

The Southeastern Caver

Volume 25 February 2020

**This Issue:
A Lee White
Memorial Tribute**



The Southeastern Caver is the official newsletter of the Southeastern Region Association (SERA) of the National Speleological Society and is published once a year for distribution to SERA member grottoes and the NSS archives. Statements and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the policies or beliefs of SERA or the National Speleological Society. Reprinting of articles is allowed if proper credit is given to the author and/or photographers represented in this publication. Send correspondence and exchanges to: The Southeastern Caver, c/o Don Hunter, address given below.

2019 SERA Officers:

Chair: Bill DeVan
Vice-Chair: Jon Zetterberg
Secretary/Treasurer: John Hoffelt

The Southeastern Caver Editor:

Don Hunter
157 Madison Oaks Drive
Colbert, Georgia 30628

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Cover: Jim Fox captured this nice photo of Lee White on rappel in an unnamed 111' pit in Widowmaker Cave, Van Buren County, Tennessee. Lee set the bolts for the initial descent of this pit. See more about Lee in this issue, beginning page 5.

Back Cover: "Angel Lee", by Bill Steele

A Few Words From The Editor:

As I began to put this issue of The Southeastern Caver together, one of the first submissions was the Jim Fox's cover photo, a dramatic image of Lee White descending the unnamed 111' foot pit in Van Buren County's Widowmaker Cave. As I began to inquire about the specifics of the photo, Jim identified the caver as Lee White. Before long, we pulled in Zeke McKee for additional information on the photo and he soon offered up his recently published tribute article on Lee, as well as several other stories about caving with Lee. In short order, Bill Steele was submitting photos and stories of Lee's exploits with the Proyecto Espeleologico Sistema Huautla (PESH). Within days of hoping I could wrangle up enough content for this year's issue, I was staring straight at an issue that would become a fitting tribute to Lee. I never met Lee, as far as I can recall, but feel I now know why he was so respected in SERA and international caving circles. I hope you enjoy this collection of photos and stories about Lee.

Don Hunter

SERA Summer Cave Carnival

The 2020 and 69th Annual SERA Summer Cave Carnival will be hosted by the Upper Cumberland Grotto on May 15 – 17, 2020 at the Parrish Reservation, Camp Tubbs, BSA in Rock Island, Tennessee. Check out this link for more information and registration:

http://sera2020.subworks.com/SERA_2020.html?fbclid=IwAR3DmlviOx0ERWnYIGU5gTnngqI9IKT5NLWS2XC7Tpbgi0pcq-P72ZzUUH4

2020 Treasurers Report

(Covering January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019)

BEGINNING BALANCE	\$807.97
(Balance brought forward from December 31, 2018)	

INCOME (\$617.50)	
Nashville Grotto Avis Award Fund	\$100.00
2019 SERA Cave Carnival	\$505.50
Patch Sales	<u>\$12.00</u>
Subtotal	\$617.50
EXPENSES (706.25)	
SKTF 2019 Cave Carnival	\$168.50
2019 SERA Awards	\$250.00
Plaques, Frames	\$137.75
SCCi New Cave Acquisition Donation	\$150.00
Subtotal	\$706.25
ENDING BALANCE	\$719.22

2019 SERA WINTER BUSINESS MEETING MEETING NOTES, SUMMARY, TO-DO LIST

(A digital recording of the meeting (partial) is available in the SERA Archives. The minutes presented here are edited/reformatted for publication in this issue. The official version will be posted at the SERA website.)

Meeting hosted by Chattanooga Grotto at Reflection Arboretum and Nature Center, Chattanooga, Tennessee

1030hrs Chair Jay Manneschmidt opens meeting; Vice Chair Bill DeVan present; Secretary/Treasurer John Hoffelt present; SKTF Chair Maureen Handler present

Rebecca McNabb welcomes meeting attendees on behalf of Chattanooga Grotto.

Salon Introductions:

- Fine Art, Don Hunter – 11 photo submittals; no art; New (2019) and back issues of the Southeastern Caver are available. Judges for salon: Chuck Sutherland, Jerry Wallace, Kyle Lassiter.
- Map, Brent Aulenbach – 25th Annual Map Salon, 12 submittals. Judges for salon: Brent Aulenbach, Kyle Lassiter, Rebecca McNabb, Natalie Pheasant, Chuck Sutherland, and Jon Zetterberg.

Executive Reports:

Chairman, Jay Manneschmidt: Chair and help organize the WBM.

Vice Chairman, Bill DeVan: Assisted with the WBM. Secretary/Treasurer, John Hoffelt: Treasurers Report. Treasury for 2018 started with \$401.90; added \$1,022.64 income and \$616.57 expenses, for ending balance of \$807.97.

Internal Organization Activity:

New grottoes, RAT Grotto (Alabama) and Poseidon Grotto (again); Florida Cave Survey did not file a report and status is unknown.

Other Reports:

NSS web service went to new server, with SERA following and no change noted. Mississippi caver correspondence, no additional contact.

Advertising solicited for NSS Members Manual, executive decision not to advertise (too expensive). Also discussed SERA Award Procedures, will include that discussion under new business.

SKTF, Maureen Handler – Brought WNS decon to Cave Carnival and TAG Fall Cave-In

SERA Activities:

2018 Cave Carnival – Alan Cook reported attendance was 330; profit approximately \$5,000. Report provided for SERA archive. Hosted by the Birmingham Grotto.

2019 Cave Carnival – Mark Ostrander reported on preparations at Lazy G Wedding Chapel near Union Grove, Alabama, May 2-5, 2019. Hosted by Huntsville Grotto.

2020 Cave Carnival – Calla Goins reported that the carnival will be held at the Rock Island Boy Scout Ranch. Hosted by Upper Cumberland Grotto.

2020 Winter Business Meeting – Jon Zetterberg reported that Dogwood City Grotto would host the meeting in Atlanta.

2021 Winter Business Meeting – Jay Manneschildt reported that East Tennessee Grotto would host the meeting probably in Oak Ridge.

Old Business:

2018 WBM Notes – John Hoffelt read the minutes from the 2018 WBM; the minutes are amended to note the Map Salon Report in *The Southeastern Caver*, Vol. 24, February, 2019.

SERA Cave Carnival Toolbox Web Development – Jay Manneschildt discussed the Toolbox; it did not develop as original concept, but he is available to assist in local IO development of management tools.

2019 NSS Convention – Maureen Handler showed the 2019 Convention Video and discussed plans for the convention.

New Business Identification:

Jay Manneschildt identified SERA Award nomination and evaluation procedure issues for discussion, including the 30-day nomination cut-off deadline and the 3-year consecutive evaluation time for committee members.

1245hrs Break for Lunch

1400hrs Meeting Reconvenes

Roll Call and IO Reports:

14 IOs present (see Sign-In Sheet in Archives)

Athens Speleological Society declines hosting the 2021 Summer Caver Carnival

New Business Resolution:

SERA Executive Committee (Jay Manneschildt) moves and the Governing Committee (unanimous acclamation) seconds the following SERA Act:

To revise the guidelines for selection of SERA Award winners as established by SERA Act, dated February 18, 2006. The new procedure removes the requirement to notify the award committee of the nominations two (2) weeks prior to the Winter Business meeting. Nominations may be submitted in writing to the Executive Committee (Chair, Vice

Chair) up to the opening of the Winter Business Meeting. Continuity of award committee members will be maintained, as is possible, by meeting attendees. Motion passes unanimously (11-0).

2019 SERA Awards:

Francis McKinney Award – awarded to Alan Cressler; Judges: Kathie Ferrari, Warren Wyatt, Jon Zetterberg

Richard Schreiber Award – awarded to Jon Zetterberg; Judges: Zeke McKee, Kyle Lassiter, Jeff Patton

Alexis Harris Conservation Award – No Nominees

Larry S. Adams Landowner Appreciation Award – awarded to Mike Friday; Judges: Michael Gilbert, Dave Hughes, Chuck Sutherland

Avis Moni Hospitality Award – awarded to Warren Wyatt; Judges: Calla Goins, Natalie Pheasant, Rebecca McNabb

Meritorious Service:

- Warren Wyatt (nominated by Chuck Sutherland (TCS) for outstanding service as an ambassador to new cavers and to the Upper Cumberland Grotto.
- Thomas Whitehurst (nominated by Dave Hughes) for outstanding public education and interaction as Property Manager at Stephens Gap Callahan Cave Preserve.

Election:

Vice Chairman: Jon Zetterberg

Secretary/Treasurer: John Hoffelt

New Business:

Georgia Speleological Survey (Brent Aulenbach) opens discussion on SERA webpage management. Dogwood City Grotto (Jon Zetterberg) moves and Spencer Grotto (Calla Goins) seconds the following SERA Act:

To require the SERA Webmaster to be an active NSS Member.

Motion passes unanimously (13-0).

