

SERA

Newsletter

Southeastern Regional Association of Grottos



Volume 10

February 2005



*Kara Akens on the lip at Valhalla
photo by Clem Akens*

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Comments expressed within are not necessarily those of the NSS or of SERA but are those of the author.

WELCOME

Welcome to this edition of the SERA Newsletter. Special thanks go to all of the individuals who took time to send articles, information, photos, and support for the creation of this issue. Please assist me by submitting items of interest, articles, suggestions, photos, or anything else you might want to appear in our next newsletter. I humbly thank you in advance. I would also like to thank our previous editor Don Hunter for his years of hard work and dedication to SERA! Thanks Don!

Brian Roebuck, Editor

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2004 - 2005 SERA Officers

Chair	Mark Joop
Vice Chair	Peter Michaud
Secretary/Treasurer	Jim Wilbanks

Note from the Chair

Looking back on the 2004-2005 term, a lot of great events took place in the Southeast Region. Just to name a few, the Florida Cave Crawl, hosted by the Flint River Grotto, was April 23-25. Appalachian Grotto put on the 53rd SERA Summer Cave Carnival at Camp Davy Crockett in TN on May 20-23. The TAG Fall Cave-In moved to a permanent location on Lookout Mountain, GA, and Dogwood City Grotto held the first Cave-In, the 27th, there on October 7-10. Many volunteers helped to carve the Cave-In site out of undeveloped woods from January to October. Speaking of volunteers, the SERA Karst Task Force had a great year with cleanups of trashed sinkholes to caves like Rocky River Cave, TN and Carson Campbell Cave, TN, as well as in-cave cleanups like Pettijohns Cave, GA and Cedar Ridge Crystal Cave, TN. Cave photographer Benjy Von Cramon and many of the original cavers involved with the 1997 McBrides Cave rescue (rescuers and rescuees) spent countless hours creating a reenactment for a National Geographic documentary film that aired in February 2005. The end of 2004 was marked with another inspiring Christmas Party at Cumberland Caverns.

It was a year of cavers uniting to create something out of nothing or to get a big job done, from an 8-person grotto putting on a fantastic SERA to dozens of cavers cleaning out a totally trashed sinkhole to protect karst waters and regain access to a nice cave. I am proud to be a part of SERA and to have served as Chair. SERA cavers rock! And I know that Peter (Mudpuppy or Pup) Michaud will do a good job chairing SERA through another productive year.

Mark Joop, SERA Chair

2004 SERA Winter Business Meeting

Minutes for the 2001 SERA Winter Business Meeting 2/06/04

The 2004 SERA Winter Business Meeting was held at the Best Western Tree City Motel in McMinnville Tennessee. The Athens Speleological Society did a fine job hosting this meeting.

Morning Session

Chairman Lynn Roebuck called the meeting to order at 10:05 Central. Also present were Vice-chair Mark Joop and Sec/treas Jim Wilbanks.

Lynn thanked ASS for hosting the meeting and announced a get-well card would be at the rear of the room for former SERA chair, Rob Robbins.

Grotto introductions were next. Tim Curtis Mark Joop and Bill Walters reported for Spencer Mountain Grotto about mapping projects in Paradox Cave. Brian Roebuck reported that the Southport Chronic Cavers were rebuilding and working on mapping projects. Don Hunter reported that Athens had been working on the SWBM and a mentoring program for the University of Georgia outdoor program. Brent Allen of Appalachian Grotto reported most of their activities were on the upcoming SERA Cave Carnival. Kristen Bobo of Upper Cumberland Grotto reported on cleanup efforts in Ament Cave. Gerald Moni reported that the Nashville Grotto hosted its fiftieth anniversary party and is involved in surveying all the caves in Cedars of Lebanon State Park and Swirl Canyon Cave. He also reported on the Central Basin Grotto's efforts managing Snail Shell Cave for the SCCI. Sharon Faulkner reported on the Birmingham Grotto's efforts on the Scottsboro Mountain cleanup, helping host the TAG Fall Cave In. She also reported the grotto was hosting both the SWBM and SERA in 2005. Alicia and Dan Henry reported for the Flittermouse Grotto. They talked about surveying in North Carolina caves and working with the US Fish and Wildlife service doing bat counts. They also manage Rumbling Bald cave for the Nature Conservancy. They are surveying Carson/Campbell Cave in Tennessee and helping the Appalachian Grotto with SERA. Lee Trowbridge reported the East Tennessee Grotto was supporting the East Tennessee Cave Rescue Squad. They are working in Gap Cave and Big Salt Cave. Michael Gilbert of Central Alabama Grotto reported the grotto is surveying Rickwood Caverns and is working on a cleanup of Manitou Cave. Glenn Mills reported the DCG is working on the new TAG site. He described the layout. Martha Mills reported on the Board of Governors. She encouraged all members to communicate directly with the board. Jim Wilbanks reported on the Chattanooga Grotto. He stated the grotto was growing and attributed large turnouts at meetings to food.

