

The Southeastern Caver

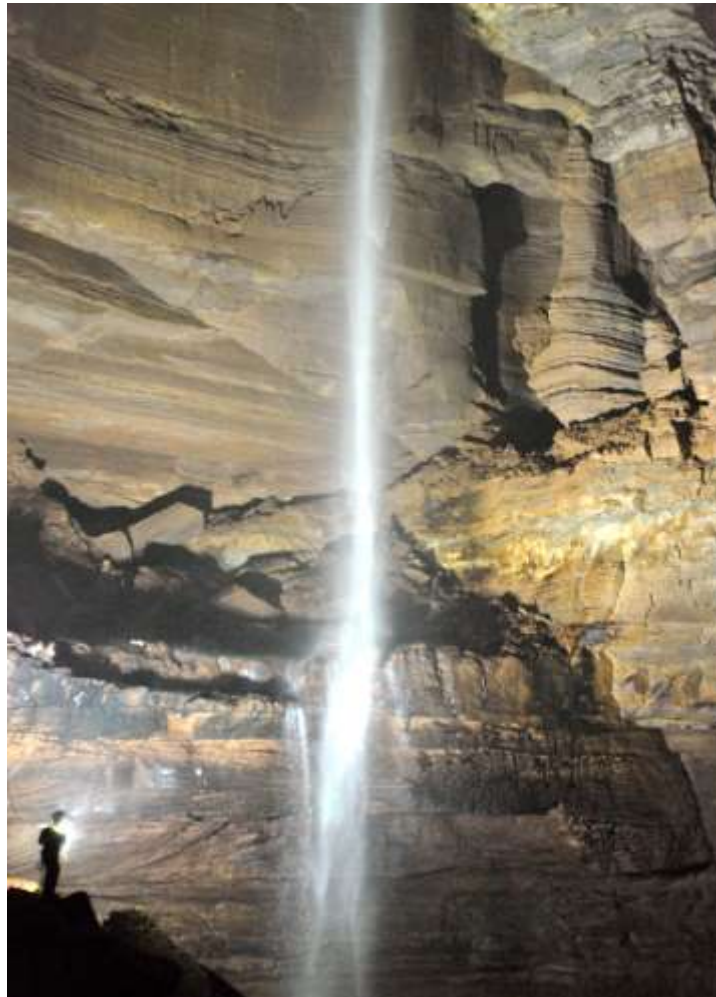
Newsletter of the Southeast Regional Association of Grottos



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Brian Roebuck - Editor



Waterfall (photo by Jim Fox)

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Are We being Watched?

By: Bill Walter

Sooner or later it will happen to most of us. That helpless feeling when you exit a cave and discover you have lost the keys to your only transportation. For me it happened early in my caving career way back in 1958. I was a student at Vanderbilt, enrolled in the School of Engineering. After a freshman year without a car, I finally had one; a 1953 black and white Chevrolet. Until then I had had to rely on other people getting me to and from the caves.



Bill caving in 2007 sporting a 1958 helmet with underwear elastic headband!

(photo by Brian Roebuck)

Going caving in those days meant coveralls, boots, gloves, gas-mask type pack, a good old carbide light for cave gear – and youthful curiosity. Finding someone to go caving with at Vanderbilt was difficult. The consensus at that time was that caving was dangerous and a crazy thing to do. Eventually I met Howard White of Nashville, who was also in the Engineering School. Our heavy class loads did not give us many opportunities to pursue a hobby, but eventually the chance came. He had heard about a large cave near Murfreesboro called Snail Shell. It sounded like a cave worth visiting. Howard did mention that we would get wet because it was mainly a stream oriented cave system... O.K. ... I'll just take a change of clothes.

We took Hwy. 70S to Murfreesboro (mostly two lane, no Interstate 24 back then), and headed South to the cave. It was almost dark when we descended into the Snail Shell sink. This was an impressive sink with 60 foot vertical walls measuring about 150 feet in diameter.

Before we entered the cave, it was time to hide the car keys. I chose a tight crack in the wall, placed the keys and placed a small rock on top for safety. As I was doing this I had a strange feeling that I was being watched. I looked around the sink, but saw no one. I told Howard, "I felt like we were being watched when I hid the keys", but he was more concerned that we were going to get wet. Weather had not been a concern as it was clear, but

very cold. We had tubes for any pools we encountered. Howard said we would go to Venetian Avenue. We explored and wandered around for 4 or 5 hours, then it was time to head out.

Arriving wet and cold back at the sink hole entrance we were greeted with icy air, close to 15 degrees F. I hurried to get the keys, joking that I hoped they were still there. Ah! There is the crack and the rock covering the keys. I picked up the rock – the keys were gone. A wave of nausea swept over me. I was sure someone had stolen the car. So there we were, 15 degrees and our clothes were already freezing. My eyes wandered around the sink hole until they focused on two beady eyes gleaming in a small round solution tube. There he was, Mr. Packrat, ...and I swear he had a sly grin. I went over, hoping he might be sitting on my keys, but as I approached he vanished further back and around a corner, beyond my arm's reach.