Bill Stringfellow invites SERA to provide a delegate to the Congress of Grottos at the NSS Convention. (Bill DeVan to attend or provide delegate) Mr. Stringfellow also reminds people to join or renew their dues for membership in the Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc.

1530hrs Chair Jay Manneschildt closes meeting and award committees meet

1730hrs Banquet Meet and Greet

1900hrs Jay Manneschildt reopens business meeting for Executive Committee proposal to donate \$150.00 to the Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. Governing Committee approves by unanimous acclamation.

1915hrs Awards Presentation by Jay Manneschildt (as noted above), Don Hunter, Brent Aulenbach
Photo Salon Best of Show = Jim Fox, Tilted Well
Map Salon Best of Show = Zeke McKee, Widowmaker Cave

1930hrs Banquet speaker: Amber Lehmann:
Acquisition of Johnson's Crook by the Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc.

2019 SERA Map Salon Winners

Submitted by Brent Aulenbach

The 25th annual SERA Map Salon was held at the SERA Winter Business Meeting on Saturday, February 9th, 2019. The meeting was hosted by the Chattanooga Grotto at the Reflection Riding Arboretum & Nature Center in Chattanooga, TN.

The goals of the map salon are to encourage and improve the mapping of caves in the SERA region by (1) providing a venue for cartographers to display their maps, (2) give cartographers an opportunity to view other cartographer's maps and techniques, (3) provide helpful critique, and (4) provide an incentive through healthy competition.

There was a good participation this year with 12 maps entered for competition by five cartographers along with one map entered for show only. Maps included caves in Tennessee, Alabama, and Florida,

including one mostly underwater cave. Maps were judged in three categories, Long Caves, Short Horizontal Caves, and Pits. All maps were of high quality and eight maps received awards.

Two maps received a Merit Award for achieving a high level of proficiency: Peter Cave Cove Moonshine Cave, Marion Co., TN (Short horizontal caves category) by Kyle Lassiter and Birmingham Grotto 50th Anniversary Pit, AL (Pits category) by Dave Hughes. These caves deserve special recognition for having some of the longest cave names!

- In the Pits category, First Place went to Kyle Lassiter for Freight Hoppers Pit, Marion Co., TN.
- In the Short Horizontal Caves category:
First Place went to Ryan Hoffman for Ant Farm Cave, Jackson Co., FL.
Second Place went to Ryan Hoffman for Maddachalk (Peacock Springs), Calhoun Co., FL.
- In the Long Caves category:
First place and Best of Show went to Zeke McKee for Widowmaker Cave, Van Buren Co., TN (with contribution from Chuck Sutherland).
Second Place went to Jon Zetterberg for Haggard Cave, Marion Co., TN.
Third Place went to Zeke McKee for Delong Cave, Van Buren Co., TN.

A large draft map of Zarathustra Cave, TN was entered for show by Bill DeVan. Additional entries included Deer Rub Pit, AL, Hannah's Cave, AL, and Anna's Gallery, AL, all by Dave Hughes, and Bat Mama Cave, Overton Co., TN by Kyle Lassiter.

Thanks to all the cartographers for their excellent maps! And thanks to the judges: Brent Aulenbach, Kyle Lassiter, Rebecca McNabb, Natalie Pheasant, Chuck Sutherland, and Jon Zetterberg.

Looking forward to lots more great maps next year!
Get mapping & drafting!

-Brent

2019 SERA Fine Arts Salon Winners

Submitted by Don Hunter

The 2019 SERA Fine Arts Salon was held at the 2019 SERA Winter Business held on February 9, 2019 at the Reflection Riding Arboretum & Nature Center in Chattanooga, TN. Eleven photos were submitted for judging in the Photo Salon by two photographers in two categories (Color print, People and Color Print, Artistic). There were no entries in the Art Salon. Judges for the salon were Chuck Sutherland, Jerry Wallace and Kyle Lassiter.

The following awards were given:

Category 2A, Color Print/People

1st Place: Warren Wyatt, "Wolf River"

2nd Place: Warren Wyatt, "Run to the Mill #2"

3rd Place: Warren Wyatt, "OV 44"

Category 2C, Color Print/Artistic

1st Place: Jim Fox, "Tilted Well"

2nd Place: Warren Wyatt, "Water Well"

3rd Place: Jim Fox, "Run to the Mill #3"

Honorable Mention: Warren Wyatt, "Secret Cave"

Honorable Mention: Warren Wyatt, "Run to the Mill #1"

Best of Show was awarded to Jim Fox for his photo "Tilted Well", scoring 41 out of maximum 45 points.

Worley's Cave (Tennessee) Resurvey

Submitted by Richard Knapp

A resurvey of Worley's cave was started in April 2019 in the hopes of increasing the accuracy and detail of existing maps. While this is not a 'Grotto project,' many members of the Flittermouse Grotto are involved. As of the end of 2019, thirteen survey trips were made resulting in 11,554' of resurvey with nearly 400 stations. The project has had the help of thirteen participants so far. We have surveyed the

first section (entrance to the Devil's Staircase), almost all of the Railroad Passage, and have just started on the second stream segment (Devil's Staircase to 2nd Sump/Scout Loop). The project received a generous donation of old maps and surveys and a lot of historical documentation. We have been able to relocate most of the passages and are trying to clean each section as we go."



Surveying in Worley's Cave, TN



Bill Steele Photo

Lee White

A collection of remarks, remembrances and photos commemorating and celebrating Lee White's life and contributions to caving in the five short years he was with us

My Good Friend

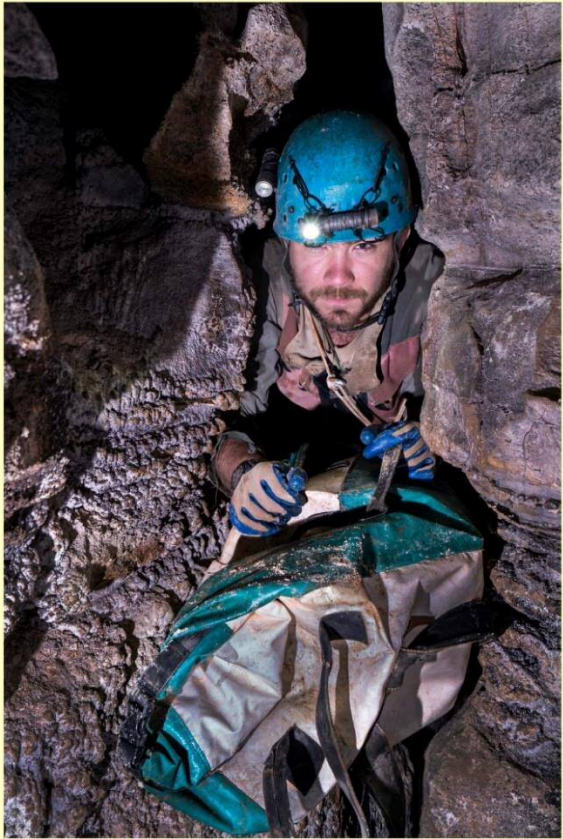
Contributed by Bill Steele NSS 8072 FE-LB-CM-AL
Irving, Texas

I have been leading expeditions to the Huautla de Jimenez, Oaxaca, Mexico (200 miles southeast of Mexico City) for 42 years. The cave system has grown through the years and is now the deepest cave in the Western Hemisphere at 5,117 feet deep, 9th deepest cave in the world, 55 miles long, with 29 entrances. Six years ago, Tommy Shifflett and I reorganized the project, gave it a new name, and set some new goals. The first goal was to conduct annual month-long expeditions, 2014-2023, and write a comprehensive book about it in 2023.

Lee White joined us in 2017. He came on three expeditions, 2017, 2018 and 2019. Lee was young, smart, skilled, brave, and tireless. He was the explorers' explorer. He was technically precise, well read on worldwide cave exploration literature, and was the utmost advocate for safety.

I was counting on Lee to continue to be on our expeditions and be impactful. In fact, he didn't know this, but being 40 years older than him, I had him in mind to eventually become the leader of Proyecto Espeleologico Sistema Huautla (PESH). Now, sadly, that won't happen.

(More photos by Bill Steele on page 6)



Lee White PESH Pics

Bill Steele Photos

Dome Climbing in Tennessee, A Lee White Memoir

By Zeke McKee, NSS 67250

“Slack!” The word rolled past and into the abyss below. I relaxed the grip in my right hand, pulling with my left, I watched as the damp rope slipped out of the dirty, yellow cloth bag clipped to the cold limestone wall by my side. The dynamic line slid gracefully out of the sack, gliding through my belay device and a procession of quickdraws that littered the wall, stretching upward. The rope ended, tied to Lee White, 30 feet above. Here the great limestone wall curved inward creating a narrow spot near the top of the dome. Lee grunted as he hauled himself, the rope, a rotary hammer, webbing ladders, adjustable lanyards, bolts, hangers and a variety of other odds needed to ascend the vertical shaft, upwards, into the unknown. The light from his headlamp disappeared as Lee heaved himself over the projection of rock and out of sight.