He stated the grotto was growing and attributed large turnouts at meetings to food. He also reported on the state of the Southeastern Cave Conservancy, stating they were committed financially to current purchases and would need further support if more were to be made.

Brent Aulenbach reported on the SERA Map salon. Brian Roebuck presented the latest SERA newsletter. Debby Johnson reported the next TCS meeting would be held at Sewanee on April 3rd.

Curtis Ellison reported on SERA preparations. He gave a presentation on the proposed site and the logo. Appalachian Grotto seems to have the preparations well in hand.

Jeanne Trowbridge commented on a presentation put together by Jack Thomison on the Rich Mountain Blow Hole gating project, which SERA supported last year. Chris Walters reported on local eating establishments and the meeting was adjourned for lunch.

Afternoon Session

The afternoon business meeting was reconvened at 1:25 Central. The role call of grottos revealed the represented grottos. They are: Birmingham, Central Alabama, Chattanooga, Dogwood City, East Tennessee, Flittermouse, GSS, Huntsville, Nashville, Smoky Mountain, Southport, Spencer, TCS, Tennessee Central Basin, Upper Cumberland, ACS, and Athens. The minutes for the 2003 SWBM were read, corrected and adopted. The treasurer's report was read and approved. Jim Wilbanks reported SERA had \$720.97 with \$204.92 in outstanding bills.

Debby Johnson reported on the SERA Karst Task Force. She stated the committee had run cleanups at four different caving events. She reported all of the \$100 set aside had been spent and only part of the money allocated for Stephen's Gap. She reported that the committee wants to be an NSS Conservation Task Force. A discussion ensued and a consensus was reached that there were no reasons not to apply. Several cavers had experience with the process. A resolution authorizing the SKTF to apply was passed unanimously.

Brian Roebuck reported on the SERA Newsletter and asked for articles. Jim Wilbanks reported the SERA Awards Committee had not met and promised to submit a report by next year.

John Hoffelt asked for an update on the NSS Library. Jim Wilbanks reported on the letter sent to the BOG and Martha Mills reported the issue had been tabled and there was no sentiment to move the library.

Officer elections were then held. Vice Chair Mark Joop moves to Chair for next year. Peter "Mudpuppy" Michaud was elected Vice Chair by acclamation. Jim Wilbanks was re-elected secretary/treasurer by acclamation.

Lynn Roebuck appointed Brent Allen to be Webmaster.

Sharon Faulkner and Avis Van Swearington reported on the efforts to host an NSS convention in Alabama. Debby Johnson (TCS) and Sharon Faulkner (Birmingham) introduced a resolution, which passed and said: "SERA supports an NSS convention in the Southeast in 2005." The vote was 14-3 with Central Alabama, Dogwood City, and Upper Cumberland voting no.

Don Hunter (ASS) moved and Lee Trowbridge (ETG) seconded that SERA support the Glory Hole gating project with \$200 of SERA funds. The motion passed unanimously. Concern over the lack of participation in the 2003 SERA Cave Carnival, which only put \$317 dollars in the treasury, was voiced. Joe Douglas announced he would pass the hat and match any donation up to \$100. \$183. was collected and Joe wrote a check for \$100 for a total of \$283.

Mark Joop and Dan Henry reported on the Carson/Campbell cleanup scheduled for SERA. They showed pictures of the cave and the garbage. Jim Wilbanks talked about the Rocky River cleanup scheduled for Sunday.

John Hoffelt announced an upcoming cleanup at Snail Shell Cave being run by TCBG.

SERA Awards

Award Committees were announced:

Francis McKinney: Chris Kerr, Brian Roebuck, Glenn Mills
Richard Schreiber: Jim Wilbanks, Dan Henry, Eric Crisp
Larry Adams Landowner: Shane Stacey, Myrna Attaway, Jeannie Trowbridge

Alexis Harris Conservation: Kristen Bobo, Martha Mills, Sharon Faulkner

The meeting was Adjourned at 3:03.

Awards Committees met with the following results:

Francis McKinney: Don Lance
Richard Schreiber: Carey Frost
Larry Adams: Agnus Cauthorn
Alexis Harris: Jim Whidby

SERA Photo Salon:

Print Category (Eleven entries by five photographers)

1st Place: "Pool" by Rob Tayloe
2nd Place: "I Heard That!" by Lynn Roebuck
3rd Place (tie): "Dewey's Drop" by Ezra Schwartzberg
"Watch Out for The Bat" by Steve Buer
Honorable Mention: "Where Does That Cave Lead?" by Lynn Roebuck

Slide Category (One entry by one photographer)

1st Place: "Rusty's Cave" by Steve Buer

Special Recognition for entries that didn't fit a category:
"Martha" Oil on Canvas by Glenn Mills
"Memories" Photo collection of friends by Bill Walter

SERA Map Salon

Best of Show went to Mike Rogers for Blue Spring Cave, White Co., TN (TWH2).

