

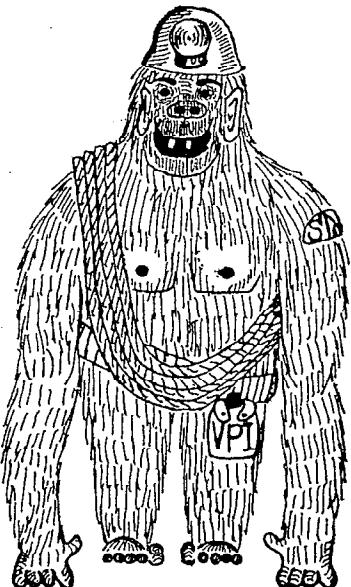
THE TECH TROGLODYTE

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THE TECH TROGLODYTE

VOLUME IV

NUMBER ONE

FALL 1965

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EDITOR'S COLUMN

For those of you who weren't around this summer, the following is to bring you up to date on the activities of the club while you were making money and/or loafing.

The club organization continued smoothly throughout the summer, with R.E. Whittemore doing a fine job as acting President. "Shorter meetings, longer orgies" was his motto, although old business, committee reports, new business, trip reports, trip plans, and Uncle Whitt's Mail Bag (a most entertaining pastime) were conducted as usual. Minutes were sometimes taken by me, and during the 2nd session I became treasurer! Orgies were most often held either at "the Ranch" or Plank's Cabin.

Although 7 or 8 people paid trainee dues, no formal training program was conducted. A trip to Maybrook Sinkhole several times for rappeling and prusiking practice was really the extent of our training; most of us have accumulated well over the 20 required hours of caving with a member of the Cave Club.

As usual, VPI Cave Club members have been working while caving, contributing their efforts to furthering speleology. Much exploration and mapping have been done in Russell, Smyth, and Tazewell Counties, Virginia, as well as in the Greenbrier System in West Virginia. No doubt, this work will continue through the school year.

The Old Timers Reunion at Franklin, West Virginia proved a time to make ourselves well-known. Some people don't like our patches. Tsk. Others remembered that we call ourselves the world's most active caving organization, and didn't think we have the "right" to say that. If the shoe fits, wear it. But, five individual Troglodytes were sold at 50¢ a piece; three subscriptions were sold, and two summer/winter co-ops (from VPI) paid for a fall Troglodyte. Isn't it wonderful what women can do?

Well-known caves visited this summer included: Pig Hole, Old Mill, Tawney's, Links, Dead Air, New River, s.t., Sinnit, Sites, Kenny Simmons, Keys, Buchanan Salt-peter, Clover Hollow, Culverson Greek, Friars Hole, and Cassells.

With a new thirty foot cable ladder, ten dollars worth of almost-new manilla manilla (290 feet), and a whole new group of interested trainees, we should be off on a new, active year with lots of accomplishments in mapping, more new cave discoveries, perhaps a few more cleaned caves, and some better landowner-caver relations.

Associate Editor
(Anne Braithwaite)

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A WORKABLE TRAINING PROGRAM FOR PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS OF A STUDENT GROTTO, as presented at the 1965 NSS Convention in Bloomington, Indiana.

As might be imagined from the title, this paper will be of more interest to members of student grottoes than others, for the reason explained below.

I think it is important for a student grotto to have a strong new-member training program because there are problems and factors peculiar only to student grottoes.

Student grottoes usually have a large influx of members at one particular time of the year. This makes it difficult for those that are already members to adequately train the prospective members. For example, at the beginning of the academic year in the fall of 1964, the VPI Student Grotto had between 20 and 30 people who were interested in caving and in joining in the grotto's activities. At the same time, there were only 15 to 20 active members of the grotto. The prospective members included one boy who had never engaged in any form of physical activity, some that had read books on caving, some that had been to commercial caves, others that had done some hiking, and even one who had been caving and in the NSS for the past five years. So that our grotto might function efficiently and progress, we had to train these people as quickly as possible.

Now someone might say, "Why have a training program in the first place; why not just let one or two of these people tag along on a trip and eventually they will learn all they need to know?"

Not so! This cannot be done for three reasons:

1. We usually have a transportation problem at the beginning of the school year. There are not enough cars. For this reason, a half-way democratic method must be used to determine which of the new members go on which trips. If all of these new people are evenly and adequately trained, this problem is somewhat abated.
2. The nature of the caves in the area of Blacksburg is another reason. While many regular grottoes are located in population centers, student grottoes can be found closer to concentrations of caves. VPI is no exception; Blacksburg is within two hours driving-time of the extensive horizontal caving areas of Greenbrier County, West Virginia and is in the heart of an area containing some of the deepest and most complex cave systems of Virginia. A work or pleasure trip to either of these areas can be turned into a nightmare if an inadequately trained person accompanies the party.
3. I believe that there is probably very near the same percentage of students interested in caving in every large college. If these students can be encouraged to join the existing student grotto and to participate in their training program, they, in turn, will be able to pass on safety and conservation ideals to others. It will more than likely be one of these students who will be asked by a fraternity, the boy scouts, or some other similar group to lead them on a caving trip.

To be qualified as a full member of the VPI Student Grotto, a trainee must fulfill ten obligations:

1. He must remain a trainee for at least one quarter. During this quarter, he spends 20 hours underground on at least three trips under the leadership of a qualified member. He must submit a written trip report for one of these trips.
2. He must have a working knowledge of a carbide light.
3. He must demonstrate elementary climbing skills.
4. He must have a working knowledge of static belaying methods as outlined in the MIT training manual.
5. He must know how to tie a bowline, a bowline on a coil, prusik, butterfly, and fisherman's knot.
6. He must participate in a conservation project which meets the approval of the Conservation Committee. Projects by which trainees have fulfilled this obligation in the last year are:
 - a) Participated in a cave clean-up project.
 - b) Rebuilt a farmer's gate and fence which had been used quite often by cavers.
 - c) Placed a tight-fitting, wooden door on a small, second, man-made entrance of a cave which at one time contained a large bat population. It is hoped that the cave conditions will revert to their former state and the large bat colonies will return.
 - d) Placed cave registers.
 - e) Made special trips to talk with upset landowners trying to convince them to reopen their cave under controlled conditions.
 - f) Took cave owners caving on a trip where excellent conservation practices were exhibited.
7. He must have a working knowledge of prusiking and rappeling.
8. He must complete satisfactorily a comprehensive general information quiz. This quiz deals with general caving questions; the names of some of the more important cave systems in our area; on the structure and purpose of the NSS; on safety, first aid and basic rescue know-how; on the folklore of caving; on mapping and on conservation. This test is designed to cultivate more than just the physical aspect of caving and to acquaint new members with caving in such a way that they may participate in discussions and serve on committees. Very, very few people fail to pass this test.

9. He must be endorsed by a member in good standing.
10. He must be approved for membership by two-thirds of the members present.

These foregoing ten points are merely rules or obligations. Our safety committee chairman administers the entire program, and when a trainee is ready to be voted in, the safety chairman presents him to the grotto at large, discloses the trainee's quiz score, and discloses the various ways he has fulfilled his other obligations. Then someone whom the club respects endorses the trainee and, after a vote, he becomes a member. Our actual training program begins, however, at the first grotto meeting of the academic year. Incidentally, our grotto meetings are held weekly.