I settled back into my harness locking off the belay device. Moments later the whirring and clanging of Lee’s rotary hammer pounding away at the rock resumed. The progress continued upwards till the top was nearly reached. At one point near the top, a layer of mud, with no solid rock for gear placement, or bolts separated Lee from his goal. Prepared for such an event, Lee unclipped a length of steel angle iron, sharpened to a point on one end and a hole drilled on the other for clipping to. He drove this “mud piton” deep into the gummy sludge with his hammer. Carefully he clipped an etrier to the metal spike and slowly tested it with his body weight...it held. Not long after, Lee had reached the top. He placed some permanent stainless anchors, tied off a static line, and rappelled back to the belay station.

It was crowded. The station consisted of just three stainless concrete anchors, smaller in diameter than your finger, hammered into the sheer face of the dome, over 200’ from the floor below. Now with Lee returning from above, there were two of us, a bag of dynamic belay rope, a pack of various other climbing supplies, and a personal pack of water, snacks, and sundries all trying to share the same 3 bolts and few feet of wall space. I was tired, cold, and sore from sitting in my harness for what seemed like an eternity. I packed up all the gear that was no longer necessary and bailed off the wall, leaving Lee to clean his route and then reconvene at the bottom of the dome. On the way to the bottom I took some disto-measurements and determined the dome to be approximately 270’ tall.

On the floor I was met by Mike Lepley, who had been napping and touring around solo during the climb. I was sore, stiff, and cold so Mike took me on a tour to some nice formations he had encountered while waiting. Shortly thereafter, Lee came whizzing

down the fixed line in the dome and nearly impaled himself on a mud piton sticking vertically out of a pile of debris just at the base of the rope. At one point, near the top of the climb, this piton had come unclipped from Lee and went flying down the pit like a missile, entombing itself erect in a pile of mud and rocks that had fallen from the top of the dome. In his usual Lee fashion, an after-climb meal was in order, so he treated himself as Mike and I began to gather and pack the assortment of goods strewn about the floor. It was getting late and we were ready to go, with the exception of Lee, who wanted to organize and inventory his climbing gear. This was typical of Lee as well; he could regularly be found counting and arranging his gear both above and below ground.

Finally, everything was packed and the heavy trek back to the entrance was in motion. Each of us had two or three bags overflowing with gear, as we were removing all the stashed climbing goods and derigging the cave for the winter. We walked and climbed until we reached a low belly-crawl in water that would lead us to our first rope ascent back out of the cave. Pushing one bag ahead, and pulling one behind, clipped to your harness was frustrating and tiring work through the crawl passage. It was refreshing on the other end to crawl out into the base of a waterfall pit. On the way in, we had taken care to avoid the spray of the water as much as possible. Now, hot and covered in sweat, exhausted from the hefty pack haul, the cold spray of the water as it plummeted and splashed around the base of the pit were refreshing. Here the three of us climbed up the rope beside the falls, the weight of gear, now being soaked by water, slowed progress and strained every muscle as we advanced. At the next climb we rearranged the weight distribution of the packs and then climbed up, crawled over and stared up at the short rope leading up into the cool November night air.

We talked cheerfully on the brisk hike back to the vehicles. The top of the dome had not gone anywhere, just a small alcove at the top, where one can get off rope but go no real distance. It didn't matter to Lee, this dome, the "Very Hungry Caterpillar Dome" as he named it, was almost 300' tall. Later a tape measure determined the distance from the floor to the lip of the alcove at the top to be 267'. It was the second tallest climbed dome in the TAG region. It had only taken Lee three pitches to conquer the giant. The last few years had honed his skills as a dome climber. His method was sound, his technique efficient, and his natural ability gave him the ability to scale cave walls in an impressively short amount of time. We reached the cars around midnight and chatted for a few more minutes. Before heading out Lee looked at me as a wide grin spread across his face, his eyes squinted in the darkness of the Alabama night. "Now we have to find a dome that's even bigger, The BIGGEST dome in TAG!".

Lee White had an incredible passion, talent, knowledge, and desire to explore caves. This drive led him to incredible accomplishments of exploration and discovery in a relatively short amount of time. He was the most efficient dome climber I have ever met. He used creative and innovative techniques to push the boundaries of bottom-up cave exploration. The word “impossible” did not exist in his vocabulary. When told of the Mt. Stromboli dome climb attempt in Gourdneck Cave, and how there was an impassible layer that could not be climbed near the top, Lee took it as a challenge to prove nothing was impossible. Lee and Kyle Lassiter reached the top of this dome finding more passage at the top before being stopped by breakdown. Lee then turned his attention to another dome in the same cave of nearly the same height, he had nearly topped that climb at the time of his passing. Lee also made extensive contributions to the exploration of Enigma Cave. In the cave he performed more than 9 aid climbs leading to the discovery of new cave passage. He also bolted numerous pits in the cave and assisted in the survey. The cave now stands at 4.25 miles long, it has over 35 known dome/pits sporting over 60 rig points, five of these are over 100’ making Enigma the cave with the most pits over 100’ in the state of Tennessee. These discoveries would not have been possible without the contributions of Lee White. There are so many other projects of which Lee was a part of in the caving world. He was on the trip when Jewett 3 cave was connected to Happy Top Horror Hole, dethroning Bull Cave as the deepest in the state of Tennessee and made extraordinary contributions to the PESH project in Huautla, Mexico. I can’t begin to try and compile a list of his contributions to speleology.

Lee was an incredible caver but was just as accomplished at being a friend. I met Lee in 2016 and didn’t know what to think of him at first. It was Marion’s 74th birthday and we were eager to see about this “hot shot” new bolt climber MOS had heard about. He showed up late, spent forever counting and organizing gear, and still forgot to bring the drill bit on the first trip over to the cave. It didn’t matter, by the end of the day we were already friends. We spent a lot of time together caving, and just hanging out around campfires talking. At these campfire discussions we’d host a plethora of topics, but the main one being caves. Where to find the hardest cave in TAG, fusion knots, alpine vs American rigging, or an invite to his favorite spring cave with the promise that, as Lee put it, “You won’t die much, the water crawl is less than a mile”. Lee was a deeply caring person who invested heavily into the people and activities his life was intertwined with. Reliable, though not always on time, if Lee said he was going to do something, he did it. As an example, one time he showed up 30 minutes late for a cave trip with the bumper of his old white Jeep tied on with plastic zip-ties. He was involved in a minor accident on the way up from Alabama, but was determined not to let that stop him; we had an excellent day of caving, after we finally got started. He carried a passion that you could

occasionally see spark in his eyes in the moments between the stern emotionless face and the broad smile that he would flip between. Lee was loud, in the volume in which he spoke most certainly, but also in the impression he would leave with you. He was a dear friend that positively impacted the lives of so many. So now we carry on with Lee in our thoughts as we climb the next dome, drop the next pit, or survey around the next corner just as he would have done. Until we find ourselves in that big discovery Lee knew was waiting, just up that next dome.

(More photos of Lee dome climbing in Tennessee , page 14)

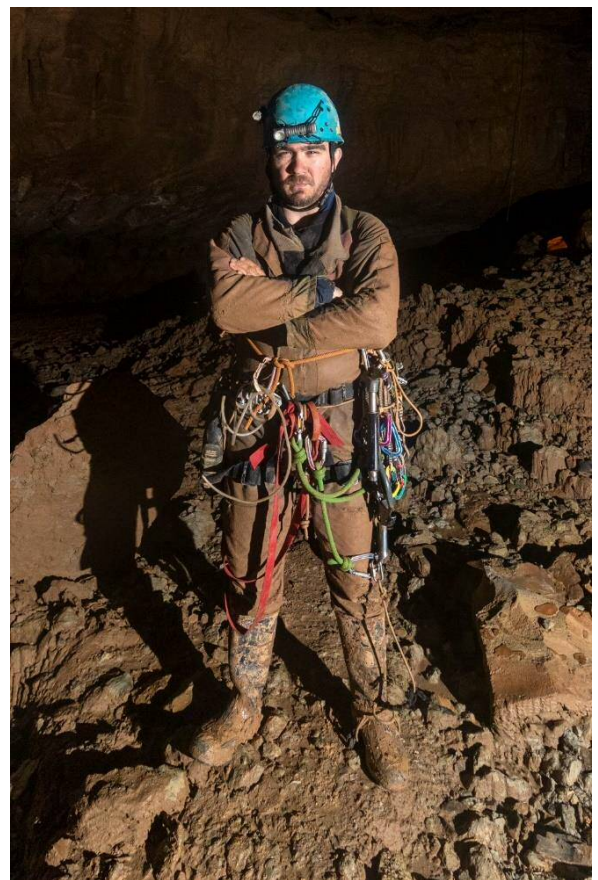
“The” Lee White

April 17, 1988 – September 15, 2019

A great caver taken before his time

By Kyle Lassiter

A man with a bold personality and even bolder caving prowess, it is most appropriate that I use his email address prefix as the title of this memoriam to a great caver. He was The one and only Lee White, a unique individual in so many ways who impacted the lives of many cavers in his short caving career. On an otherwise unremarkable Monday morning, I rolled over in bed around 7am to go through my morning routine of checking my phone notifications that had accrued during the night while I was sleeping. As usual, there were a dozen or so worthless Facebook notifications, most of which I hardly even take the time to glance at as I clear them from the queue. However, the newest notification at the top of the list from just a few minutes earlier was from Bill Steele in a private group for PESH expedition members, and when I viewed it I was immediately shocked. I can't remember the last time a Facebook post did that to me. It was short and said: “Terrible, terrible, terrible news. Lee White died last night in a vehicular accident in North Carolina. I just spoke with his mother.” My sleepy morning routine ahead of an otherwise boring day off of work was suddenly shattered by unbelievable news. I immediately sat up in bed and read the



