pushed them “over the edge.”

Then on March 24, Jensen, DNR’s Dr. Jessica McGuire and Dr. Chester Figiel Jr. of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service dipped up another reticulated flatwoods sally larva at a nearby Mayhaw pond.

Sollenberger and students also found three larvae in a separate visit.

The finds, said Jensen, “Give us hope the species will continue to persist in Georgia.” That hope is bolstered because the ponds are on conservation lands, and management at Mayhaw has significantly upgraded habitats, largely through the use of prescribed fire.

Federally listed as threatened in 1999, flatwoods salamanders were split into two species, reticulated and frosted, divided geographically along the Flint and Apalachicola rivers – with reticulateds west of the drainage and rated endangered in 2009, and frosted on the east side and listed as threatened.

Though more common in north Florida, reticulated flatwoods sallies were last documented in Georgia in 2001. That record also came from Mayhaw, but from a different site than the recent catches.

These amphibians are usually found as larvae in ponds. Adults live mostly underground in uplands, only visiting wetlands to lay eggs.

# Antidepressant Microbes In Soil: How Dirt Makes You Happy

Published by [www.gardeningknowhow.com](http://www.gardeningknowhow.com)  
By Bonnie L. Grant



Prozac may not be the only way to get rid of your serious blues. Soil microbes have been found to have similar effects on the brain and are without side effects and chemical dependency potential. Learn how to harness the natural antidepressant in soil and make yourself happier and healthier. Read on to see how dirt makes you happy.

Natural remedies have been around for untold centuries. These natural remedies included cures for almost any physical ailment as well as mental and emotional afflictions. Ancient healers may not have known why something worked but simply that it did. Modern scientists have unraveled the why of many medicinal plants and practices but only recently are they finding remedies that were previously unknown and yet, still a part of the natural life cycle. Soil microbes and human health now have a positive link which has been studied and found to be verifiable.

## Soil Microbes and Human Health

Did you know that there's a natural antidepressant in soil? It's true. *Mycobacterium vaccae* is the substance under study and has indeed been found to mirror the effect on neurons that drugs like Prozac provide. The bacterium is found in soil and may stimulate serotonin production, which makes you relaxed and happier. Studies were conducted on cancer patients and they reported a better quality of life and less stress.

Lack of serotonin has been linked to depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder and bipolar problems. The bacterium appears to be a natural antidepressant in soil and has no adverse health effects. These antidepressant microbes in soil may be as easy to use as just playing in the dirt.

Most avid gardeners will tell you that their landscape is their "happy place" and the actual physical act of gardening is a stress reducer and mood lifter. The fact that there is some science behind it adds additional credibility to these garden addicts' claims. The presence of a soil bacteria antidepressant is not a surprise to many of us who have experienced the phenomenon ourselves. Backing it up with science is fascinating, but not shocking, to the happy gardener.

*Mycobacterium* antidepressant microbes in soil are also being investigated for improving cognitive function, Crohn's disease and even rheumatoid arthritis.

## How Dirt Makes You Happy

Antidepressant microbes in soil cause cytokine levels to rise, which results in the production of higher levels of serotonin. The bacterium was tested both by injection and ingestion on rats and the results were increased cognitive ability, lower stress and better concentration to tasks than a control group.

Gardeners inhale the bacteria, have topical contact with it and get it into their bloodstreams when there is a cut or other pathway for infection. The natural effects of the soil bacteria antidepressant can be felt for up to 3 weeks if the experiments with rats are any indication. So get out and play in the dirt and improve your mood and your life.

Watch this video about how gardening makes you happy:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=G6WxEOrWUik](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=G6WxEOrWUik)



# Cavers In Israel Discover Rare Artifacts From Era Of Alexander The Great

The Huffington Post | By Jacqueline Howard Posted: 03/11/2015

Spelunkers exploring a large cave in northern Israel in February 2015 made a rare discovery: jewelry and other items believed to date back thousands of years.

Among the finds were 2,300-year-old rings, bracelets, and earrings, as well as silver coins believed to have been minted in the late 4th Century B.C. during the reign of Alexander the Great.

The items were found by three members of the Israeli Caving Club, Reuven Zakai, his son Chen Zakai, and their friend Lior Halony. The items were handed over to the Israel Antiquities Authority.