- A. At one of the first grotto meetings of the year, an older member of the grotto gives a talk on general caving, discusses the activities of the grotto, and usually shows a few slides of the local caves and the activities of the grotto in the past year. This is usually followed by a short trip either that night or the next day to a local cave to show the neophytes what it is all about.

Other instructive talks follow at subsequent meetings and include:

- B. A talk on safety, belaying, and vertical caving techniques illustrated with slides. The next day is usually spent at a nearby sink hole or rock faces where the trainees can get in as much practice with ropes as necessary.
- C. A talk on the NSS; its purposes, advantages of affiliation, its activities and its structure. Included is a slide show of the past year's convention and other NSS and regional activities.
- D. An illustrated talk on conservation by the chairman of the conservation committee. The IKS Visual Aids Committee now has a slide series available on conservation which we may consider using in the future.
- E. A rescue and first aid demonstration.
- F. A session on cave mapping.
- G. A discussion of cave photography.
- H. A presentation on speleogenesis and cave geology.

In theory, this may appear to be a good training system. The question to be answered is whether or not it actually works.

I would say that it works, and works quite well.

The conservation obligation is an example of just how well this plan does work. On two occasions, groups of trainees went out and organized a trip themselves, secured the equipment, and did a good job of cleaning up several caves. The interest was spontaneous and the trip was not the result of prodding by the conservation committee. The trip was not of the dull, work trip variety, but resulted in an afternoon of enjoyable caving.

On another occasion, a group of trainees took it upon themselves to rebuild a farmer's gate after a discussion with the farmer.

This program has helped to generate interest in the NSS and in regional activities.

The program has worked very well toward teaching safe vertical caving techniques. This is more than likely the reason that the program was begun. When the novices first come out on the rocks for their first belay or rappel instruction, time is minimized due to the fact that they are familiar with most of the techniques.

This trainee program works well to stop cliques which are often found among such groups. In the past, it would have been impossible for a new member to be elected to the chairmanship of the grotto during his first year. But this occurred this year.

As might be imagined, cave stamina probably results from the experience and physical condition of the caver. Inspite of this training, the leaders of extensive ten, fifteen, and twenty hour trips must remain cautious in choosing their companions.

A recent development in the VPI trainee program has been the decision to award annually a membership in the NSS to the best-qualified trainee at the end of the fall quarter of the academic year. Qualifications will be determined by the grotto chairman, the chairman of the safety committee, and the chairman of the conservation committee.

In conclusion, I believe that the great number of people effectively trained by this system far outweigh the fact that a few people might turn away at the thought of such regulation and regimentation.

Ed Bauer
Blacksburg, Virginia

MORE ON RAPPELING

The ideas and criticisms of rappeling technique so recently expressed in the Troglodyte do not necessarily reflect the unanimous opinion of the entire club. By saying this I've already enlarged an argument, but at the same time I might be able to offer a resolution.

I suggest that the single brake bar rappel isn't always safe, and it certainly isn't always best. Now that I've dared to say this, I'd better back it up with a few ideas and some simple-minded reasoning. (The reasoning must be kept simple so as not to confuse our friends in Baltimore and Charlottesville).

For those who haven't yet discovered it: rappels are made under many different conditions. There are several very important things that should at least be considered in choosing a safe method of descent in any given situation. Most important: the nature of the drop. Will the rope be wet from the waterfall? How long is the rappel? Will the rope be muddy? What type of rope? Nylon? Manilla? What diameter? What about the person rappeling? Has he had any experience using that particular method in similar circumstances?

Obviously, no single rappeling device is best for all combinations of circumstances. The problem involves friction. How much friction does the rappeling device produce and how much friction is the person rappeling capable of excercising when using that device in a particular situation?

This is a rather inappropriate place to introduce a trip report, but I would like to use this particular incident to illustrate what I'm saying:

Last March, Paul Helbert, Paul's sister Dianne, Tom Vigour, John Tichenor, Rocky Ward, Paul Schulz and I planned a photography trip to Cass Cave. It was a cold day following several days of rain. Cass is a friendly cave in the dry seasons, but it can be an ordeal in wet weather if proper precautions are not taken.

Tom Vigour and I had visited the cave several months before, during dry weather. We had negotiated the drop quite comfortably using single brar bar and 5/8 inch dry manilla rope.

The drop from the belay loft is 180 feet and normally the rigging is completely away from the waterfall. [see National Geographic Magazine, June 1964, page 825 if you want a picture of the whole problem.] This time things were different; it wasn't the same cave we had visited earlier. Because of the recent rain, the waterfall had grown to tremendous proportions and presented a fantastic spectacle under such conditions. To borrow Huntley Ingalls' description: "It's the most infernal sight I've ever seen in any cave."

At the top, the rope stands free of the waterfall, but because of the increased trajectory of the water in wet weather, the stream falls very close to the bottom of the rope. The waterfall is narrow at the top, but after falling 140 feet it forms a blinding cascade 20 feet wide and about 10 feet thick.

The standing line was a fairly new $\frac{1}{2}$ inch goldline. It was wet, having been dragged through the water crawl, and I decided to use a double (or tandem) brake bar system with a chest prusik safety.

I reached the bottom in a confusing swirl of wind and noise. The falling water pushes the air forward as it falls, causing large gusts of wind and resulting in a huge spray which envelopes the area near the falls. It gradually collects on the rope to form a steady flow of water down the last 50 feet. Rocky decided to use the same method I had used, and he soon joined me at the bottom; however, when he was about eight feet from the bottom, he stopped momentarily. I pulled the rappel rope, swinging him over on top of a boulder to prevent him from landing (as I had done) too close to the base of the falls.

Dianne began her descent next. She was somewhat experienced in horizontal caving and had visited Hellhole the day before. She had used a double brake bar device but didn't like it. This time she wanted to use a single brake bar and a chest prusik safety. This was a bad decision under the circumstances; because of her relatively slight vertical experience, she should not have been allowed to use that particular method without a belay. But a belay was not possible in this situation.

She rappelled slowly. When she was about 30 feet from the bottom I positioned myself to swing her over the top of the boulder as I had done for Rocky; however, as she approached the bottom, she suddenly lost her grip on the rappel rope, screamed "falling", and fell free about 15 feet to the breakdown-covered floor in the edge of the falls. The rope pulled me from my position and I fell about five feet. Rocky and I scrambled to her. She yelled above the loud steady roar of the waterfall that she was O.K. We helped her up the breakdown slope, away from the drenching falls.

Other than a rather battered hardhat and a small cut on her head, she was all right; however, we decided to take no chances -- I signaled the others that we were coming up. Using prusiks, I made a painfully slow ascent through the spray. Dianne followed shortly afterward using Rocky's mechanical (jumar) ascenders. The spray put her carbide light out soon after she started and she had to finish most of her ascent in darkness.

I reached the Belay Loft and explained what had happened. Paul Helbert rappelled down to the Soler Ledge to give Dianne some light. She soon reached the Loft and appeared to be O.K.

Dianne did not release her chest prusik safety when she fell, but she was lucky. Had she fallen from a higher level, our trip may have ended in tragedy. [It may be well to note that without mechanical ascenders, the ascent under her own power would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible.]

Now to get back to the point in question: is the single brake bar or any other rappeling device always best? No, of course not!