Chuck Sutherland Photo

message over and over again to make sure I had read it correctly. Stunned, I then texted and called a few of my friends who were also very close to Lee and probably had not heard the news yet, as Bill had only just announced it. Steve Davis, Jim Smith, Mark Wingard, and more. I ended up talking to Mark Wingard and Josh Schultz about it that morning, two of his closest caving companions from his earliest days of caving. Disbelief prevailed over sadness during these earliest hours, but as the days went by the sadness and unfairness of it all set in for many of us.

Lee White was from Augusta, GA, and began learning about and exploring caves in northwest Georgia around 2014, having no prior caving experience beforehand. Five years of dedicated caving later, and he became arguably the finest bolt climber that TAG has ever known. He climbed dozens of domes in record time, often climbing over 100' in a single day and topping out several domes that had rebuffed prior climbing attempts by other cavers. To watch him climb a dome was to watch a craftsman at his craft, as they say.

The first time I met Lee White was on my first trip to the Stairstep entrance of Ellison's Cave in November 2014. Josh Schultz had met him recently, and with Lee still being a new caver at that point, Josh invited him along for our big trip that day. I remember being skeptical about how this new caver would do on a trip as advanced as bottoming Incredible Pit. Of course, he did just fine (even with his micro rack), and the rest is history. He was hooked on vertical caving. An intelligent man with a academic background in physics, he was a quick study on the techniques of vertical caving. He soon turned his focus from going up and down ropes, which was "easy", to bolt climbing, a much more arduous and complicated skill that only a handful of cavers know. Seemingly overnight he conquered the basics, and soon myself and others were belaying Lee up the walls of domes all over TAG. I helped him with climbs in Johnson's Crook Cave, Mother's Finest Cave, Run to the Mill Cave, Orcestrwell Spring Cave, Savor It Well, and Gourdneck Cave, amongst others. He was particularly fond of his climbs in Savor It Well, which has multiple domes over 200' tall in it, including his so-named Very Hungry Caterpillar Dome at 267'. He was also highly regarded for his climbing done in Tumbling Rock and Bell Spring Caves, where he established two significant multi-drop "up" routes.

What turned out to be one of Lee White's last caving projects was climbing the two tall domes (~200' high) near the back of Gourdneck Cave, my survey project with the Sewanee Mountain Grotto for the last 2 ½ years. On July 14, 2019, Kevin Ditamore visiting from Hawaii joined Lee and I for the 2nd attempt at summiting the Mt. Stromboli Dome all the way at the back of the cave. Lee had climbed over 150' high already in

prior trips, but on the last trip he was stopped by rotten rock at the top of the dome that would not hold bolts or traditional aid placements. This time, we hauled in a three-foot metal stake, two two-foot metal stakes, a two foot drill bit, and other odd metal aid pieces that made for some strange pack shapes. It took 3.5 hours to reach the base of the dome with this gear, which is all the way at the back of the cave. This time, I belayed him as he topped out the dome using these "improvised advanced aid techniques" to get through the thick layer of rotten claystone and shale that had stymied a prior climb attempt by cavers in the 1980s. To get through this layer, Lee proceeded to hammer the three-foot stake all the way in to the bad "rock" for an aid placement. Next, he hammered the two-foot long drill bit in followed by a two-foot stake, until he was finally able to climb high enough to place a bolt in another dolomite layer. He made it stick and never took a fall. He was the absolute master of his craft, the best aid climber I have ever witnessed. He made quick work traversing around a ledge thereafter and then up and into going passage. Mission accomplished! Ahead of him lay a 20-foot wide by eight-foot tall passage heading off to the south, and another passage on the east side of the dome as well. Lee proceeded to clean the ledge, which included chunking some enormous pieces of dolomite and shale breakdown into the abyss, and then finished rigging the pit. Lee checked ahead a short distance to see if the passage continued and found a breakdown collapse with a 20-foot climb on one side that may lead over it.

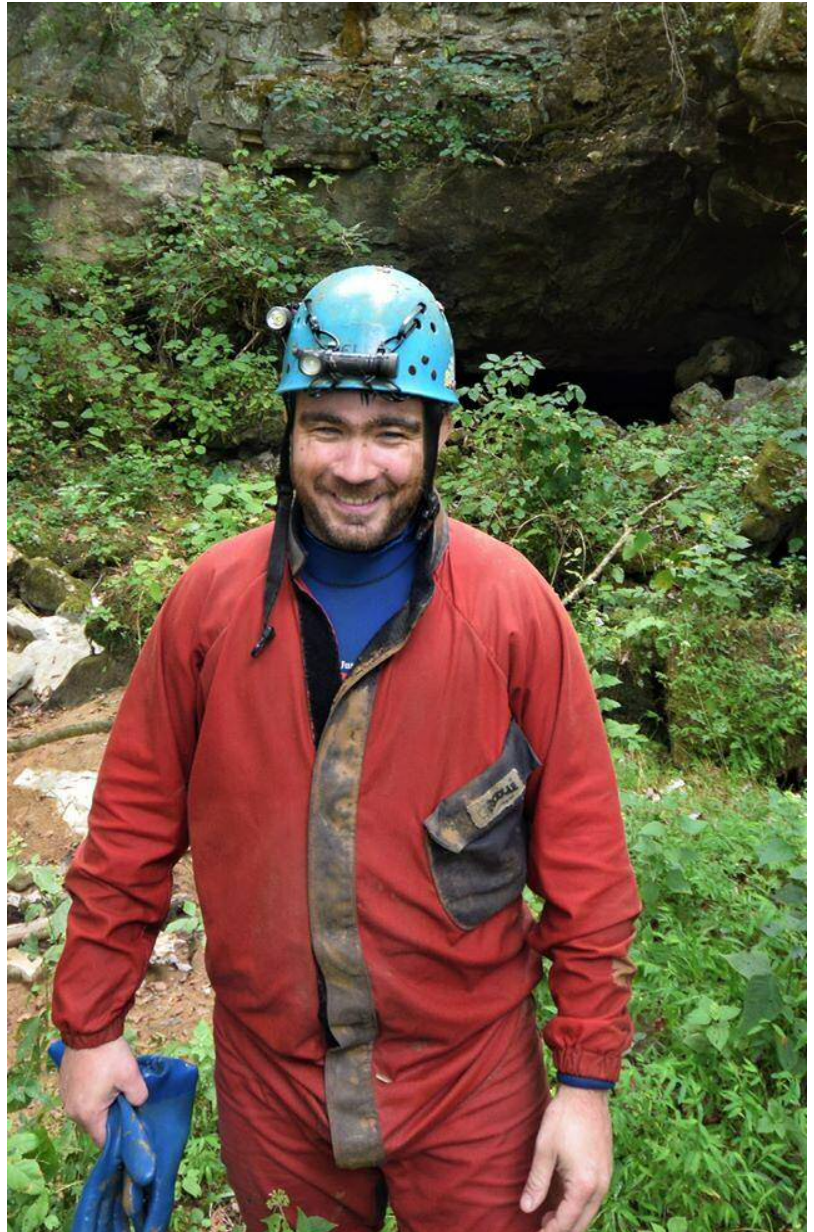
Lee and I returned on August 22nd to explore and survey this passage; this ended up being my last trip with Lee. We were stopped by breakdown at the top of the 20-foot climb after netting 270 feet of survey, but that's how it goes sometimes. I often joked with Lee that every time I belayed a dome climb for him, the passage at the top didn't go far. He was still glad to have me along!

Lee's last dome climb was Thursday, September 12th, with Philip Rykwald in the other unnamed tall dome in Gourdneck. He got up about 180' high in it before being stopped by scary rock again. He named it Halfway House Dome. Lee probably contemplated how to improvise a climb through the bad rock for his next trip there, but his life was cut short before he could return. His last caving trip was the day before his death, Saturday, September 14th, to survey a terrible water crawl in Orcestwell Spring Cave, one of his project caves. The photo at the end of this article is Lee at the entrance of the cave at the end of the trip, and you wouldn't know he had just been laying in the water for hours with that grin...that classic Lee White grin and laugh that all who have met him can still hear. (A partial, but significant list of Lee's dome climbs can be found on page 15).