Three other maps received merit awards by meeting the required high standards:

Webb Cave, Overton Co., TN (TOV39) by Mike Rogers
Howard Collins Cave, Putnam Co., TN (TPU335) by Mike Rogers
Runa Rift, Bedford Co., TN (TBE85) by Brian Roebuck

SERA Banquet

A banquet was held in the same room catered by Charlies Barbeque. Chris Anderson of Dark Light Imagery presented a slide show on big room photography and his collection of flash bulbs.

Respectfully Submitted;
Jim Wilbanks
Secretary / Treasurer

Sewanee Mountain Grotto - A "New" Old Grotto

By Martha & Glenn Mills

In February of 2004 a meeting was held at Charlie Smith's place near Kimball, TN for the purpose of reactivating the Sewanee Mountain Grotto. At that time, Peter Michaud (a.k.a. Mudpuppy) was living at Charlie's place. Those present were Mudpuppy, Maureen Handler, Paul Baggett, Gordon Rosser, Mike Anderson, Martha and Glenn Mills, Anne and Blaine Grindle, Myrna Attaway, and Cindy and Harold Geick.

Why did we want to reactivate the grotto? Well, as stated Pup was living at Charlie's and working for Maureen who was in the final phases of building her house on Jump Off Mountain. Gordon Rosser, her neighbor, had recently joined the NSS and taken up caving. Blaine & Anne and Glenn & I were looking for land in the area. (Both couples bought land are currently building houses near Maureen's house.) Mike lived near by in Altamont, TN. Paul was involved because he is Maureen's friend. Myrna was present because she was also helping Maureen some on her building project and therefore "hangin' out" on the mountain. Harold & Cindy are good friends of Pup and frequently visit the area.

We decided with that many cavers in the area we should have a grotto. The first officers were Pup as Chair, Maureen as Vice Chair and Gordon as Secretary/Treasurer.

Since then we have added several others to the group and have become an official grotto. Our Constitution and By-Laws were approved by the NSS in December.

During our first year many of our members have helped with SKTF clean-ups (heck, three are on the SKTF committee). Sewanee Mountain Grotto was responsible for the aluminum recycling collection cans at the TAG Fall Cave-In. We also hosted a Holiday Reception at Maureen's place in December. We invited people from local conservation organizations and land trusts groups. In December we continued the efforts started by the SKTF at the TAG Fall Cave-In in Cedar Ridge and spent a day scrubbing formations in the cave.

Current officers are Glenn Mills – Chair, Maureen Handler - Vice Chair, Gordon Rosser – Secretary, Martha Mills – Treasurer, and Anne Grindle – Member at Large to EC. One of our main goals as a grotto is to be involved in conservation and clean-up efforts. Danielle Purvis has been appointed as Conservation Committee Chairman to help us organize efforts in this endeavor. We are already planning to do Recycling again at the Cave-In this fall. Hopefully we will be able to expand on what we did last year.

If anyone we aren't aware of lives in the area we welcome them to join our group. Our meetings currently not on a "regular schedule but are usually held on Saturday nights. We have a covered dish dinner at someone's home then hold our meeting. We pick a date for the next meeting at each meeting. We are listed as a grotto in the latest NSS Members Manual but the number listed for Pup is Charlie Smith's phone. Maureen's number listed there is correct but Pup's e-mail is listed for her. The info on the NSS website under grottos is correct
<http://www.caves.org/io/iolookup.php?ionum=000379>

Glory Hole Project Update

by Tom Moltz

Dear SERA friends, thank you for the \$200 donation to the Glory Hole Project. We have received \$1423.00 to date. The money has been spent very frugally. The latest comment we had was, "This looks like a \$20,000 project".

As most of you know, the motivation for us undertaking this project was the loss to the world of Bruce Brewer. The gate restoration was a goal of his and something many of us talked about and planned on doing for years. After Bruce's death in Climax cave we starting acting. The Glory Hole Project is dedicated to Bruce.

Some of our accomplishments are:

1. Built a new gate housing.



2. Stabilized the sink with silt screen and brought in over 12 tons of rock (hand picked from a near-by quarry)

3. Rebuilt the fence and gate around the sink, planted grass, trees, shrubs, and various other plants around the sink.

4. Rebuilt and rerouted the steps leading down into the sink.

5. Burned a large pile of debris from a logging operation.

6. More recently we tore down the old wash/butcher house for Grandma Gainous' daughter, Linda Barfield, who is living in Grandma's house.





The majority of the funds were spent on the 10-inch thick walled concrete monolith gate housing. We drilled and placed rebar in the rock. A concrete pump truck was hired to pump the concrete into the forms.

In the near future we plan to replace the steel gate itself. The old gate was retrofitted and needs replacing.

Our latest accomplishment of tearing down the old wash/butcher house was to help the landowner, and say "Thanks".

Allen Mosler coordinated the wash/butcher house demolition. Matt Kalch, Allen Mosler, Tom Moltz, Linda Barfield, Sheldon Barfield, Tim Lewis, and Matthew Lewis completed this on the 6th of November 2004.