I was frustrated but relieved because I knew the car would still be there. We hiked back to the parking area, and there it was in a very frosted state. Now what do we do? The '53 Chevrolet has a side window vent located forward of the main front door window. I figured that at least we can get to dry clothes. Then what? At that time I knew nothing about cars.

We managed to pry the window open, and get into dry clothes, but were still shaking from the cold. Then Howard tells me he might be able to start the car by Hot Wiring it! I said, "Try it". At this point, it seemed rational that if the car caught fire we wouldn't freeze to death immediately!

After a few sparking guesses he connected the two or three correct wires, and the engine started. I didn't really question how Howard learned this skill ... he didn't seem a likely car thief. He was a budding engineer.... and my Hero for the day.

Senior Citizen Afterthoughts: Cars were simple back in the 50's – no anti-theft devices. Oh, yes, I still hide the keys, but now the problem is, I forget where I hid them.

A Celebration of Russel Cave Watershed

By: Jim Wilbanks

In 2009, the Sewanee Mountain Grotto received the NSS Conservation Section's Group Conservation Award. Each year, the section reviews nominations from around the country and chooses the group that stands as an example for the rest of us.

Starting in 2005, SMG proposed an ambitious project to the Sera Karst Task Force. Russell Cave National Monument near the town of Orme had a recurring problem. Russell Cave is an important anthropologic site. The cave takes in the drainage from an entire cove. Garbage was continually washing into the cave. Over the years, various grottos had organized cleanups to help the park service. Each spring, more garbage would be introduced into the cave. SMG made the stunning proposal to clean the entire water shed. This comprised miles of streambed over hundreds of feet of elevation. There were several popular dump sites and a continuous trail of garbage between. Beginning in February 2006, the SMG and SKTF organized a series of hauls netting over fourteen tons of debris. Aluminum and other metals were recycled, tires separated and dumpsters filled. After the first cleanup, a local landowner walked into the Russell Cave office and donated \$500 to help defray expenses. He has since donated more money. Working with local government, tipping fees were waived and county trucks were dispatched on cleanup days to haul the tires. Local papers featured articles on the cleanup and local citizens started showing up to help. Over the next three years, SMG organized its own efforts to clean up the areas between the dumps. The town of Orme started having cleanups of their own. On the last two cleanups the town of Orme fed the volunteers at the Fire Hall. In total, over 30 tons of debris was removed, including hazardous materials such as gas tanks and cans of stain.

SMG started fundraisers of their own to pay for dumpsters and to craft signs. These signs were posted at strategic points talking about clean water and protecting the watershed. Today the entire watershed is clean, local residents are more conservation minded, and Marion County, Tennessee thinks cavers are great.

On April 21st. the SKTF and Sewanee grotto will host a celebration of the completion of this huge endeavor. The day will include a four mile stroll down the road nabbing any odd trash. The wildflowers should be peaking. There are several caves along the way with friendly landowners. Shuttles will be provided to return folks to their cars and a cookout will be provided to end the day.

Fun with Cave Photography Section

By: Brian Roebuck

I didn't get much material for our newsletter this year so I decided to add something of interest. Lynn suggested that the newsletter highlight a few neat photos from an up and coming SERA cave photographer. We both thought y'all would enjoy the cave photography of Jim Fox (his work is on the cover too).



Some of these photos were shot in Blue Spring Cave TN. The photo above shows Josiah Fox negotiating a tight spot in a vertical cave entrance. To its right is a cool cave fossil photo! Angel hair gypsum is always a tough thing to find and photograph. Jims photo below reminds all of us of the magic of sunlight streaming into a cave entrance.





Editors Blurb

All submissions to "*The Southeastern Caver*" are gladly accepted in the following forms, written text, MS Word, plain text files, jpeg, tiff, scanner size prints (8.5" x 11" max), photo slides (I have a slide scanner), pdf, Adobe Photoshop native, and many others (please contact me if you have any doubt). Please send all submissions, photos, etc to the editor by the last day of January for possible inclusion into the next "*The Southeastern Caver*" electronically to: solow@charter.net (broadband) or via snail mail to the following address:

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Please visit our website at <http://www.caves.org/region/sera/> for the latest information and to view older newsletters etc.

Caving related discussion forums and websites of interest to SERA members can be found here:

<https://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=333106360986>
<http://www.hiddenworld.net/tag-net/>
<http://www.webwhisper.com/tcs/default.html>
<http://www.caves.org/survey/fcs/>
<http://ourworld.cs.com/alabamacaves/>
<http://www.caves.org/survey/gss/>

SERA Facebook page
TAG – Net
Tennessee Cave Survey
Florida Cave Survey
Alabama Cave Survey
Georgia Speleological Survey

For all of you cave photographers out there please head on over to Flickr to see some amazing cave photography in various groups such as Cavers, Caves, and Caving Photos (CCCP) located here: <http://www.flickr.com/groups/cavers/> as well as many individual accounts and cave related groups. Search to find more!

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