A few more observations:

- (1) The single brake bar seems to provide a safe and comfortable descent when used on $5/8"$ and $\frac{1}{2}"$ dry manilla rope; however, if the $\frac{1}{2}"$ rope is brand

new, the rappel will be rather rapid and some other device, such as a tandem system, is probably safer. The above is generally true for longer rappels, but if the rappel is relatively short, the single brake bar is quite safe -- assuming, of course, that the person rappelling knows how to use it properly.

- (2) When wet, manilla rope swells and, to some degree, slows down a rappel.

In the case of nylon (again, this is my own opinion -- subject to debate):

- (3) When used on $\frac{1}{2}$ " nylon rope, the single brake bar method is not unsafe, in most instances, if the drop is fairly short and the person rappelling is experienced. However, as I've emphasized in the preceding "war story", some other method (such as a tandem system) is much safer if the drop is longer and the person rappelling is inexperienced.

- (4) When used on new 7/16" nylon, the single brake bar usually provides a rather frightening "express elevator" ride -- especially if the drop is long and the rope is new. Again, the problem is one of friction: under such circumstances, the single brake bar does not provide enough friction. An excessive amount of friction must be exercised by the person rappelling. It is normally dissipated through the seat and hands. If pads aren't used, you may have just a warm rappel or you might get some nasty and very painful blisters. Worse still, when things begin to get hot, it's a little more difficult to control the rappel.

If the rope is wet, pads and leather gloves get wet, and friction in all parts of the system is quickly reduced. This was at least a contributing factor in Dianne's case.

The efficiency of most devices in controlling a rappel depends, to a large extent, on the amount of tension in the standing line below the point at which the device is acting on the rope. In most cases, the friction across the hips and hands serves to increase this tension and thus increase the friction. So now we have a friction-tension-friction system. Friction exercised by the person rappelling causes tension in the rope and results in friction across the device. The total effect makes it possible to control a rappel.

On longer rappels, the weight of the rope often presents a problem. The tension in the rope below the rappeling device is not constant. It decreases as the rappel proceeds, and the difference must be make up for by the person rappeling if the rate of the rappel is to be controlled. With some devices, such as the spool, it is possible to "add-a-turn" while rappeling and thus compensate for the loss in tension.

Each situation is unique, and different rappeling devices provide variable amounts of friction. A safe method is one that the person rappeling can control easily and which enables him to stop completely if necessary.

Friction should be calculated and tension predicted before choosing the rappeling method. No, I don't suggest that you carry your slide rule and CRC tables. An educated guess, supplemented by good judgement based on some experience, is usually the best answer to the whole problem.

Mike Hamilton

submitted for publication August 14, 1965

CARBIDE DUMPS SHOCK CAVER

"Careless Cavers Destroy Caves." This is an oft-heard phrase on a subject much talked about and written about. Who is it that destroys the beauty of our caves in the United States? Is it dedicated cavers or those who make caving a one or two-shot spree? Or is it a person who knows no better and/or cares less?

What can we do about the carelessness, the urge to destroy and the non-conservation practices of our fellow cavers? Sure, the NSS has a Conservation Committee and the Regions have interested persons, but what is being done? Individual occurrences pop up all the time but no action is taken. Can individuals do something? They can. A group may "clean up" a cave, as was done to Giant Caverns three years ago. This is what should be done in Breathing Cave. Those who have previously visited the cave should be aware that the cave is not what it once was.

Breathing Cave, in Highland County, Virginia, has been one of my favorite caves since I first visited it in 1962. In the past three years I have visited the cave four times, two of which were four-day trips spent in the cave. The cave, to me, is particularly challenging for the many forms of cave traversing necessary, and requires a variety of techniques with various grades of difficulty. It is a cave which I feel is equally suited for the beginner and the experienced caver.

A last trip to the cave during the Virginia Region-MAR Speleo-Go-Go in July, 1965 revealed some very disturbing sights. The entrance crawlway and the sandy sleeping room are littered with trash, garbage, flash bulbs and spent carbide. The passages from the sleeping room to the waterfall are disgustingly littered with spent carbide. It looks as if people used carbide dumps instead of rock cairns or nylon cord to find their way out of the cave. I was very shocked. I also observed that bats no longer inhabit the Bat Room, nor are they to be found in the main passages of the cave. I wonder what this signifies.

I had been to Breathing Cave previously in the summer of 1964, and the wanton destruction was not in evidence at that time. I am of the opinion that the destruction of the cave is due to a more widespread knowledge of the cave's location since the publishing of Caves of Virginia. (The dates of my last visit and the availability of the book correlate). I think that since everybody and his brother are able to purchase a copy of the book (to make ends meet), those who don't care and don't know any better have found that Breathing is a good cave to explore. The cave is fairly accessible, and with those nice reprints of topographic maps in the back of Caves of Virginia, very easy to find.

So, lets get together and clean up Breathing Cave. And, everybody, please, watch where you dump your carbide. Dig a hole, bury it; carry it out; but don't just drop it where everyone who comes after you can see it. Etiquette in caving is certainly lacking.

Anne Braithwaite

Submitted for publication August 23, 1965

WANTED: A LITTLE THOUGHT

More than one person has commented to me on the attitude displayed in an article by Dave Strope entitled "Wanted, a litte cooperation" (Troglodyte, Spring 1965).

This attitude is one unfortunately held by a great many cavers; it is the attitude that cavers have some God-granted right to explore all caves regardless of the feelings and objections of the particular landowner. It is the attitude that the cave owner must explain his motives for not granting permission to enter a cave. It is the attitude that landowners are unintelligent fools who hold no claim to the activities which take place on their land.

I feel, along with many others, that the major conservation problem has shifted somewhat from cave vandalism to landowner relations. Consider the following points.

A cave owner very seldom benefits from pwning the entrance to a cave. In most instances, it is bothersome, inconvenient, and often expensive for him to leave the entrance open.

A caver is a guest of the cave owner who holds legal title to the land.

Most caves in this area (West Virginia and Virginia) are located on small farms; their owners are seldom wealthy and they certainly cannot afford any damage to their crops or livestock, by which they make their living. If they think there is any chance of a caver destroying their livelihood, they certainly have every right to stop thses cavers from coming there; they close their caves.

It is interesting to note that during the '65 National Convention in Bloomington, between 300 and 400 cavers were asked that, supposing they owned a cavē, would they allow other cavers to explore it. The reaction was an almost unanimous NO.

Recently I spoke with aging Mr. Freemar, whose home is located less than 100 yards from McClungs Cave, West Virginia. Nicer cave owners are hard to find. In the past, he has consented to letting many cavers park on his lawn; he has allowed cavers to sleep in his new barn; in 1962, he allowed over 30 cavers in his cavē at once (Va. Region Project). He passes on directions and notes from one caver to another. He enjoys extended chats with people that have seen his cave. He wants to know what they have found. He likes to get postcards and notes in the mail.

At our last discourse, I noted a bit of worry in Mr. Freeman's conversation. He told me that two weeks before some cavers had come out of his cave very early in the morning and one loud voice had awoken him. The week after that someone left his gate open. He was worried that a hog might get loose and run into the road, where it would cause an auto accident. In West Virginia, he would be responsible for the damage to the car as well as losing his hog. He didn't say he was worried, but a man of his age shouldn't be caused worry by his guests. Will, eventually, such friendly people like Mr. Freeman close their gates to cavers? The answer is definitely yes, if cavers continue to make a nuisance of themselves, if they continue to display a lack of common courtesy, and if they retain an attitude that they have a right to explore every hole in the earth.