Linda told me two months after the demolition that some of her friends and neighbors were amazed that we took the time to do something like that.

Volunteers to date:

Marty Abercrombie, David Adams, Erik Amsbury, Jo-Ane Amsbury, Paul Aughey, Sue Aughey, Nancy Aulenbach, Allen Cressler, Ann Durham, Ted Hailes, Linda Jamison, Chrissie Jett, David Jones, Susan Jones, Matt Kalch, John Klayer, Tim Lewis, Matthew Lewis, Jennifer Massey, Tom Moltz, Allen Mosler, Patty Perlaky, Ed Pratt, Josh Pratt, Luke Pratt, Ricky Rawlins, Terri Rawlins, Jason Richards, Corie Rocket,



Jacob Storbakken, Dan Straley, Steven Straley, Will Summer, Stan Tew, Kevin Turner, Jeff Van Horn, Bernie Van Horn, Jerry Wallace, Jim Wasson, and Guy Yates.

As Matt Kalch reminds us, the Glory Hole Project is 'on-going'. You can look forward to years of formation cleaning, touring, and picture taking in Glory Hole. This is mostly possible because of the ongoing support and dedication of the caving community.

On behalf of the landowners in the area, the volunteers, and the caving community, Thank You!

Project Managers:

Tom Moltz
Allen Mosler
Matt Kalch

Making the Best of a Rainy Day

By Martha Mills (photos by Martha too!)

On Sunday, February 20 Judy Ranelli of Birmingham dropped by our under construction house because we'd made plans to go to a nearby pit for her to get in a little rope practice. Unfortunately it was raining pretty hard and the pit would not have been pleasant.



However, being resourceful cavers we decided to be creative. Since we had just succeeded in getting the house "dried in", we decided to use it for vertical practice. Glenn rigged a rope from our ceiling joists (using some extra lumber to distribute the weight on several joists) and managed to get us a nice little drop. The foyer ceiling is approximately 18 feet high due to a dormer designed to be a sort of skylight.

Our rig point (which will have a rail when construction is completed simulated getting on and off rope

from a ledge (like a lot of bolt rigs in TAG). Judy learned how to get on and off rope on a ledge. She learned how to avoid a pendulum



as you step off a ledge and learned what happens when you climb too high. After some interesting moments we decided to spend some extra time with her practicing her downclimbing.

Using the temporary stairs we rigged a short rope to practice downclimbs and changeovers. Our neighbor Gordon Rosser also came over and participated in our vertical practice session. We spent several hours

playing on rope in our soon to be new home. Cavers are very adaptable to a variety of conditions.

Graffiti in Caves

by Jim Wilbanks

photos by Lynn Roebuck

Webster defines graffiti as: "A drawing or inscription made on a wall or other surface, usually so as to be seen by the public. A rude decoration inscribed on rocks or walls."

Rude is a very good word to describe the graffiti we see today.

We have all seen graffiti in caves. These graphic expressions come in many forms and styles. We all hate the spray painted attempts at personal recognition of daring spelunking feats and especially the colorful expressions of lust left in the dark for our lights to discover. There are caves barely marred by graffiti while other caves have become huge palettes painted time and again with multiple layers of the stuff. Just about every caver I know doesn't like modern graffiti and wants it removed. There seems to be a visceral, deeply felt hatred of the stuff. Volunteers will gleefully spend hours trying to remove even small patches of it. Grottos have been known to devote years of weekends to scrubbing graffiti from cave walls.

Many of us have also seen cave graffiti in a different way. Such graffiti often is an important historical record. Those of us lucky enough to tour Big Bone Cave with Marion Smith or other knowledgeable historian / cavers have witnessed



such important records. Marion knows the history behind nearly every name on those walls. These carefully inscribed names and dates from earlier times are invaluable for researching the history of a cave and the region. Such cave treasures are valued and protected by all cavers.

There are ancient renderings on some cave walls that do not make use of the written word. Most of us have not seen archaeological cave graffiti, which is much harder to find and to authenticate. I recall ten years ago a noted anthropologist reported that there were only a few examples of it in the Southeast. Since then, much more has been found using side lighting techniques to highlight the faintly drawn symbols important to ancient cultures. Some of these indeed lie beneath more modern graffiti.



Historians argue that graffiti is a historical record. Some even argue that spray paint should never be removed because important historical or archaeological graffiti might be under it. Most cavers do not have the training or experience to determine if sensitive ancient cultural materials lie beneath modern graffiti. There are historians and archaeologists that can spot such hidden treasures. It is wise to consult such experts before planning a graffiti removal project in any cave. The generally accepted point of historical antiquity is fifty years before present but there are always exceptions.