Lee White was killed in a car crash while driving to a job site near Raleigh, NC, on the night of Sunday, September 15th. Another vehicle swerved out of its lane and hit Lee's Jeep in the side, causing it to lose control and flip multiple times. He died shortly afterwards. Considering all of the high-risk caving and aid climbing Lee had done over his prodigious five year caving career, it is bitterly ironic that he was killed prematurely doing something so ordinary as driving to work, something that all of us can relate to on a daily basis. It is a painful reminder of just how fragile our lives are. As the song lyric from "If I Die Young" by The Band Perry states so eloquently:

"The sharp knife of a short life..."

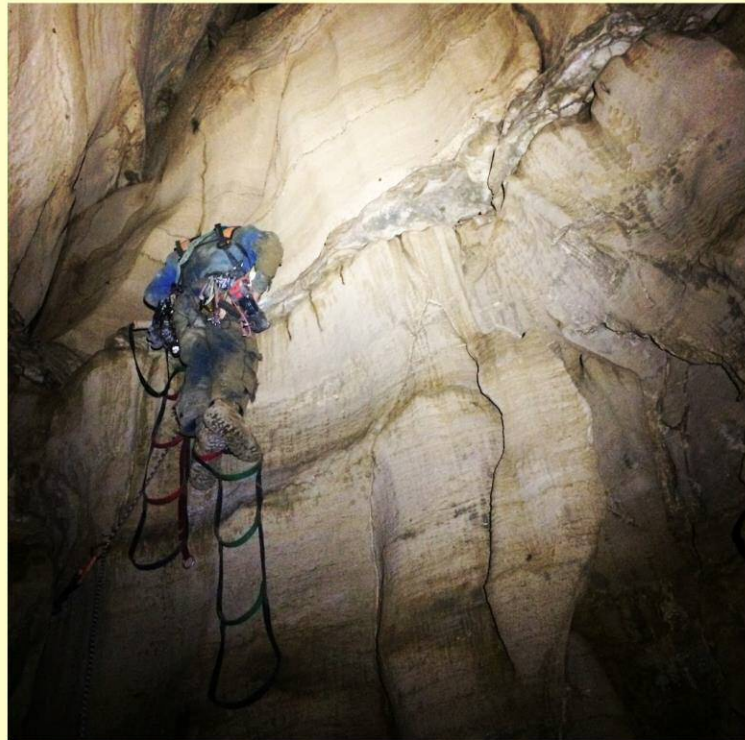
I, for one, am immensely grateful for knowing Lee White and was privileged to share many outstanding caving experiences with him over the years. I am particularly grateful for the contributions he made in SMG's survey project cave, Gourdneck. He reclimbed Hans Falls, reestablishing access to the back half of the cave for the first time in over 20 years. He tackled Mt. Stromboli, one of the most challenging dome climbs ever completed in TAG, taping at 191' high. He nearly conquered Halfway House Dome before his untimely end. He participated in numerous survey trips, and rigged Axel Falls for safe visitation by tourist cavers. Many domes in TAG will remain unclimbed now that Lee is gone, but his ropes left in Gourdneck and other caves throughout TAG are his legacy for cavers to see and use for years to come. Lee was taken in the prime of his life, and will be sorely missed.



Steve Davis Photograph



Lee climbing Cypher Dome, Enigma Cave. Photo by Jim Fox



Lee climbing Natural Arch Dome, Enigma Cave. Photo by Zeke McKee



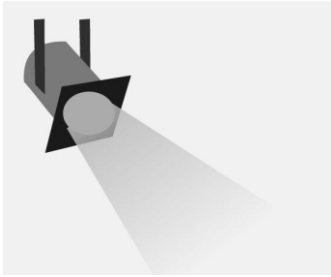
Lee White (climbing) and Marion Smith in Widowmaker Cave. Photo by Jim Fox



Lee White climbing in Enigma Cave. Photo by Alfred Crabtree

Lee White Dome Climbing in TAG

Partial List of Lee White's Dome Climbs, In No Particular Order		
Cave	Dome	Height
Enigma Cave, TN	Cipher Dome	153'
Enigma Cave, TN	Mud Dome	20'
Enigma Cave, TN	Hollow Dome	15'
Enigma Cave, TN	Lee's Blind Dome	40'
Enigma Cave, TN	Blasted Dome	35'
Enigma Cave, TN	Natural Arch Dome	30'
Enigma Cave, TN	Zellner Dome	20' (Horizontal Traverse)
Enigma Cave, TN	Station SC6	15'
Enigma Cave, TN	The Last Dome	57', with Jim Fox
Enigma Cave, TN	Lee's Freeclimb	18'
Enigma Cave, TN	134' Canyon	30' (Horizontal Traverse)
Savor It Well, TN	The Very Hungry Caterpillar Dome	262'
Savor It Well, TN	Pet Cemetery Dome	180'
Savor It Well, TN	Circle Window	30'
Tumbling Rock Cave, AL	Inner Sanctum	88'
Tumbling Rock Cave, AL	Ouroboros Extension, Waterfall Four	15'
Tumbling Rock Cave, AL	Chaos Shaft	153'
Tumbling Rock Cave, AL	Unnamed dome near Christmas Tree	60'
Tumbling Rock Cave, AL	Xylophone Dome	147'
Gourdneck Cave, TN	Mt Stromboli	191' rope drop (220' ceiling height)
Gourdneck Cave, TN	Halfway House Dome	190'?, in progress, 150' gained
Valhalla, AL	100 200 Dome	?
Natural Bridge Caverns, TX	Dome Pit	80' (approximate)
Sparta Sod Hole, TN	There Should a Law Dome	100' (approximate) , in progress
Sistema Huautla, Oaxaca, Mexico	Blowhard Boulevard/The Elbow	?
Jewett Three/III/3, TN	Paleo Domepit I	20'
Johnson's Crook Cave, GA	Main dome in back...name?	130', recomb of original Davidson/Jones climb
Run to the Mill Cave, TN	High lead in downstream paleo borehole passage	40' (approximate)
Mother's Finest Cave, AL	Unnamed waterfall climb	30' (approximate)
Orcestrwell Spring Cave, AL	Dome climb in back of cave	80' (approximate), in progress, started 2016
David & Marshall, AL	Dome climb in back of cave	30' (Project not yet started due to water conditions)
Bell Spring, AL		? (Five climbs, not measured)



Spotlight On: Dogwood City Grotto

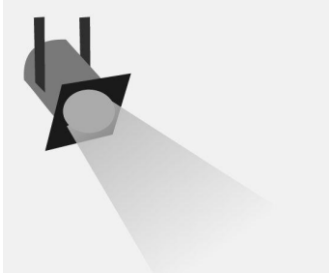
Submitted by Jon Zetterberg

The Dogwood City Grotto hovers between 150 and 175 members depending on the week. Our grotto meets monthly for our regular meetings, but the locations vary. Attendance typically ranges between 25 and 50 folks. Our meetings every other month are held in the community room at REI in Atlanta and the other months we have campout meetings throughout the TAG region. For the past two years, we have had Super Meetings with other grottos in the region. These have been excellent opportunities to meet other cavers and see what is going on in other areas. There are cavers all over, and each group is a little bit different. By coming together, it creates a larger sense of community and provides folks with opportunities that they may not experience otherwise.

We have had quite a few new folks join our grotto over the past year. While some of them have been “one and doner’s”, a few have stuck around and a new generation of cavers is forming within our grotto. A lot of the new folks coming to our meetings either hear about the organization through a friend or find us through our website. Many of them have been caving before, but some are truly new to the activity. We put on the TAG Fall Cave In every year on Columbus Day Weekend which draws around 1,000 cavers from all over to TAG and beyond for a weekend of caving and other fun. This year we were able to give \$8,000 of the profit from this event back to the caving community through the form of grants.



DCG's Annual Christmas Party, at IMO



Spotlight On: The Sewanee Mountain Grotto

Submitted by Martha Bryant, Sec. SMG and
Julie-Schenck-Brown

Hello from the Sewanee Mountain Grotto!

In 2019 our grotto was led by our President Kristine Ebrey. Julie Schenck-Brown served as our Vice President and came up with some wonderful programs that will be described later in this article. Kyle Lassiter served as Treasurer and Cave Fest Chairman. Martha Bryant was our Secretary and John Attaway was our Member at Large. At the end of the year the grotto had 101 paid members. Dues are due on January 1st but we give a "grace period" until March before we purge our membership list. Only NSS members can vote on grotto business.