Ed Bauer

Submitted for publication August 20, 1965.

AROUND THE REGION

Probably the biggest regional event in the near future is the annual fall meeting. This year we will be host grotto and we have so far made many preparations for accommodations. Regional Chairman John Cooper, can be expected to do his usual fine job of recruiting a good list of speakers for the afternoon and evening programs.

The meeting will be held at the Wesley Foundation in Blacksburg on Saturday, October 9; registration will begin at noon, the meeting at 1 PM. Papers and programs will be presented during the afternoon; a publications desk will sell regional, grotto, and national publications. A steak dinner can be obtained at a low cost by all those who sign up for it at registration time, but reservations must be made then since we have contracted for a private room in a nearby restaurant. After dinner, comes the evening program, parts of which will probably be illustrated with slides. There are several motels in town and arrangements are being made for the use of the town park-playground for camping. This will probably be a good place for any parties.

On Sunday, it is hoped that all those still in town will take advantage of the many nearby caves. The VPI Grotto is planning numerous trips and private ones will be easy to arrange.

It is hoped by this writer that a due amount of time will be given to regional business, besides that spent on the election of officers.

John Holsinger informed me recently that he will be present. Sometime during the conference, he wishes to gather together those people who are seriously interested in doing continued work on the Virginia Cave Survey. Only those who have a genuine desire to assist in gathering data or in Virginia caves are asked to attend. Areas in the state needing further work will be assigned to individuals. A list of caves which need mapping will be distributed.

John also informed me that he plans to give a short talk on "the present status and future plans of the Virginia Cave Survey" as a part of the afternoon program.

As usual, the summer months have proven very productive for caving activity in this area. The McClung Cave (Greenbrier County, West Virginia) Survey has been completed. Other work in the Greenbrier area continues, always threatened by rain and high water. This past weekend the Higgenbotham #1 (Virginia) project was completed; look for the complete survey and map in the next Tröglodyte. Whitt continues to find caves in Russell County and Holsinger is raving, as usual, about the many big ones of Lee County. Mike Hamilton has also been busy looking and mapping in the Saltville area where he has been working.

Ed Bauer

Submitted for publication September 1, 1965.

MAP OF NEW RIVER CAVE REDISCOVERED

While working for the U. S. Gypsum Company this summer, I met Mr. Ed desRochers who was in the VPI Grotto from about 1950-1952. I talked with him several times about caving and one day he asked me if I had ever been in New River Cave. We discussed New River for a while and he said, "You know, I think I have something you might be interested in. Back about 1951, Earl Thierry and I surveyed the cave and I believe I still have the map."

A short search of his office revealed an old mailing tube containing Earl Thierry's original sketch, the old original map covering the area up to the waterfall, and Ed's map of the big area beyond the waterfall. We even found the original survey notebook!

The maps are legible but somewhat discolored and rather brittle because of age. The old mailing tube had been in a dusty closet for over ten years.

I'm re-drawing the entire map and it will be placed in the files along with the old ones this fall.

Mike Hamilton

Submitted for publication August 14, 1965

Editors note: See a letter by Earl Thierry in LETTERS TO THE EDITOR concerning footage in New River Cave.

LABOR DAY WEEKEND IN FRANKLIN - REVISTED

Friday night found Charlie Maus and I frantically piloting my battered VW through the darkened alleys of Covington, Virginia. We had been mapping in the extensive Bone-Norman system in Greenbrier County, West Virginia, all day and were pretty tired. Here we were on our way to the Old Timers Reunion, the curfew hour of 11 pm quickly approaching, and still we could find no beer.

Eventually the dark clouds lifted, and the moon shone bright on the familiar lettering of what must have been Covington's only ABC store.

Thus fortified, we proceeded on to the Old Mill Building outside of Franklin. Many had already arrived for a get-together which did not abate until late Monday morning.

The National Capital Grotto and the PSC seemed well-represented, but when it came to the group with the most "cavers", I'm sure VPI led the field by far. Alan Armstrong, John Peduzzi, Dick Gerling, Gene Harrison, Craig Peters, Gary McCutchen, Barry Whittemore, R.E. Whittemore, Anne Braithwaite, Rick Nolting, Paul Helbert, Tim Schoechle, Henry Stearns, Bob Swensson, Bob Robins, Charlie Maus, and myself all managed to put in an appearance or two over the holiday.

Saturday dawned foggy for some and clear for others, depending on how they had spent the previous evening. Many stayed around the area and participated in the Cave Olympics - ladder and prusik climb, cave crawl, best cave pack, obstacle course, cave rescue and cave mapping. Others spent Saturday and Sunday caving in Propst, Sites, Sinnet, Trout, New Trout, Kenny Simmons, and Hamilton, in riding and climbing on Seneca Rocks, or swimming.

The one group who entered the cave rescue contest did so poorly (three hours and still not finished) that the MET Grotto decided to do something about the situation. They were nice enough to arrange for two of their group to get into trouble in Hellhole - and before you could yell NCG, a real live rescue was underway. The funny part of the whole incident was that, how got this, John Cooper was the only one at the party sober enough to lead the rescue. What a shameful way to carry on, Coop.

Saturday night was party night again (ed. note: a branewpardy). For me, the highlight of the night was when Bill Karras arrived with a truck full of 12 year olds. What happened to your high school boys, Bill?

If it hadn't been for those friendly fellows from Australia with their bagpipes, I'm sure many would have slept through Sunday (ed. note: and Monday too). Most people seemed to stick close to the area that day, swimming and partying, in anticipation of the banquet that night.

It's at the banquet, a good meal of chicken with all the trimmings, that all the prizes and praises are bestowed. Jerry Nettles certainly deserves a lot of credit for coordinating the entire weekend.

Emmett Graham, a real old timer, unfortunately couldn't make it to the front to receive his prize of a West Virginia-size shot-glass. He seemed to be trapped at his table by a circle of bottles, glasses, and mixers.

Dan Luke (caver for ten or so years), the person to most recently join the NSS, received a huge ball of twine as his prize. I noticed that soon after Dan had left a trail of the twine down to the bar and back.

This year, the prize for the distance furthest travelled went to Charlie "the Squire" Lewis. Charlie only came from Arkansas, but he had such a hard time of it, arriving with only a hard hat and cave pack, that he was awarded a B.C. wheel with an axle of "green" to help him get home.

In the Cave Olympics, Doug Bradford combined enough points to receive second overall and Grayson Harding won the first place award of 150 ft. of Goldline. (We at VPI should accept this as a challenge. Next year I'm sure if we enter the events and don't go caving, we can sweep them all.)

John Cooper, who uses an electric headlamp, won 50 pounds of carbide for his efforts in the Hellhole rescue. Because John is such a good friend of VPI (and possibly because certain of us assisted in the rescue) John gave us half of the winnings.

After the awards, the branewpardy resumed with dancing and also a rather informal concert from the Bluegrass group of Bob Thren of Reading Grotto. This same group seemed rather alarmed when I saw them in the Big Room of Sinnit Cave. They weren't sure that there was enough air.

By noon on Monday, the area was deserted and local residents were once again allowing their children out of their homes; they have about 360 days before drunken hordes of cavers again descend on the area from all over the country for the 1966 Old Timers Reunion.

Ed Bauer

Submitted for publication September 13, 1965.

NOTES ON THE OLD TIMERS REUNION

Al haarr was overheard telling John Cooper why his dog was so fat. John was eagerly taking notes - seems Al's dog isn't the only one that needs excuses.