Others are concerned about further damaging the microbial balance in the wall. All exposed rock is undergoing a weathering process. Exposed rock on the surface must be cracked open to identify it, because of the effects of weathering on the rock. Rock in caves is weathering because of several processes. Rock in water filled conduits is being worn away by the passage of water. These conduits are called phreatic formations whether they are active or not. Rock in active caves is undergoing weathering from surface drainage, which forms pits, formations and other vadose formations. Even bone dry cave passages are being actively eroded.

Most agree that microbial action is a part of this weathering. Microbes are tiny life forms, which are actively eating away at the rock and in turn being eaten by other microbes. These microbes are fed by the surface drainage, the air in the cave and the minerals in the rock. Cavers who are lucky enough to encounter virgin cave usually find the walls to be very crumbly. The top surface of the rock has been weathering for eons and is easily brushed away. This microbial life zone is actively feeding the life in the soil of the cave, especially at the base of walls and is an integral part of the ecology of the cave. When our graffiti removal leaves behind bare un-weathered rock, these microbes move back in and return the rock surface to a weathered state in time.

Spray painting is toxic to this microbial action. It delivers a huge slug of toxins in the paint and the propellants. When we encounter graffiti, the damage is already done. All that is left are simple pigments. Anything volatile or toxic has evaporated.

Urban areas are constantly being targeted by "taggers". These people derive pleasure from painting their signature on buildings and railroad cars. One local cave has been defaced from one end to the other by religious graffiti. Municipalities who have aggressively removed this form of graffiti have noticed a decline in the practice. The former enforcement ranger for Pigeon Mountain headed up multiple projects to remove graffiti from Pettijohn's Cave. He attributes constant removal of graffiti for a measurable decline in new graffiti. Many believe there is simply less of it showing up in general. Of course there is always an exception like the recent defacing of Neversink. The ranger and most municipal leaders believe prompt removal of graffiti inhibits new graffiti.

Removal of graffiti has to be done carefully. After determining that a site does not contain archaeological or important historic materials the SERA Karst Task Force uses a graduated process for removal. First, we brush the area with a soft brush. If the paint is on undisturbed, weathered rock, it comes off easily. If it is on mud, then water from a pump

up sprayer is added. Next we try a wire brush. This gets most of the graffiti. Wire brushes can be manual or electric. In both cases, eye protection is important. If the paint persists then more aggressive means are needed. These more aggressive means are the point where opinions begin to differ regarding impact on the cave and safety for the cleaner.

One method, which is certainly effective, utilizes acid. Stonemasons use Hydrochloric acid to clean rock. Diluted to about 20% with water, this substance literally eats the surface of the rock away along with anything on it. This acid mixture is very toxic and can burn any tissue it touches. Fumes from the process are acrid and probably toxic. Acid might be a good choice on an outside surface well away from water sources where power is not available. It is not advisable for groups or in cave use.

The SKTF has been using a new product for a few years called Graff-Off. This product is manufactured from coconut oil and is reputed to be biodegradable and non-toxic. While we have used it, several volunteers have reported allergy like symptoms as well as nausea. The committee has been unable to get complete ingredient lists from the manufacturer. We are currently awaiting a chemical analysis from an environmental lab. In the mean time, we are not using the product in caves and recommend others not to use it until it can be determined that it is safe for use in caves.



Pressure washers can remove a great deal of paint especially in crevices and cracks. The operator has to be prepared to get wet and wear eye protection. Power and water has to be supplied. One Tennessee caver has a self-powered unit, which will siphon its' own water which was demonstrated to good effect removing spray paint graffiti.

Most pressure washers need a pressurized water source and run on gasoline. Caution has to be exercised in dealing with exhaust fumes and Carbon Monoxide. Unless the cave is large with good airflow and no hibernating bats, a gasoline engine does not belong in a cave.

Sandblasting is very effective in graffiti removal. Air tools do not loose effectiveness over distance, so you can clean away as long as the hose reaches. A sandblaster using glass beads can be effectively used on flowstone as the power of the tool can be adjusted. Glass beads are a very expensive blast media, but they are used because they are inert and do not seem to affect the cave's ecosystem. Recovery of spent media is important both economically and in order to lessen any unknown impact on the cave.

During the summer of 2005 the SKTF will be hosting a Graffiti removal trailer first fabricated by Ray Keeler of the Central Arizona Grotto. This trailer is intended for off road use and contains a complete assortment of graffiti removal tools. Everything is powered by a generator/air compressor, which is mounted on the trailer. Fifteen hundred feet of air hose and electric lines end at three stations fifty feet apart. Each station is equipped with: sandblaster, angle grinder with wire brush, tarps, shopvac, and personal protection devices. Recovery, screening and reuse of the glass bead blast media are integral steps in the process. During a full weekend's work, up to 10, 5-gallon tubs of media will be used. Greater than 50% of the blast media is recovered and reused. The tubs are about \$40 each. We need help designing a better recovery system. Those of you who are engineers, try and think of a way to use the shopvac to help increase the recovery. We need your help.