Archaeologists at the Authority said in a written statement in March:



*Silver coin bearing head of Alexander the Great.*



*Agate stones that were part of a string of beads and a Hellenistic oil lamp in which the stones were kept.*

"This is the second time in the past month that citizens have reported significant archeological finds and we welcome this important trend," Amir Ganor, director of the Unit for the Prevention of Antiquities Robbery at the Authority, said in the statement.

In February, the Authority announced that nearly 2,000 gold coins dating back more than 1,000 years had been discovered in a Mediterranean harbor. The treasure was called the [largest hoard of gold coins](#) ever found in Israel.

"The valuables might have been hidden in the cave by local residents who fled there during the period of governmental unrest stemming from the death of Alexander, a time when the Wars of the Diadochi broke out in Israel between Alexander's heirs following his death. Presumably the cache was hidden in the hope of better days, but today we know that whoever buried the treasure never returned to collect it."

The archaeologists and members of the caving club returned to the site and found evidence of human habitation -- including pottery and other artifacts dating from the Chalcolithic period 6,000 years ago to the Hellenistic period around 2,300 years ago, Discovery News reported.



*Active stalactites in the cave.*

## 2015 Easter Float Trip by Kelly Smallwood

Each year for Easter, a handful of us get together for a float trip in Tennessee. Over the past four years we have floated the Elk several times and the Duck once. This year, we were looking for something new and a river that we could also primitive camp along. After some planning with Ben Miller, it was decided we would do 23 miles along the Collins River.

The Collins River is a 67-mile-long stream in the east-central portion of Middle Tennessee in the United States. It is a tributary of the Caney Fork, and is part of the Cumberland, Ohio and Mississippi watersheds. The river drains the scenic Savage Gulf area, located just below the river's source, and empties into Great Falls Lake at Rock Island State Park. The Collins River passes through Grundy and Warren counties. McMinnville, Altamont, Gruetli-Laager and Beersheba Springs are among the communities located within its watershed. The Savage Gulf section of the Collins River has been designated a "scenic river" by the State of Tennessee.

This year we had a much larger response of folks wanting to join us and unfortunately some of our "regulars" were not able to go. We set the trip up to allow for both day trippers and overnighers. On Saturday morning, after some shuffling of people, boats, paddles, gear, etc... and vehicles to both take outs, we all put our boats in the river at the Hwy 56 Bridge ([www.tn.gov/twra/gis/Boating/Boating\\_PDF/CollinsRiver/HWY56Bridge.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/twra/gis/Boating/Boating_PDF/CollinsRiver/HWY56Bridge.pdf)). The day trippers would take out at Irving College, which is around half way of the 23 miles we planned (around N 35 34' 53" W 85 42' 2") and the overnighers would take out at Shellsford ([www.tn.gov/twra/gis/Boating/Boating\\_PDF/CollinsRiver/Shellsford.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/twra/gis/Boating/Boating_PDF/CollinsRiver/Shellsford.pdf)). Some of our floaters rented boats this year. There is a nearby outfitter in McMinnville that rents both canoes and kayaks and will shuttle you for a fee to and from the take outs, <http://smoothrapids.com/>.

On Friday night, a handful of us met up at the Wannamaker Landing to camp. Wannamaker Landing is only about a mile from where we were putting in so it turned out to be a great spot. It is also a great put in area as well. On Saturday morning, we started out with 25 people and 18 boats. Of those 18 boats, 7 were canoes and 11 were kayaks. We had some rain Friday night that mucked up the water but other than that we had a beautiful day on the river Saturday. After the day trippers took out, we had 11 boats and 15 people who were camping and paddling on Sunday. There are not many camping spots along the river, but we did find a decent spot near Turners Bend. Sunday was another great day on the river.

There are six access points that are maintained by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. To view a map for each, visit <http://www.tn.gov/twra/gis/CollinsRiver.html>.

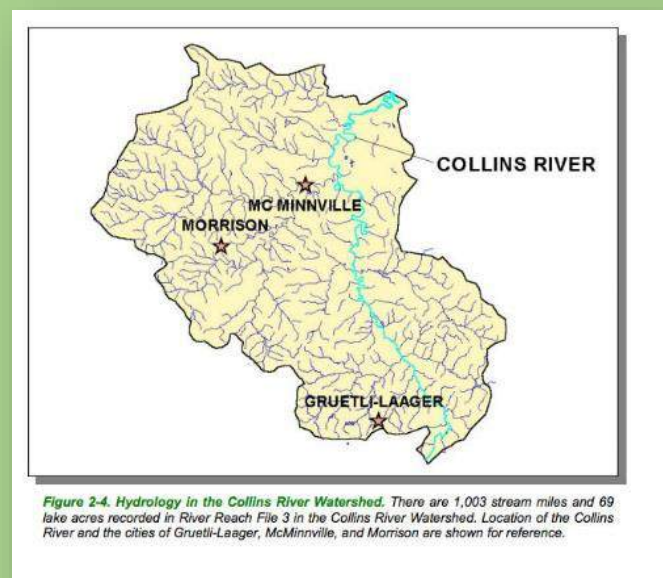
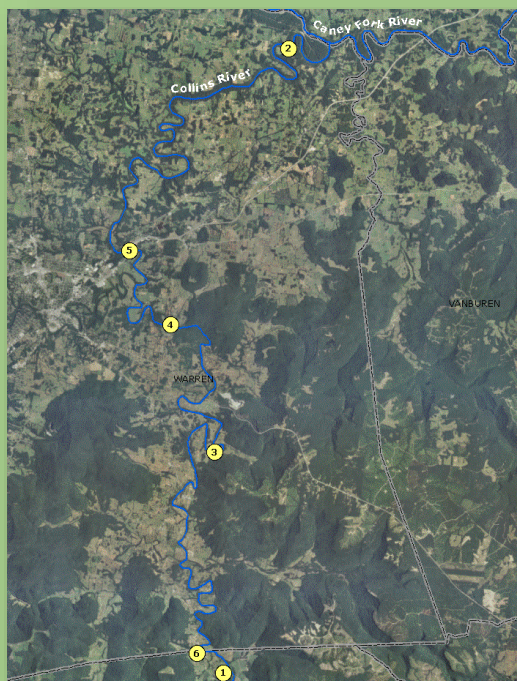


Figure 2-4. Hydrology in the Collins River Watershed. There are 1,003 stream miles and 69 lake acres recorded in River Reach File 3 in the Collins River Watershed. Location of the Collins River and the cities of Gruetli-Laager, McMinnville, and Morrison are shown for reference.







# Air from 'a cave where Yetis live' goes on sale in Siberia

By The Siberian Times reporter  
March 12, 2015

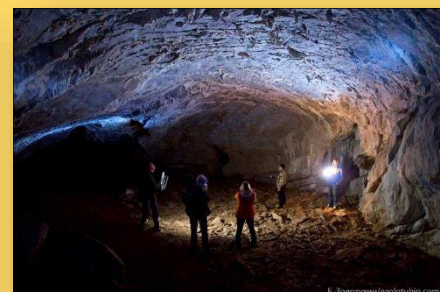
If you can't come here, at least you can breathe the crystal clear air.

The air is 'full of goodness and has a healing effect, helping to strengthen the immunity and positively impact of the mental state'.

Entrepreneurs have canned the air from Azasskaya Cave, the location of supposed sightings of fabled Yetis, known to some as Bigfoot or the Abominable Snowman.

Air was also canned from Zelenaya Mountain, the centrepiece of Siberia's leading ski resort of Sheregesh in Kemerovo region.

Vladimir Makuta, head of the local Tashtagol district, said the areas are 'famous for stunning mountain scenery and crystal-clear air'. The air is 'full of goodness and has a healing effect, helping to strengthen the immunity and positively impact of the mental state'.



Canned the air from Azasskaya Cave and Zelenaya Mountain. Azasskaya cave, view from outside and inside. Pictures: Administration of Tashtagol district, KuzYeti, Evgeny Zolotuhin

The cost of a breath of fresh Siberian air - 200 roubles, around \$3 or £2.

Sightings of Yetis - or some other giant hairy creatures - are not uncommon in the Shor National Park, site of the Azasskaya Cave, though many dispute them. The cave is 18 kilometres from Ust-Kabyrza village.