The Sewanee Mountain Grotto is unusual as many of our members do not live locally. Fourteen of us live on the mountain. Six others own property on the mountain. One from GA is currently building a retirement home and hopes to move in this spring. Two others from GA are building a "barn-a-do", apartment in a pole barn, for use on weekends until they get ready to retire. A Florida resident rents a permanent space at Caver's Paradise and visits frequently. Our grotto meetings are generally held on the second Saturday of each month and are rotated at the homes of various members and other locations. In 2019 we held a meeting at Cavers Paradise, the Maple View Park on Nickajack Lake and watched the bat flight for our program. We also held a meeting at "The Caverns" in Pelham. The rest of the meetings were at members homes. In October we skipped our meeting due to the TAG Fall Cave-In being on the second Saturday and for November we changed our date to the third Saturday because of a conflict with the NSS BOG meeting in Huntsville and 3 of our members needed to be at that meeting.

We had a busy year in 2019 as many of us were active members of the 2019 NSS Convention Staff. Maureen Handler was the chair and recruited many of us to help. Our grotto even offered a Scholarship for a new NSS member to attend the convention. It was awarded to Jessica Coffey. Julie Schenck-Brown and Kristine Ebrey served as directors for the NSS and Kristine was Chair of the Directorate in 2019. For 2020 Julie is still a director and Kristine has been elected Treasurer of the NSS starting at the spring BOG meeting. Maureen is now Operations Vice President of the NSS. Maureen also has been and continues to be active in her role of coordination of the renovations and improvements at the Headquarters building in Huntsville AL.

After Convention we jumped into action for our Annual Cave Fest Event. Once again it was successful, and we did well at our annual fundraising auction. We use our funds to donate to worthy causes during the next year. If you have never attended a Cave Fest you should consider joining us on Labor Day weekend. We have cave trips, bat flight trips, a pot luck dinner, the auction and a band. . . Oh, and we can't forget beer . . . always beer! There is no attendance fee but there is a small fee for camping and to partake of the beer you must register to get an armband verifying you are of legal age. You must also buy a mug to drink from.

The grotto has continued our recycling efforts of aluminum and plastic at SERA Cave Carnival, TAG Fall Cave-In and our own CaveFest. This is another way we raise money for grotto donations to worthy causes. This year we expanded our recycling by partnering with "The Caverns" to recycle their aluminum cans from their events. The grotto has a trailer on site for collection and when it is full we take the cans to a local aluminum recycling station that pays us for the cans.

We have several active survey team leaders in the grotto. They have been involved in many projects that are described below. Also, several projects are scheduled for the next year. Julie Schenck-Brown had a busy year surveying some caves near the 2019 SERA Cave Carnival Site in AL. She had a nice article in the guidebook on these projects. The caves are Cherry Hollow Cave and Bolding-King Spring Cave. She also surveyed a Pennington cave near Huntsville and also surveyed Speegle Cove Salt Peter Cave on the property of the late Charile Smith near Kimball TN. During the year she also worked on projects in AL and TN. Hali Steinman has assisted Julie on several of her surveys and surveyed Sewanee Blowhole Cave, as well as doing some hiking/ridgewalking. (Julie provided the following details regarding her surveys in Speegle Saltpeter Cave and King Spring-Bolding Pit).

Speegle Saltpeter Cave Survey:

This cave is part of the upper hydraulics of Solution Rift and has been on my list of caves to survey for several years. My plan is to update my map of Solution Rift with Speegle Saltpeter Cave and Plummeting Pot to show the hydrological connection of the three caves. After contacting Leanne Smith to make arrangements for access, I was excited to return to this project area and asked Hali Steinmann, a fellow karst scientist and surveyor, to join me. Hali and I both thought that surveying a horizontal cave would be a great introduction for our fellow Grotto members and friends to learn.

After months of planning and discussion, Hali Steinmann and I returned to Speegle Cove this past summer with Katie Balzas and Kevin Dittamore, who are two newer surveyors from the Sewanee Mountain Grotto. Our goal was to start the survey of Speegle Saltpeter Cave at the upper entrance, but had doubts about ever returning as the vegetation was brutal. We persevered in December, when Leanne Smith allowed us to visit during hunting season, as she was excited to have us back on the ridge honoring her father's legacy of kindness to cavers. Leanne even reflected on my map of Solution Rift being dedicated to her father, Charlie Smith.

Our December survey crew included Jon Zetterberg, Crayton Miller, Hali Steinmann, Roubideaux Steinmann, and a new surveyor, Charlie Huling. It was an easy day of survey and this time we found a much easier route up the mountain. We decide to start at the lower entrance for this survey and Crayton was surprised that I actually survey nice, easy borehole caves, while Jon was surprised he didn't have to belly crawl through water. Roubideaux even appeared to enjoy himself and stayed with us during the entire survey. Having three sketchers was great and Crayton was happy to be back on the Disto X2 after a long summer away. The cave offered a day of fun survey and we enjoyed talking with Leanne and the hunters after the survey.

We have surveyed 511' in Speegle Saltpeter Cave and probably have at least three more trips. Leanne Smith, the landowner, is excited to have us back as she continues her Daddy's legacy of kindness to cavers and we enjoy telling stories about her Daddy. This cave will continue to be our intro to survey project for the Sewanee Mountain Grotto and the trips will continue to coincide with SMG meetings,

weather permitting, as we don't want Leanne to worry. Please remember to contact Leanne Smith in advance to access any of the caves on her property.

King Spring-Bolding Pit:

Our survey work in Alabama has focused on the Bolding Pit area for most of the year and we have made excellent progress, thanks to Jon Zetterberg leading a trip during SERA with Zachary Cunningham. Crayton Miller and I also began the survey of the King Spring entrance while Jon and Zachary surveyed in the Bolding Pit entrance earlier in the year. A survey trip in the King Spring entrance with Zachary Cunningham took us to the Queen's Bedroom, a formation gallery with stunning displays of bedload deposits. The intriguing sediment deposits were discovered again in the upper levels, with one area having bowling ball size deposits that have been rounded and deposited amongst bedload cleavage in a phreatic tube that intersects the passage. What an interesting case study for sediment transport in the middle levels of the cave.

The older map of Bolding Pit-King Spring lists a length of 4097', but in 2019, we surveyed a horizontal length of 2723.3'. The middle levels of Bolding Pit will be the focus of a mini-survey camp over President's Day weekend in which we plan to survey the area past The Menagerie. Jon Zetterberg is also going to look at the domes and is willing to climb them, if the rock is suitable. This area appears to be the surface input for the water that enters the cave, but also did not exhibit staining or marking to indicate that it floods. We have plenty to survey in this cave and welcome experienced surveyors with advanced vertical skills. And if you want to visit this cave on your own, please contact me to make arrangements with the landowners.

In 2019 Kyle Lassiter participated in the PESH expedition in Mexico. He is also an active surveyor locally. This year he has focused mostly on surveying the SCCi's Gourdneck Cave near South Pittsburg TN. During the dry spell this summer a lot of progress was made. In July an SCCi approved dome climb added a fair amount of passage. Gourdneck is now the third largest cave in Marion County TN. Kyle also surveyed a small cave near Pelham TN at the landowner's request. He also recruited Julie Schenck-Brown to help survey a small cave on John Attaway's property near Sewanee TN. One Sunday after a grotto meeting two teams of grotto members mapped this small cave at 725 feet.

Jon Zetterberg does not claim Sewanee Mountain as his primary grotto, but he has assisted Julie on projects and has been involved in other survey projects in 2019. If I have missed any grotto surveyor's I apologize.

Of course, we went caving just for fun. We also went hiking and paddling. We don't have regularly scheduled trips but we use our Google Groups email and our Facebook page to plan impromptu caving trips. Next year we hope to schedule a cave clean up somewhere close to home and hopefully have more grotto caving trips. Working on the convention planning until June kept many of us pretty busy. During the year we had many very good programs at our Grotto meetings. In January, Mark Skove, NSS OVP gave a status report on the NSS Headquarters and answered questions from the group. For February Rielly Blackwell gave a presentation on the Exploration and Survey at Tumbling Rock Cave. David McRae did our March program which was a presentation on the history and reopening of Lacy Pot Cave in AL. In April, Amber Lehmann presented on The SCCi's Charles B. Henson Preserve in Johnsons Crook. May was a campout meeting at Cavers Paradise and our program was an astronomy presentation by Eric Silkowski and Alexander Dobrowolski. Our June meeting was scheduled to be the "bat flight"

viewing but weather changed our plans so our program was pictures from Kristine's trip to Jordan. July weather cooperated and we viewed the Nickajack bat flight. Jon Zetterberg provided a presentation on Lidar technology for our August meeting. In September, Hali Steinmann gave us a program on the Lesser Known Caves of Mammoth Cave NP. Tim White, the Southeast Coordinator of the NCRC spoke with us in November about Small Party Assisted Rescue. In December we continued our tradition of elections followed by a Dirty Santa gift exchange. Our 2020 Officers are Hali Steinmann – President, Julie Schenck-Brown – Vice President, Kyle Lassiter – Treasurer, Martha Bryant – Secretary, and Sue Milburn – Member at Large.