* * * * *

One of the other caving organizations, we were informed, resents the VPI Grotto because VPI cavers are loyal, work as a team, are very active, and go around boasting about being the world's most active caving organization. Well, I felt so bad about this that I vowed that from that moment I would do more partying, do less caving, throw away my VPI patch, and hate all my fellow cavers. I'm sure everyone else at VPI feels the same way. It's a drastic step, but, after all, which is more important for a grotto: contributing to caving or having everyone like you?

* * * * *

VPI placed second in the cave mapping contest, even though no second prize was given. The team from National Capital Grotto had an error of over 27 feet, VPI's error was exactly 10 feet, and the winning team, PSC, had only a three foot error.

* * * * *

Craig Peters tried valiantly to win the cave crawl, but nearly lost his pants when he loaned his belt to June Hancock (D.C. area) while she tried the cave crawl. June didn't win either, but her form was one of the best.

* * * * *

We noticed lots of people who took Cooper's advice (in the latest BGN) literally. They would enter the men's room with copies of the latest Tech Troglodyte and BGN, eat the TT, then use the BGN for toilet paper.

Gary McCutchen

Submitted for publication September 13, 1965

FROM THE BOOK, LIMERICKS, PUNS, AND OTHER TALES: A VERY PUNNY STORY #37.

In a fairly recent issue of the BGN, we read a ten-page trip report by John Cooper that sounded more like a philosophy book than a visit to Cass Cave. (Looked like it too - Assoc. Ed.)

Now, we hate to go out on a limb and risk sowing a seed that might sprout up into a full-fledged feud, but we think John's flowery report was a bit too colorful. We like to see cavers branch out into different types of writing, but sometimes a budding writer fails to blossom.

We hope this articles doesn't cause John to turn green, but part of our criticism stems from his philosophy and this may be the time to root out our differences, since we'd rather be pedaled his ideas in some other way.

Before we make any real criticism, John, wooden it be better to talk about this calmly, without beating around the bush, and instead of feuding and making remarks about each other's family tree? We'll turn over a new leaf and stop barking at other grottos if you will. It might stunt their growth. Let's bury our differences and see what germinates.

Normally, we'd go into detail about John's article and explain our differences, but in this case there are many instances in John's article where he doesn't make him quite clear (A. Ed; beats around the bush, so to speak). And, though he just seems to lumber along, John has treed many an opponent with his fertile wit.

So, rather than soil John's good (chuckle) name, we'll Just say that there are some parts of his philosophy with which we disagree and we'll end right there.

All this writing has me bushed.

Gary McCutchen

Submitted for publication September 13, 1965

Now that y'all have been to the Old Timers, the next great, thrilling event to attend (before the New Year's party) is the fall Va. Region meeting to be held in Blacksburg. Mark the date on your calendar, so ya won't forget. Use any color your little heart desires: red, lavender, aqua, orange, blue, white, but mark the date so you'll be sure to remember. Oh yes, the date. It's October 9 and 10; registration is at 11 am. There'll be another branewpardy in the evening!!!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Bob,

I was mighty glad to see your list of Virginia caves over a mile long and also John Holsinger's comments on your list.

Newberry-Bane -- Sorry to disappoint you on the survey notes, but I no longer have all of them. I took all the footage off the map shortly after I plotted it and came up with two miles plus 1265 feet. In 1957, Joe Lawrence sent me the enclosed plan of about 660 feet more, which he had drawn of the Zig Zag passage. This makes a total of two miles and 1900 feet. I am not familiar with the area below the Straddle Pit, but I see no reason why a prominent tie-in point on the existing map can't be used to map any additional passage. I have always thought it would tie-in to Penley's Cave but had no luck doing so.

Buchanan Salt peter Cave -- I get only 6700 feet from the map, and to the best of my knowledge the map contains all of the cave. In fact, I never did get as far downstream as the map shows. I realize that a plan map is a poor source to scale off a cave which contains several levels, but from personal knowledge I would say the cave contains no more than 7000 feet at the most. Stephenson said "about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles of passage" in 1948, which was long before the cave was completely explored and mapped. No more than 1.25 miles.

Paxton's Cave -- I visited this one only once, just briefly in 1947. A recent Cavalier Caver said almost a mile mapped. It should contain well over a mile.

Cribb Cave -- Washington County. A maze-type cave. I sketched a half mile of it in 1950 and Lee Skinner added several hundred feet in 1961. I think this one is much more than a mile.

New River Cave -- You say over 6000 feet has been mapped. I thought a lot more than that had been mapped. I'll have to wade through a lot of old reports and notes and see.

/s/ Earl Thierry
2034 Buckner St.
Petersburg, Va.

Editor's note: Earl's remarks on New River Cave are timely with Mike Hamilton's discovery of the old New River Cave map. Perhaps the two should get together.

* * * * *

The following section of this journal contains information on new caves found in Virginia as well as new information on already-known caves in Virginia. We have worked at checking in detail those caves noted by a letter and/or for the record only as designated in Caves of Virginia, in order to have some informative data on each known cave.

ROANOKE COUNTY CAVES

The book, Caves of Virginia, while doing a very good job of presenting a large quantity of data, does contain certain errors in description and/or location of caves in Roanoke County, as follows:

Salem Quadrangle: west-central sector:

McNeils Cave ($37^{\circ}20'12''$ x $80^{\circ}11'45''$) Elevation: 2300 feet.
The given location is about 0.5 mile too far northeast. The correct location is as above.

Shepherd Cave ($37^{\circ}19'58''$ x $80^{\circ}12'52''$)
The given location is about 0.5 mile too far west, and in the wrong sector of the quad. The correct location is that recorded above. The description notes the cave as ending in a small room with no leads. In reality, there are two leads from this room yielding about 150 feet more passage, giving a total length of over 300 feet.

Salem Quadrangle: southwest sector:

D.E. Custer Cave ($37^{\circ}19'47''$ x $80^{\circ}13'29''$)
The latitude noted in the book is correct; the longitude is corrected as above. The "large impressive entrance" is a four foot wide slot on a 55° slope at the base of a rock face.

Robert Custer Cave ($37^{\circ}19'56''$ x $80^{\circ}13'03''$) Elevation: 2160 feet.
Location corrected.

Newman Cave ($37^{\circ}19'44''$ x $80^{\circ}13'34''$)
The longitude is corrected, placing the cave west, not east of D.E. Custer Cave. The cave contains only 40 feet of passage.

Whitey Eubank

Submitted for publication August 5, 1965.

MORE CAVING ON THE TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE

Listed in this article are descriptions of some Russell County caves that were located and explored by the VPI Cave Club this summer.

After we had explored one of the caves, it was called to our attention by a local resident that a group from "up north" had explored the cave a few years ago. To our knowledge, the information gathered by that group was never published, but it was interesting (and a bit surprising) to find out that other groups besides VPI have been working in that area.

The information given here will undoubtedly find its way into the first supplement of Caves of Virginia when it is published in 1970. But meanwhile, to help prevent other groups from "working over" the same areas, all information gathered by the VPI Grotto will be published as it is received in the Tech Troglodyte.