If you or your caving club has a graffiti covered cave that we can get within fifteen feet of, we want to come help you clean it up. We will show up with the trailer and the expertise to run it. You or your group needs to supply the cavers to operate the equipment and provide support such as hauling, feeding, housing or camping, and supply. According to the folks who have used this rig, an entire weekend will go through about \$400 worth of blast media, plus gas.

They describe the system as being able to remove a large amount of graffiti quickly. We interpret that as a big cave with lots of graffiti. Your target cave may be smaller and may be near another grotto's target cave. As the summer progresses, we will have much more clear idea of how much running this machine will cost to operate. Below are some web links which describe the equipment and its use:



<http://caves.org/grotto/cag2/pcleanup.html>
<http://www.thespectrum.com/news/stories/20050206/localnews/1961225.html>
<http://members.cox.net/neonspyke3/graffiti2.html>
<http://members.cox.net/webmastercaverjim/pccpsummary.html>

This summer at the NSS Convention the trailer will be in use in a graffiti removal workshop. The SKTF is sponsoring three workshops at the convention. Formation repair will be taught one day. We will demonstrate our trash hauling system in a pit nearby on Friday of convention. The graffiti removal workshop will show different methods side by side. We will measure Nitrogen content as a basic measure of the life in the soil at the base of the wall and repeat the measurement in an effort to assess the impact of graffiti removal on microbial life.



This will be a pivotal year for the SKTF. We will be busier than ever and we are reaching high in our expectations. None of this can happen unless you help. None of the projects we have worked on would have been possible without your help. Your strong backs, and determined spirit make what we do with the SKTF a pleasure.

We can never say **THANK YOU** enough.

I'm always looking for articles for future issues of The Cave Conservationist Newsletter. If you have article that pertain to conservation, cave conservancies, cave preserves, grotto clean ups, cave clean up, photos, issues that effect caves or just about anything related to cave conservation, management and the protection of caves, please submit them.

Issues of The Cave Conservationist are available at: <http://www.caves.org/section/ccms/>

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NSS Cave Conservation and Management Section
<http://www.caves.org/section/ccms/>

Feel free to pass this announcement to any and all caver lists or grotto newsletters.

The Survey and Exploration of Hubbel's Post Office Cave

By: Brian Roebuck (photos by Lynn Roebuck)

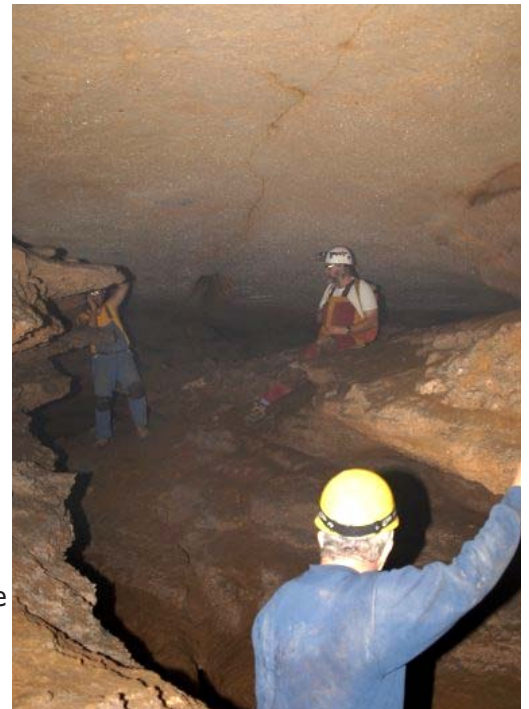
Back in September of 2003 the Southport Chronic Cavers decided to explore and survey a unique cave in Tennessee known as Post Office Cave. This cave has been off limits to most people for many years and through the hard work of Buddy Baldwin and Mark Dunnavent was made accessible to our grotto for this opportunity. The cave was formerly unknown to most cavers and most locals as well. Note that the access to this cave should be considered very "closed" due to the wishes of the owners. Nearby an old hand hewn log structure is reportedly one of the oldest post office locations in the state and has been used for many years for a variety of purposes. It still stands to this day.



The cave entrance is located in a sink divided by a rock based road bed that appears to have been placed across the sink in years past. The crawl-in entrance is none too inviting where the caver is greeted by a short belly crawl across glass sherds from old trash dumpings etc to a small drop into the main passage of the cave. From there the cave is much more friendly and exhibits many surprises to the observant caver. In the cave traces of prehistoric use in the form of cane torch stoke marks and fragments of torch charcoal were

found. The cave is a typical stream passage cave meandering beneath relatively flat terrain and exhibiting joint controlled layout much like other area caves. What becomes interesting in this cave is the multi level nature it has formed as well as the complexity of the passage shapes. The cave is home to typical cave adapted species as well such as Pippistrellus Subflavus (Pippistrell Bats), raccoons, crayfish, and cave rats. Various insects were also observed within. This cave is pretty easy going for most all cavers and made a great project for the grotto survey.