Our donations for the 2019 year are listed below:

- \$500 to be a sponsor of the NSS Convention
- \$100 to the Albuquerque Mountain Rescue Organization in memory of Steve Attaway.
- \$500 donation to the Chattanooga Cave/Cliff Rescue Equipment Fund Fundraiser
- \$300 scholarship for convention
- \$1000 to sponsor a table with 8 tickets for the SCCi's Beer, Bats and Bluegrass Event. The tickets were auctioned at the Cave Fest.
- \$2000 to the NSS. The donation is to be split to give \$1000 to the Headquarters Fund and \$1000 to the Acquisitions fund. The acquisitions donation is be used for new acquisitions and not for existing projects.
- \$1000 to the SCCi at the Cave-In. This is an annual donation that the grotto makes
- \$500 to The Rockcastle Karst Conservancy with stipulation that it go to pay on the newly acquired entrances to the Sloans Valley Cave System
- \$250 to the TCS and \$250 to the NSS Exploration Fund in memory of Lee White. A stipulation was placed that it be used for US Exploration
- \$500 each to the rescue squads of Chattanooga Hamilton County Rescue Services, Huntsville Cave Rescue Unit and Walker County Rescue Squad. Total donation \$1500.

Our 2020 year kicked off with Julie Schenck-Brown giving a presentation on the NSS Landowner's Relations Committee. At this meeting we voted to donate \$500 to support the PESH Expedition in Mexico. We anticipate another active year of surveying caves by our active surveyors.

If you would like to be a member of our grotto, please let us know. You can join by PayPal at sewaneemountaingrotto@caves.org. Dues are \$10.00 per year. We do not do family memberships. We maintain a membership list that is available to our members.

Sewanee Mountain Grotto Recycling

Submitted by Maureen Handler

When Sewanee Mountain Grotto reactivated in 2004, we decided that we wanted to focus our grotto efforts on conservation and surveying. We are a diverse group of TAG cavers that have moved to the Sewanee area from Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia over the last 18 years. With significant years of caving experience (over 200 years of caving between the original 8 members), we had participated in our fair share of clean up events and survey trips.

As a part of our conservation efforts, we became very active in the clean ups organized by the SERA Karst Task Force. Some of our members began recycling what we found at the roadside and in cave clean ups. We decided as a group, that we would take on the task of recycling at TAG caving events. We started with wire cages we built (great idea Myrna Attaway) that we placed at significant points at the TAG Fall Cave-In and the SERA Cave Carnival. We would collect cans during the entire year and during the winter months; we would load them up on a trailer and take them to the recycle center. The cash we received, we immediately put back into our conservation efforts. We supported the SKTF financially and also graduated to trash cans for our event recycling. Holes were cut in the lid to limit trash intrusion and each can was marked for plastic bottles and aluminum cans. We get no money for the plastic, but felt it was the right thing to add into our recycling efforts. The grotto has been leading the recycling efforts in TAG for 15 years now. We even set up recycling at the 2005 and 2014 NSS Conventions in Huntsville.

When Kristine Ebrey went to work for The Caverns music venue in Pelham, TN, she couldn't stand that all of the aluminum cans were going in the trash. The grotto offered to assist with recycling the cans generated at The Caverns. In 2019, SMG purchased a trailer and modified it to hold the recycling. This trailer lives at The Caverns and the staff there have been working to help make sure the aluminum is separated from the rest of the trash. The grotto purchased new recycling trash cans to be placed around the venue. We hope this new conservation effort will help with our overall conservation and sustainability efforts.

All cavers can help. At events, separate your recycling in your campsite, then drop off the recycling at the Sewanee Mountain Grotto trailer, usually parked near the exit of the event space. We will even sort them out if you don't have enough bags. When you are finished with a can or bottle in the common areas, look for one of our recycle cans for your empty. **AND PLEASE EMPTY OUT YOUR BOTTLE OR CAN BEFORE PUTTING IT IN THE RECYCLE CAN!** It really helps make our job much 'cleaner'. Thank you cavers, for all you do, to help keep this waste out of landfill.



Sewanee Mountain Grotto Recycling Trailer

Sewanee Mountain Grotto Photos:



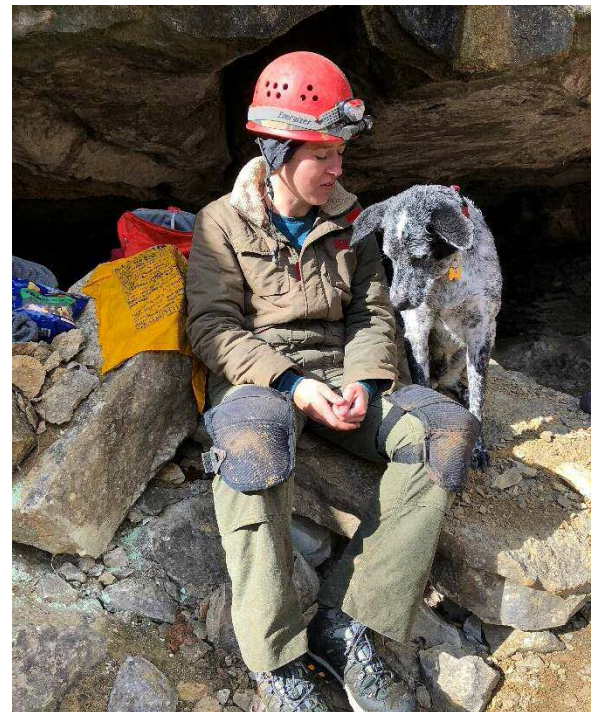
Grotto Ladies at Buggy Top Cave, photo by Shari Lydy



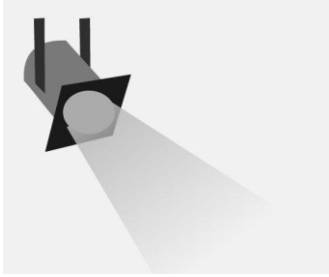
Martha On Rope, photo by Hazard



Grotto Trip to Tumbling Rock Cave, photo by Martha Bryant



Hali Steinmann and buddy, Roubideaux, Speegle Saltpeter Cave, photo by Julie-Schenk Brown



Spotlight On: RAT Grotto: A Service-Oriented Year in Review

by Jason Lovvorn, NSS 67942

RAT Grotto, based in Gallant, Alabama, is a newcomer to the National Speleological Society, having been granted its charter in August 2017. From its origins as a caving and rappelling group, its TAG members brought with them interests in vertical and rescue work, and this specialized identity has only grown stronger since the grotto's recognition as an official NSS internal organization.

Many RAT Grotto members now train and serve in a separate but affiliated search-and-rescue group, RAT-SAR (<https://ratsar.org>). After the SAR group became operational at the outset of 2019, RAT Grotto members have participated in a diverse range of vertical training, rescue training, and search-and-rescue work. The list includes successful SAR operations in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia; collaborative high-angle and cave rescue training with Mountain Search and Rescue (MSAR) groups from North Carolina; and continued refinement of vertical skills at a variety of pits, caves, and bluffs.

In line with the vertical, search-and-rescue themes, what follows is a partial compilation of 2019 activities undertaken by RAT Grotto members:

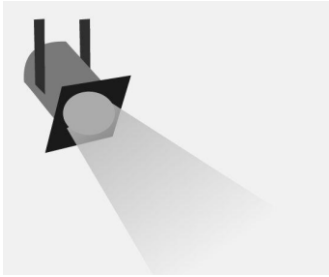
- Cave rescue training at Varnedoe Cave Preserve in conjunction with NC MSAR teams (June).
- Canyoneering and descent training with NC MSAR (September) at 16 Canyon, Bonas Defeat, and Flat Laurel Creek.
- Wilderness First Responder training in Gallant, AL (July).
- NASAR training in Gallant, AL (February, March, and November).
- Rigging and vertical practice at Cagle Chasm (February), Larson's Well (February), Weaver Overlook (May and August), South Pittsburg Pit (June), and Valhalla Cave Preserve (October).
- Technical rope rescue training at Monte Sano State Park, AL (March), Gallant, AL (September), Buck's Pocket State Park, AL (September), and Paradise Falls, NC (November with North Carolina MSAR).
- Technical rope rescue instruction in Haywood County, NC (May Wilderness Week), Highlands, NC (May), and Gallant, AL (November).



RAT in-cave rescue rigging



RAT is also involved in surface search and rescue



Spotlight On: Green River Grotto

by Josh Brewer

In 2019, the Green River Grotto experienced a boost in membership, mainly from students from Western Kentucky University, but also from recent graduates and young professionals. In 2020, these members accepted key roles as veteran grotto members stepped down. Meet the new GRG Board!