Harmon's Cave Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}52'14''$ x $82^{\circ}21'26''$) Elev. 1700 Moll Creek Quad. This is a small, but very well-decorated cave located at the lower end of Pumplog Hollow, about 300 yards west of the point where county route 611 makes a sharp right-hand turn. Near the place where the stream sinks is a low, horizontal crack leading into the cave. The stream reappears immediately inside and flows about 50 feet through a narrow passage and over a 25 foot waterfall. Below the falls, the water sinks within a short distance, and the stream passage ends in a rock fill. Another passage, about 50 feet in length, trends east from the waterfall, becoming quite low, and finally ending in a sand fill. This passage is floored with rimstone dams and shows definite signs of flooding.

Dog Hole Russell County, Va., Moll Creek Quad. Dog Hole is a small, muddy cave about 400 yards south of Harmon's Cave.

Roadside Fissure Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}50'17''$ x $82^{\circ}20'58''$) Elev. 1980 Moll Creek Quad. This cave was opened while a deeper road cut was being made for county route 611. A 1 by 2 foot opening in the road bank gives access to a fissure two feet wide, 20 feet long, and 10 feet deep.

Barry's Blunder Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}50'20''$ x $82^{\circ}20'55''$) Elev. 1980 Moll Creek Quad. The small opening is filled with debris and surface wash. Another FRO (for rats only).

Bush's Drop Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}52'02''$ x $82^{\circ}20'15''$) Elev. 1850 Moll Creek Quad. About 500 yards southwest of the Bush house, near the top of a hill, is a small hole about 2 by 2 feet square. It opens into the top of a vertical pit 80 feet deep with an offset 50 feet down. There are no side passages.

Lawson's Drop Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}51'55''$ x $82^{\circ}20'13''$) Elev. 1800 Moll Creek Quad. About 600 yards southwest of the Bush house and 200 yards south of Bush's Drop is another pit in a fenced-in thicket near the top of a hill. A 4 by 4 foot hole opens into a vertical shaft 160 feet deep, with an offset 80 feet down and another offset 25 feet from the bottom. A number of human bones were found incorporated into the formations at the bottom. They were covered by a 0.25 inch layer of flowstone. No side passages were found.

Kiser's Cave Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}51'51''$ x $82^{\circ}20'10''$) Elev. 1820 Moll Creek Quad. The cave is about 650 yards south of the Bush house near the top of a hill. The entrance is in a small sinkhole and has an opening of about 4 by 3 feet into a walking passage about 50 feet long. A crawlway at the end stops after a short distance. An iron hook is cemented into the wall inside the entrance. There are several small ratholes and collapse sinks nearby due to surface fill running into the cave.

According to a letter from John Holsinger, Kiser's Cave and Lawson's Cave are the same as Kiser's Cave and Kiser's Pit on page 438 of Caves of Virginia. However, the names and locations given above are correct.

Indian Bone Cave Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}53'04''$ x $82^{\circ}20'31''$) Elev. 1660 Saint Paul Quad. The cave is in fairly open country about 0.5 mile from the road and 350 yards northwest of an old barn. There are no large trees nor any other prominent landmarks nearby, making the entrance difficult to locate. A vertical shaft, partially filled with dead cedar trees, leads 20 feet down into a small room. At the

east end of the room is a pit 20 feet deep which gives access to a well-decorated passage about 100 feet long. A small hole below the entrance drop leads down to a small but very pretty room. A number of Indian skeletons have been excavated from this room and the entrance room.

Fraley's Cave Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}52'38\frac{1}{2}''$ x $82^{\circ}20'16''$) Elev. 1720
Saint Paul Quad. About 50 feet north of the road on the upper edge of a large sink-hole, a 6 by 6 foot entrance is partially obscured by bushes. The cave is essentially a single passage, eight feet high and 20 feet wide, trending west for 150 feet. There are a few small side rooms and a number of formations.

Dorton Spring Cave Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}46'48''$ x $82^{\circ}19'36''$) Elev. 1900
Moll Creek Quad. About 150 yards south of an elbow turn in the old road, and high above and south of an abandoned mill on Moll Creek, is a 20 by 20 foot entrance. Immediately inside is a wooden wall which, at one time, prevented further entry. The passage beyond is large and trends west for about 300 feet to a mud fill. About 200 feet from the entrance is a side room off to the left. Near the entrance is a concrete basin used to store water issuing from between two strata in a nearby dome-pit. Tubes, pipes, and pump wires are strung along the passage, but are no longer in use.

Maggie Baker's Cave Russell County, Va., Moll Creek Quad., approx. EC 8/2/4.
Not found.

Copper Creek Pit Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}48'44''$ x $82^{\circ}16'18\frac{1}{2}''$) Moll Creek Quad. In a sinkhole, 600 yards east of a large brick house, is a slot six feet wide and two feet high. It slopes down eight feet to the top of a pit four feet wide, 30 feet long and 30 feet deep. A short crawlway at the bottom leads down six feet to a small room.

Oak Grove School Cave Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}47'56''$ x $82^{\circ}12'26''$) Hansonville Quad. A true rathole. It is 50 yards up the hill behind Oak Grove School and 50 feet west of the fence. The cave is 15 feet long and appears to have been filled in with cobbles.

Gray's Trash Pit Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}51'30''$ x $82^{\circ}12'12''$) Hansonville Quad. The entrance is in a sink between the Grays' house and the highway. It has been completely filled with garbage and debris.

Pope's Drop Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}15'16''$ x $82^{\circ}12'15''$) Hansonville Quad. Near the corner of a fence, 450 yards south of the Grays' house, a vertical pit opens to the surface. It is 20 climbable feet deep, and has no leads off at the bottom.

Roten's Cave Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}51'43''$ x $82^{\circ}13'37''$) Elev. 2220 Hansonville Quad. About 3.3 miles north of Dogtown (Dickensonville) is a small white house on the left. Across the road and 50 yards west of the house is an entrance, three feet high and six feet wide, about 50 feet above the road. A clean, dry, walking passage extends about 100 feet back into the hill as a zigzag tunnel, ending in a gravel and clay fill. The Roten family occupied this cave until about 16 years ago. The entrance is walled and provided with a small door.

Gibson's Cave Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}51'35''$ x $82^{\circ}13'05''$) Elev. 2400 Hansonville Quad. About 1.5 miles north of Dickensonville, route 801 turns right and goes to the top of a hill. From the top of the hill, the cave is 750 yards east along the ridge, and 50 yards east of a small long barn. From the small entrance, a dirt slope leads down to a large passage six feet wide and 30 feet high. The passage trends 250 feet southwest as a high canyon, ending in a mud and breakdown fill. An upper level parallels the lower level for the last 50 feet and is similar in character.

Gibson's Barn Cave Russell County, Va., ($36^{\circ}51'32\frac{1}{2}''$ x $82^{\circ}13'07''$) Elev. 2360 Hansonville Quad. See Gibson's Cave above. This cave is about 30 yards south of the barn near the middle of the edge of a small patch of open woods. A small, inconspicuous hole opens into a room 10 feet long, six feet wide, and six feet high. A narrow fissure on the right leads down into three small chambers connected by small openings.

R.E. Whittemore

Submitted for publication September 10, 1965

FINDINGS IN RICH VALLEY

Rich Valley, located in Smyth County between Walker Mountain and the North Fork of the Holston River, is characterized by sinking streams, dry stream beds, and many sinkholes. It is an area where several of the larger, more prominent caves were located in the early 1950's while many smaller caves remained indefinitely located or not found at all. The following clarifies two cave positions and helps to more clearly orient several others.