We surveyed the cave in two trips. Fortunately the cave is neither very long nor very complex. All passages humanly accessible were easily traversed and the survey went quickly. Many new surveyors were taught the subtle art of lead tape, data taking, use of the instruments, and setting points in the most difficult location for instrument readers to deal with <grin>. We had fun and took our time doing the survey and the results

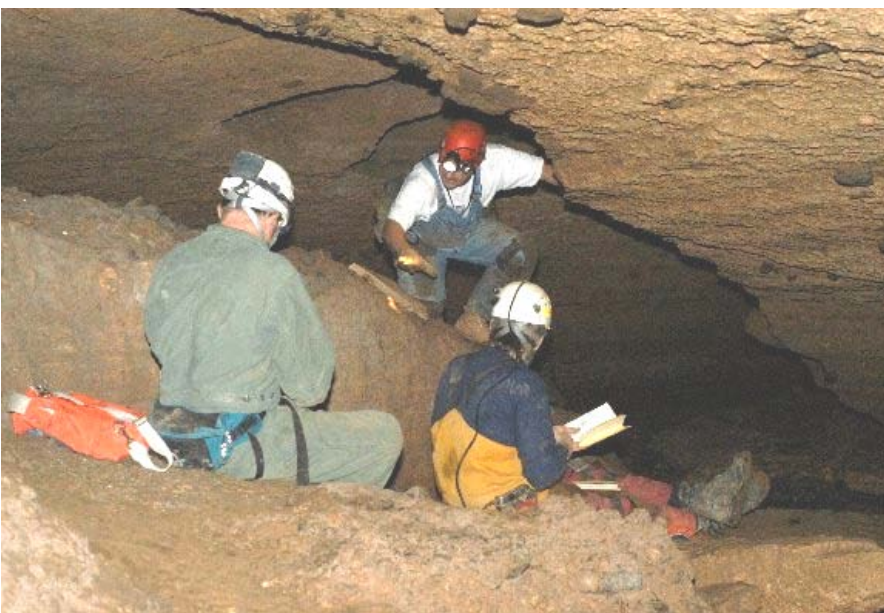


when plotted looked quite good. I did the sketching for a couple of reasons. First of all I was planning on producing the map and second – this cave was so tough to sketch in many places that beginners would be hard pressed trying to figure out how to accomplish a good sketch. Even later on trying to draw the map I would often have to refer to memory to assure the accuracy of the final map.

The first trip on September 21, 2003 included a group of surveyors and a group of explorers. We surveyed from the entrance as we went. The exploration team including Mark Dunnavent checked out the whole cave and reported what they found to us. The survey team was comprised of me on sketch, Lynn Roebuck doing data, Jim Clark and Buddy Baldwin on lead tape, and Robert Sewell on instruments. That first trip netted 624.58 feet of passage in 20 stations with a vertical extent of 22 feet. Lynn began to find what she suspected to be cane torch stoke marks about 400 feet into the cave. I also observed them and agreed they were indeed what we have been taught to be cane torch stoke marks.

Lynn noted several stoke marks at station A-17, A-18, A-19, and “tons” of them on a big rock near A-20. She also noted charcoal residue left by the stoking action below this location. This would later prove to be quite interesting. The evidence of cane stoke marks got our attention and as we all began finding more we decided it would be neat to prove their authenticity. After Lynn and I tried unsuccessfully to contact renowned cave archaeologist Dr Jan Simek of UTK to come take a look we were at least able to get historian Dr Joe Douglas of Volunteer State University to come take a look as well as help survey the cave on the next trip. We all have caved and worked with Joe for years and he was as excited to see the stokes as we were upon our return to the cave on February 29, 2004.

That trip was a survey and archaeology trip that netted survey of the rest of the cave as well as Joes’ collection of tiny fragments of cane torch charcoal for carbon dating analysis. Like Lynn and I, Joe was almost certain these were prehistoric Native American cane torch stoke marks. We followed the marks all through the cave noting the locations as we surveyed along. Keen observations by Lynn as well as the rest of the survey team showed that most of the marks were clustered along the middle of the cave to almost the end of traversable passage. We guessed that the first part of



the cave occasionally gets wet from stream activity that likely washed stoke mark evidence away from the walls long ago.

The second trip survey team consisted of Joe Douglas, Jim Clark, and Robert Sewell sharing duties on instruments, lead tape shared by Robert Sewell and Jim Clark, myself on sketch, and Lynn doing some data as well as taking notes on the cave archaeology, doing photos, and noting other interesting observations. We surveyed 730.47 feet in 26 stations with a vertical extent of 21 feet. The survey was completed that day and we talked about having me draw the map. Joe mentioned possibly getting carbon dating done on the charcoal samples. One noteworthy experience of the author was crawling near the entrance through a tight spot only to come face to face with a snarling Raccoon!

Fortunately the beast was dead and the odor blew inwards away from my oh-to-close nasal passages! We all wisely avoided the carcass and continued the survey!