Jed, photo by Keith Phillips

PRESIDENT - Jedidiah Nixon

Hailing from SD, I had my first caving experience at the age of 5 in Jewel Cave, and was awed by its beauty. Despite this early start, it's only recently that I've begun to frequent the underworld. My background is in entomology, not geology. During the winter of 2017, I began my MS in Biology at Western Kentucky University with Dr. Keith Philips, studying *Pseudanophthalmus* cave beetles and began to cave in earnest. Shortly thereafter, I joined the NSS and Green River Grotto, then headed by Josh Brewer, where I've helped with the Hoy

and Stinson cave surveys, and have currently taken on the role of President. Now, many caves and beetle sampling expeditions later, my research in KY is drawing to a close. It will result in several new species descriptions, molecular phylogenies of cave beetle relationships, and a better understanding of the evolution of Eastern North American cave beetles.



Wes, photo by Barry Adams

VICE PRESIDENT - Weston Hennion

Born and raised in the backyard of the world's longest cave system, Mammoth Cave, I've never been a stranger to caves. We would always take field trips in elementary and I would always yearn to split off from the tour and see for myself what was around the next turn.

As a teenager, my brothers and I would explore every cave we could wiggle into within Edmonson county. Fast forward 10 years and my still growing curiosity for caves introduced me to the GRG. They welcomed this ol country boy with open arms. Josh Brewer taught me how to survey and Clinton Barber taught me about safe caving and vertical rope work. During my time with the grotto, I have met so many wonderful people from many walks of life. Every person has taught me something new about caves and their importance. My goals for the grotto is to continue to build upon these practices and knowledge and in return, be an influence and guide to the younger generation as they get hooked on the last frontier for man, Caves.



Christian

TREASURER - Christian DeCelle

Born and raised in Massachusetts, I currently live down in Bowling Green, KY doing my Master's in Geosciences. I first got into caving as an undergrad at University of Massachusetts when stumbled upon the 1991 NSS Convention Guidebook. After finding my first cave, "Coffin Cave" a 200-foot porcupine infested wonder, I was hooked. After that I revived a defunct caving program at UMass and spent just about every weekend taking new people underground. Since then, I've never looked back and would love nothing more than to spend my weekends hauling dirt up a little tube in the backwoods of Vermont.

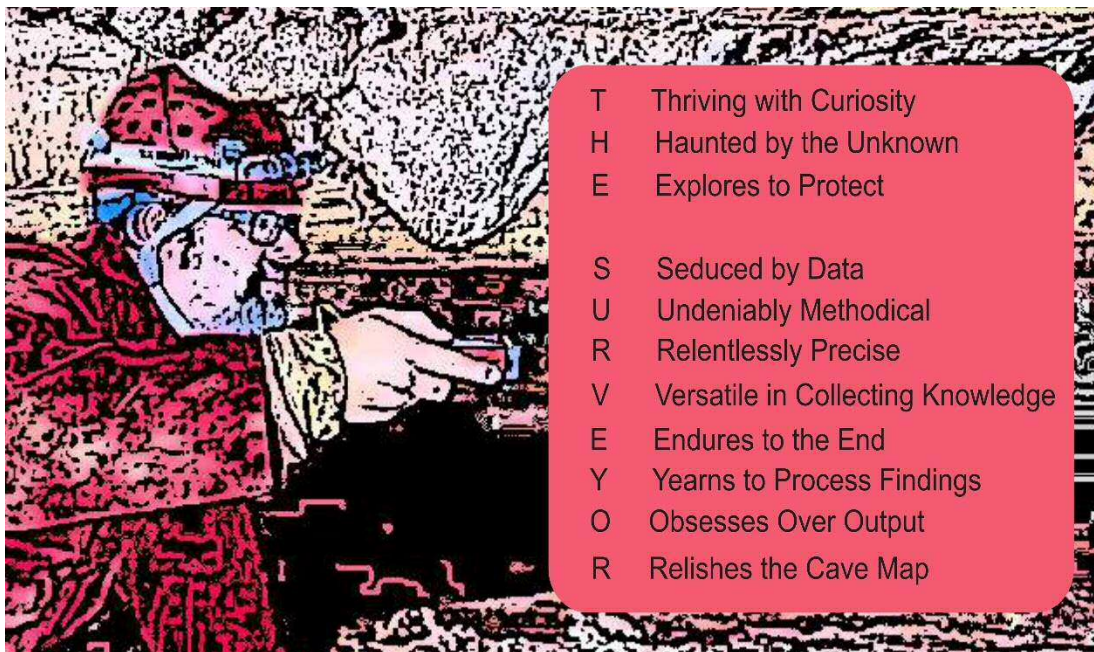


SECRETARY - Nick Lashley

Originating from Logan County Kentucky, tales of caves were told my entire childhood. Interested, but lacking direction I found myself making several excursions to popular caves, such as Hoy Cave, in the area with flashlight and tennis shoes. I further extended my interest during a 2019 Karst Field Studies course at Mammoth Cave. This led me to actively pursue and join the Green

River Grotto. My first opportunity in cave survey led my back to Hoy Cave. Under Josh Brewer, I learned how to sketch cross section and mapped the final side leads of the cave. Campbell Cave was my first project that I was with from the beginning. Through the winding stream channels, I became more familiar with sketching profile and plan views. I look forward to continuing to push the boundaries of exploration with the Green River Grotto, the KSS, and friends throughout the caving community.

With new energy GRG is sure to soar in 2020. Working along side members of the KSS the surveys of Campbell Cave (Christian Co, KY), Cindy Cave (Cumberland Co, KY) & Dillon's Den (Allen Co, KY) are top on the list to finish along with conservation projects such as sinkhole cleanups.



"The Surveyor" by Josh Brewer, Green River Grotto

SCCi 2020 Update

New Staff, New Caves, Renewed Sustainability

**Contributions by Amber Lehmann, Kris Green
Christine Walkey and Aidan Campbell**

The Southeastern Cave Conservancy Inc. (SCCi) continues to set the gold standard in cave and karst conservation. Since our last update, two full time staff were added to administer two areas we consider vital to our conservation mission - land management and education. Under the leadership of our Executive Director, our Land Manager has been overseeing conservation efforts on the 4,500+ acres of land we manage, and our Director of Outreach and Education has been educating the general public on what we do, who we are, and our underlying mission of protecting caves and karst environments.

Our boots-on-the-ground land management has been imperative to understanding the scope of not only what lies below but also the lands above our caves. Aidan, our Land Manager, has been conducting high level plot inventories of trees related to a potential carbon credit program. When SCCi's current application to sell carbon credits is accepted onto the market, it will give us an additional line of capital to be used to aid in our stewardship of the land. Aidan's surveys have not only structured the potential for selling carbon credits, they have also identified numerous endangered or threatened species, and the myriad of invasive species on our preserves. Planning is underway for the eradication of these invasive species to ensure the native species have a chance to thrive. Additionally, Aidan has coordinated efforts on our Henson Preserve to remove multiple dumpsters of trash (construction and household) from the forests and along the roads, established a trail system currently stretching over 10 miles along old road ways and through the preserve's forested areas, and has formed necessary partnerships with regional conservation groups and the county to ensure the longevity of our work.

In addition to our conservation efforts from a land management perspective, we have significantly increased our education efforts across the Southeast. The future of all caves and karst protection is education - now, more than ever. Gone are the days of keeping every cave location hidden. Social media, online communication and public articles about our caves (not condoned by us) has left us with only one weapon - education. Without educating the public on the significance and importance of caves and the species that use them in their life cycles, no one will care enough to continue protecting them. Christine, our Director of Outreach and Education, continues to expand our reach through community groups, festivals, caving events and conferences. These outreach efforts reach thousands of people each year, many of whom have never been in a cave.

As many already know, SCCi currently manages 31 preserves located in six southeastern states that contain 170+ caves and an untold number of karst features. In final news, 2020 will mark the year that these stats change. In Tennessee, we have under purchase contract a property that contains four caves (to be revealed soon), and one very significant cave in Virginia, Cyclops Cave. Cyclops is important in many ways but is also an extremely popular cave among Virginia cavers. The acquisition of Cyclops will expand our territory into our seventh state. The purchase of Cyclops is unique in that we MUST raise the

money before we close in May. We have already received pledges for over \$5,000 from various organizations and grottos to help in our efforts. To save this cave, we are asking for donations of any size to secure this very treasured resource in Russell County, VA. You can make a secure donation at savecyclops.org.

In conclusion, although it may seem as though SCCi has not achieved a lot in the past year or so, the opposite is actually true! We have created a path to sustainability that is vital to our future as an organization, AND the future of our preserves. In an environmental context, "sustainability" can mean finding a way to use resources in a manner that prevents their depletion. At SCCi, we use the term "sustainable" to describe the organization as being able to sustain itself over the long term, perpetuating its ability to fulfill its mission. Sustainability in this context includes the concepts of financial sustainability, as well as leadership succession planning, adaptability, and strategic planning. Without these concepts, there would be no future for SCCi and the caves and land we protect. If you are currently a member, we thank you for your support. If you would like to become a member, you can do so here: saveyourcaves.org/join.



SCCi Sponsored Youth Outreach Trip to Howard's Waterfall Cave, GA



Cyclops Cave, Virginia, On SCCi's Wish List



“Angel Lee”

Photo by Bill Steele