Sheep Hole (The Pit) Smyth County, Va., ($36^{\circ}54'59''$ x $81^{\circ}33'50''$) Elev. 2240 Chatham Hill Quad. In a perpendicular line to county route 610, the cave is 600 yards southeast, on the top of a small rock-covered hill overlooking a bar (to the west) and a house and the road to the north. The entrance is in the west side of the hill with an opening about 10 feet wide and 10 to 15 feet long. The depth is 35 feet, and the entrance room is bell-shaped. The floor immediately beneath the entrance is covered by debris, among which sheep bones and carcasses are the most prominent. The cave, obviously, has long been known as a place for disposing of dead sheep.

Waterfall Pit Smyth County, Va., ($36^{\circ}54'56''$ x $81^{\circ}33'37''$) Elev. 2160 Chatham Hill Quad. The cave is 700 yards in a perpendicular line from the road, and is west of Sheep Hole. The cave acts as a swallow hole for a stream flowing to the North Fork of the Holston River from Walker Mountain. Water from this stream may eventually flow by subterranean means to the stream 2500 yards west. The stream flows into the cave in wet seasons and appears to do so with great force for there is all sorts of trash above the entrance - logs, wire, and rocks of all sizes. The entrance drop is about 15 feet; the walls are 5 to 10 feet apart. Directly opposite the point where the water falls is a crawlway which pinches out in about 10 feet. It trends to the left, and is halted by a dirt and rock fill. One is able to discern on one side of the fill that a passage of some sort continues beyond the fill.

Trout Pond Caves #1 & 2 Smyth County, Va. Chatham Hill Quad. These caves are on the east side of State Route 16 on county route 610 at the base of a limestone bluff above a pond and spring on McDonald Branch about 400 yards from the road.

Big Sink or Foxhole Smyth County, Va. Chatham Hill Quad. The cave is in a large sinkhole northwest of a barn on the left side of the road (610) when traveling north.

Between Buchanan Saltpeter Cave and Cave Spring, four new caves were approximately located, but not checked. The caves are on the land of Milton Clark, who like Mr. John Buchanan, owns a great deal of land and rents it to several tenant farmers.

Burnop Cemetery Cave Smyth County, Va. Chatham Hill Quad. The cave is located about 100 yards southeast of the cemetery and is filled with cars.

Milton Clark's Cave #1 Smyth County, Va., Chatham Hill Quad. About 400 yards from the road in a sinkhole and to the left of Mr. Clark's driveway is a cave filled completely with stone.

Milton Clark's Cave #2 Smyth County, Va., Chatham Hill Quad. 5/2/2 The cave is about one mile behind the house and to the left of the driveway in an open field. It would be best that Mr. Clark locate the cave more clearly before it is visited.

Milton Clark's Cave #2 Smyth County, Va., Chatham Hill Quad. 3/4/1. The cave is about 400 yards from the main road and 50 yards from an elbow bend in the driveway going to a tenant's house. This is east of Mr. Clark's house. The cave is in a large sink which partially engulfs the driveway and is near are large tree.

Anne Braithwaite

Submitted for publication August 23, 1965.

NOTES ON SOME WYTHE COUNTY RAMBLINGS

During the second session of summer school, I made two trips to Max Meadows, Virginia, acting on a letter sent to the VPI Cave Club by George Jackson of Max Meadows, stating that there were four caves in the immediate area that had never been fully explored.

The area is only slightly above the water table, so everything is on a small scale.

Explorations were made by John Eads, Gene Harrison, Mike Youso, Dan Weatherly, John Peduzzi, Jim Wade and myself. Here is a brief report of the caves explored, only the last of which is worth visiting.

Jackson's #1 ($36^{\circ}59'22''$ x $80^{\circ}54'46''$) Max Meadows Quad. On the property of George Jackson, Max Meadows, Virginia. The entrance is a 3 by 3 foot hole in a level pasture, 15 feet deep into an only room which is 12 feet long, 3 feet wide and 12 feet high. In other words, a real neat garbage disposal!

Jackson's #2 ($36^{\circ}59'18'' \times 80^{\circ}57'41''$) Max Meadows Quad. The entrance is a 3 by 2 feet hole in the side of a small rock cut beside the road. Only several feet above the stream level, on the same level as the road. About six feet long with three leads that end very shortly.

A third cave is on the property of one known locally as Tom Boy Simmons. If such a 'cave' deserves a name, let it be Tom Boy's Cave ($36^{\circ}58'01'' \times 80^{\circ}57'57''$). The cave is actually two small caves five feet apart, approximately 200 yards behind the lawn of two abandoned brick houses. A healthy spring flows out of the rocks slightly below the entrances. The larger of the two entrances is a twelve foot crawl, parallel to the rock face; gradually going down to the stream level, and then ending. The smaller entrance was a tight crawl (for me) which snaked along parallel to the face and behind the other. It soon opens up to a narrow walking passage with about six inches of water in the bottom, approximately 20 feet long, then a mud crawl to another room of similar dimensions, but without a stream. There is no passage from this room, and no connection with the other cave, save a siphon. At the very liberal most, 75 feet of passage, occasional stalactites, salamanders and several bats.

Watson's Cave ($36^{\circ}59'58'' \times 80^{\circ}53'52''$) Max Meadows Quad. On the property adjoining that of Mr. Jackson's, along the N & W railroad tracks, just off the right of way are two small trapezoidal openings in a rock face, facing the tracks. The smaller of the two entrances leads directly to the second room of the cave, and the passage between the first and second room is not worth the effort. From the room, a passage below can be seen through numerous cracks and crevices. All leads from this room either dead-end or drop down to this level. There begins a long and almost straight walking stream passage with several chimneys leading to a mud sloped upper level. After about 600 feet of a gradually diminishing passage, there is a 20 x 4 x 14 foot room. From there, the going gets tough. Following and generally crawling in the stream is the best way to describe it. Occasionally the low ceiling allows hands and knees crawling, but more often it is a wormlike squeeze. These squeezes get longer, the ceiling gets lower, and the water gets higher, until the idea of pushing to the end gets disgusting. So, a liberal 2000 feet, the first 1000 being walk, stoop and crawl and the 1000 being described as above.

On the surface, there is a spring on the approximate area of the crawl. No passage is visible on the surface, so we all assumed the end to be a siphon. One sink hole in the area seems to have promise, but is filled with wire fencing and tree limbs. The owner says that he is the one who filled it in and there was no cave there.

Dick Gerling

Submitted for publication August 30, 1965.

TRIP REPORTS

DEAD AIR CAVE

8/21/65

by Anne Braithwaite

Personnel: Barry Whittemore, Bob Swensson, Gene Harrison, R.E. Whittemore.

The purpose of this trip was to photograph and to survey the cave. Surveying was conducted by the two Whittemores and myself while Bob and Gene did extra-curricular exploring and other assorted duties.

The cave was rigged with one rope to the ledge 40 feet below the entrance. The ledge forms a balcony above the big room of the cave and two bolts are in the wall at the edge of the ledge. We decided not to trust the bolts and tied another rope to the first. At the ledge, the crawlway was identified, but we decided to enjoy a free rappel, a mere 56 feet (taped). The cave, essentially, is one large room. Below the entrance to the right are several large pits. To the left is a sloped "pit" and an adjoining hill, all of breakdown. The room extends to the left beyond the breakdown hill for about 80 feet. The floor of this room is flat and the mud has been uniquely carved by water. At the far end of the room, several "canyon" passages continue, one of these becomes a miserable fissure and crawlway.

At the breakdown pile, a passage to the northeast goes up to one side of the big room, becoming a "balcony passage." Further to the northeast, the crawlway sighted at the ledge below the entrance joins this passage. Anyone with a mind to avoid rappeling whenever possible should be assured that the rappel is easier and much more enjoyable, unless, of course, you like to wallow in mud.

The formations in the cave are exquisite. Unfortunately, most are on the floor, and are easy prey to fatfooted, stupid cavers. Most striking were the "toad-stools" on one side of the breakdown "pit." These were short, squat stalagmites with slightly rounded tops. Many were white, although some were brown or gray. At rare times, when the sun's rays infiltrate the darkness, the ceiling is visible and is magnificently studded with formations. Fortunately, these are far away from crunching boots and stealing hands of would-be vandals.

We ascended out of the cave, emerged into the warm night air, and returned to Blacksburg by 3 am.

* O * O * O * O *

THE PINNACLES OF DAN

8/15/65

by R.E. Whittemore

Personnel: Tim Schoechle, Pinky Wheatly, Rick Banning, Ellen Witherite, Hank Stearns, Ricky Sherl, Barry Whittemore, Anne Braithwaite.

The Galax Old Fiddlers' Convention had drawn a large number of real music lovers from VPI, Md. and other places, and we had all camped at Rocky Knob Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Sunday morning broke clear and warm, so Hank Stearns, organizer of the embryonic VPI Outing Club, decided to instigate a trip to the nearby Pinnacles of Dan. Since Carroll County, Va., is my old stomping grounds, I was elected guide to this expedition.

First we took a short side trip to Groundhog Mountain for a spectacular view of the local countryside. From the old log tower on Groundhog Mountain, a long segment of the rugged Blue Ridge Escarpment can be seen, including the portentous upper reaches of the Dan River Gorge, with its curious pinnacles looming up from its depths.

Our excitement thus whetted, we left our wind-blown perch and headed for the fabled pinnacles.

As we turned onto the dirt road that approaches the pinnacles, we noted with interest a long-forgotten "Appalachian Trail - Maine to Georgia" marker tacked to the back of a stop sign. Later we wondered how hikers in those days negotiated some of the local "trails" with full backpacks. A short ride beyond this marker took us to the nearest point accessible by automobile to the pinnacles themselves. The surrounding countryside in this area one of relatively low relief, but always dominating the landscape is an enormous void from which protrude tree-covered peaks and barren rock faces. Lewis Pedigo, in The History of Patrick and Henry Counties, said "The scenery presented by the passage of the Dan River down the mountain and into the flat country is awful and sublime to the highest degree." Even from our distant vantage point, we could see that there was much truth in this description.

Looking at a topo map of the area, one may easily conjecture upon the geological history of the gorge and the pinnacles. The Dan River rises in a high meadow on somewhat the same level as the New River drainage area. Undoubtedly, the Dan River was once a tributary of the New River, whose nearest point is about 25 miles away. The New River drainage area is characterized by a very slight gradient, since it has some 3000 miles to meander before it reaches sea level at the Gulf of Mexico. On the other hand, streams that flow eastward through the Blue Ridge have only about 300 miles to make the 2800-foot descent to sea level at the Atlantic Ocean. Therefore, streams, such as the Roanoke River, that have escaped over the Blue Ridge, are characterized by deep valleys, rapid descents, and rugged terrain. Eons ago, when the Dan River flowed westward to the New River, it was a slow, lazy stream, forming long meanders and oxbow lakes. But as years went by and the land eroded away, the lazy meanders cut dangerously close to the steep face of the mountain. Finally, it found a weak spot and made its escape over the 1500-foot escarpment into the Piedmont below. In the next several centuries, the river, now flowing at a tremendously accelerated rate, began to cut a deep gorge, entrenching itself into the upland meadows. Today, the old meandering course of the river is still preserved, but instead of flowing along the rolling meadows, it is a swift, plunging line at the bottom of a yawning gorge, with almost vertical walls rising directly from the waters' edge. In one place along the course, the river, before it was entrenched, made a wide loop about a half mile across. When the gorge was cut, a cone-shaped pinnacle was left in the center of the loop, connected to the surrounding meadows by a narrow saddle.

Our group descended by a faintly-defined path until the footway turned abruptly downward. The opposite face, about a half mile away presented itself as a menacing wall, having many vertical rock faces and scarcely enough soil to support the scrubby aspens growing there. Rising above us was a grotesque heap of rocks with a few stunted aspens growing from various crevices and ledges. The average slope was about sixty degrees. The bottom of the gulf below us could not be perceived, but appeared as a bluish mist through the trees. Lewis Pedigo described the gorge from this point

as "The declivity of the mountains... the depth of the basin is beyond view and appears to be incalculable."

We descended the steep path for several hundred feet until we reached the narrow causeway connecting the pinnacle with the canyon wall. The windy ridge was no more than twenty feet wide, with a nearly vertical drop on each side. The bottom of the gorge appeared to be no closer than it did before the somewhat arduous descent.

A short walk took us to the base of the first of the three pinnacles. The first two, or "false" pinnacles, are not quite as high as the main one, but have more jagged rock outcrops. Between the first and second false pinnacles is a plate of rock cantilevered out over what appears to be a drop of several hundred feet. From this vantage point, the entire upper end of the valley can be seen. To the right is "Bursted Rock," a sheer cliff of over hundred feet. One thousand feet below is the thin silver thread of the Dan River. Somewhere upstream, obscured by trees, are the Great Falls of the Dan River and Haunted Falls. Spanning Haunted Creek Gorge is a steel arch viaduct supporting a four-foot diameter pipe, the Danville Penstock. It stands as a silent reminder that inspite of the awesomeness of this natural creation, Man is the most awesome creation of all. A dam at Round Meadow Creek supplies water to the pipe, which spans gorges, traverses canyon walls, pierces the saddle below the pinnacles at Low Gap Tunnel, and finally plunges nearly 1000 feet to drive a turbine which powers the city of Danville. Thank goodness they found this place before the Army Corps of Engineers did; the Corps would have built fourteen earth-fill dams in the gorge.

The view down the valley is spectacular, being one of more pinnacles, high walls, and a misty, silhouetted cleft through which the river makes its escape into the Piedmont.

The final ascent to the main pinnacle involves scrambling over barren slabs of micaceous schist, with an occasional quartz-filled joint for variety. The top of the peak is about 20 feet by 20 feet and affords an excellent view of the entire valley. The course of the river below can be traced as it makes a long, nearly circular, loop around the base of the peak. The rolling meadows bordering this gulf can be seen stretching for miles on each side, this vantage point being on a level with them.

One may wonder how a trip report such as this one found its way into a journal of speleology, but one visit will show that this place has many aspects in common with caving. A certain amount of physical exertion is rewarded by a spectacle unseen and undefiled by unappreciative mobs. Perhaps it is fortunate that people still retain primitive superstitions and fears of caves. It keeps out many people who don't deserve to see what lies therein.

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It was once written "everybody who is anybody subscribes to the baltimore (---) grotto (---) news." That may be so, but who wants to be just a plain, ordinary anybody? Not me. People who think for themselves and who are selective about their reading material subscribe to the Tech Troglodyte. Send a dollar or two now; we still publish at the low, low rate of 1¢ per page. SUBSCRIBE NOW.