Joe couldn't find an institution willing to pay for the carbon dating so he paid for it himself resulting in a date of 1400 AD for the sample. Thanks Joe! That clearly puts it in a range typical of Middle Woodland Period occupation and appears to prove our theory of early Native American use of this cave. I have been working on the map and while it is still incomplete it is useful for illustrative purposes. It is interesting to note that the cane torch stoke areas (in blue) appear every hundred feet or so except for the more difficult areas of the cave to maneuver through where they are found more frequently deposited.

The grotto wishes to thank the owners of this unique cave for the opportunity to survey and explore this cave. Hopefully we can find other similar great caves in our area to provide similar enjoyment and purpose for our caving addiction. Thanks also to all the surveyors and explorers involved.

2005 NSS Convention

By Sharon Faulkner

The 2005 NSS Convention will be held July 4 - 8 in Huntsville Alabama, home of the National Speleological Society headquarters. Located in the foothills of the Appalachians just north of the Tennessee River, with 4000 Caves within 70 miles and 200 foot pits within the city limits, the North Alabama area holds a myriad of outdoor opportunities. Hiking, Mountain Biking, Canoeing, Fishing, Boating, and the Trent Jones Golf Trail can all be found within the city limits. Huntsville, also known as the 'Rocket City' has a long history of contributions to the United States Space Program. The conveniences of a metro area of 300,000 mixed with large open rural areas nearby await you deep in the heart of TAG.

The 2005 Convention will be a pleasant experience for first time attendees or for folks who have attended multiple NSS Conventions. We are striving to offer something for everyone to enjoy during his or her stay in Huntsville. Included in the price of registration will be the following events and activities to enjoy during Convention week. There are two Board of Governor's (BOG) meetings during the convention, one on Monday, and one on Friday. If you are interested in the inner-workings of the NSS, it's a great idea to attend these meetings. The annual rope-climbing contest will be held at Grissom High School. Convention is the only venue where you can set an official world record. There will be a variety of sessions and programs scheduled during the week of Convention. Topics include archaeology, biology, cave diving, geology, geography, International exploration, paleontology, cave photography, United States exploration, and much more. There will be a full range of cave art salons. These salons draw artists and photographers from all over the world in a first class display of creativity. From the Slide and Video Salon, Print Salon, Graphic Arts Salon, to the T-Shirt Salon, Symbolic Emblem Salon, Cartographic Salon, and more. The best of the entries for each salon will be on exhibit July 4 to 8, 2005 at the NSS convention in Huntsville, Alabama.

Also provided in the price of registration will be evening events giving you an opportunity to meet and visit with NSS members from across the country. The Howdy Party will be at the NSS Campground on Monday night, July 4. We'll quickly turn to the important part: food, a band, and friends! Kegs of beer and soft drinks will be provided. Tuesday night the annual NSS Auction will be held at the Jaycees Building at the NSS Campground. Wednesday night will be a reception at the United States Space and Rocket Center. The museum has displays and exhibits that highlight all aspects of the United States Space Program, from the early days of unmanned exploration, to the Apollo Missions, to the Space Shuttle and beyond. The museum has vehicles, equipment, and other fascinating paraphernalia from all phases of the space program, as well as actual rockets on the grounds. The Photo and Video Salon, always a highlight of Convention, will be held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, July 7, at the Von Braun Center's Concert Hall. To end a week of fun and fellowship, the banquet, awards presentation, and closing ceremonies will be held at 6:30 p.m. Friday, July 8 at the Von Braun Center's east hall. The dinner will be a buffet with a good selection to satisfy both carnivores and vegetarians!

And that's not all, in addition to a few of the favorite things you enjoy about NSS Conventions, the 2005 Convention will be offering a variety of cave trips. From ages 3 to 93, we have something to fill the "craving for caving" for all who have the desire to spend their vacation underground! See the 2005 NSS Convention website at <http://www.nss2005.com/> for more information or details on all these events and activities.

With the 2005 NSS Convention only months away, it is time to begin thinking about Convention pre-registration. The early registration discount is in effect until May 31, 2005. Register before then and save \$25.00! Visit the Convention website here to register online or download a printable copy of the registration form: <http://www.nss2005.com/registration.htm>

For those who do not pre-register for Convention, on site registration will be at the NSS campground in an air-conditioned facility. Stop by registration first to sign in, pick up your convention materials, and get familiar with the area. The official NSS Campsite is at John Hunt Park in central Huntsville, a 42-acre fenced park with about half grass and half pavement within the Huntsville City Limits. Camping is FREE and is included in your registration. The campground does not have electricity, or RV hookups, but our facilities chair is investigating electric hookups and possibly a dump station for RVs. The campground is conveniently located in the center of town, about 10 minutes from the high school where the sessions will be held, 10 minutes away from the banquet and photo salon facilities, and right in the middle of great restaurants, shopping, and recreational options. Convention will be held in the heart of Huntsville, and there is ample camping, RV Parks, and hotels available for those who do not wish to camp in the campground. Making reservations well in advance is highly recommended. See the 2005 Convention web site for contact information on other accommodations.

We hope to see you there!

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TO: