

# THE TECH TROGLODYTE

The local Mexicans welcome you to Golondrinas...



and the VPI Cave Club welcomes you to the bottom of the pit! ☺

FALL '01

# The Tech Troglyote

## A Journal of the Virginia Tech Grotto of the National Speleological Society

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## From the Oval Office

by Philip Balister

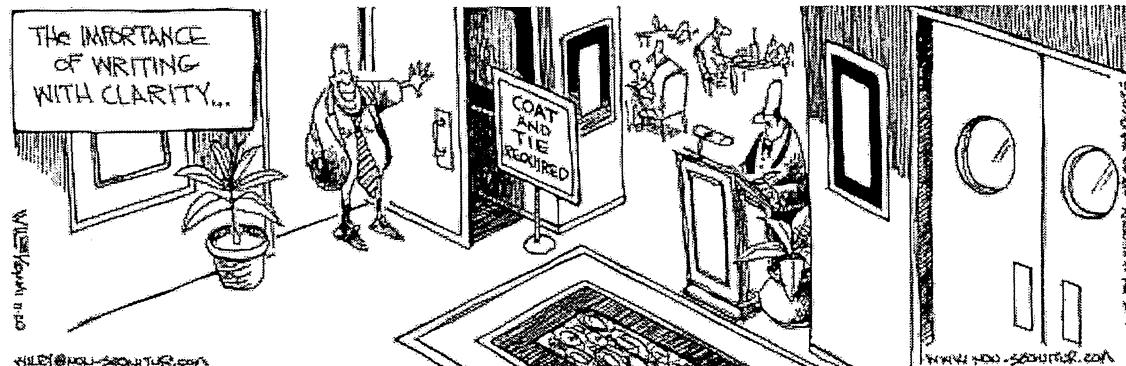
Well it took me 22 years to become President of the Cave Club. I suppose this is some kind of record. Fortunately, this is the only President's column I will do. This is also my first ever submission to the *Trog*. Hopefully the editor decides to include it.

First, I would like to thank the people that keep this club together. The heart of this club is the people that volunteer for the various tasks that come up throughout the year. Without these people the Halloween Party, Banquet, Boy Scout trips, and trips for new people would not happen. Next time you have the chance, volunteer to help with something. You will be glad you did.

Next, I would like everyone to consider this: of the last ten people to become full members of the club, less than five are still active voting members. The heart of this club is the student members. I would like everyone to develop some ideas on how to increase the number of voting, student members in the club.

I have some thoughts on the subject. Get new people more involved in day-to-day activities, encourage new members to start leading introductory cave trips, organize more club activities, and develop some goals for the training program. Some suggestions: if you eat on campus, let new people know where and when you eat. Call people from your last trip when you go see a movie. I am organizing a ridge walking project that should develop into a good continuing club activity.

Finally, consider the purpose of the training program. I believe the training program should provide people with a good introduction to the basic skills required to go caving and provide a foundation for future skill development. A new member should be able to make good decisions about what sort of trips to go on and know their personal limits. A new member should know what kind of trip, if any, they can personally organize and lead. These are pretty basic things and it should take no more than six months for most people to gain these skills.



# **TAG 2001 and an Ellison's Cave Trip (including 5 important hints for you to be successful trainee)**

by Chris Hibshman

## **THURSDAY OCTOBER 4, 2001**

This day started out like a normal school weekday for myself, except that I was not looking forward to my exam in Advanced Thermodynamics at noon. My reward for taking the exam was spending the weekend at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual TAG Fall Cave-In at Sequoyah Caverns Campground near Valley Head, Alabama. I have heard many stories from many different cavers about this spectacular event and I finally made it a priority to get there. (For all you young trainees, TAG is an acronym for Tennessee Alabama Georgia).

After defining fugacity and agonizing over several complex equations of state for over an hour, I finally made it home and packed a few last things for the weekend trip. I drove to Pam Mohr's house where I saw her SUV overflowing with gear. Earlier in the week, I gladly accepted Pam's offer of a ride to TAG with her and Kirk Digby. Personally, I think Kirk was more interested in having someone else pay for the gas. Chi-ching!

We piled into the car settled in for the six hour drive. We arrived at the campground by 9 p.m., but because we are in a different time zone, everyone else thinks it is 8 p.m. We pay the \$25 entrance fee at the registration booth and begin to find a campsite. Bill Stringfellow, a VPI member living in Atlanta, graciously invited us to camp at his site. Lucky for us, he already had a tarp set up upon our arrival, so all we had to do was crack a couple of brewskies and set up our tents. (Did I mention that we are in a dry county?) To make a long story very short, I did not bring any cool frothy beverages, but I took advantage of the fact that Kirk filled my cooler with plenty of it. (**Hint #1** to trainees: "mooching" is an art that is necessary for survival at such events.)

Immediately after setting up our tents, we headed off to Vendor's Row to shop for gear and hunt for bargains. For those of you who know Kirk, this is his favorite pastime during caving events. He cannot resist the temptation

of touching every piece of shiny metal and tinkering with the gadgets. After talking to each of the vendors for a few minutes, we went to the Southeastern Cave Conservancy (SCC) tent. There we met Andy Zellner, who is an experienced TAG caver. He was happy to give us directions to several nearby caves and pits.

Kirk, Pam, and myself decided to bounce Fantastic Pit in Ellison's cave Friday morning. Kirk was persistently nagging me to use a ropewalker system for ascending this pit, so on the way back to camp, he convinced me to fork out \$12 for some quick links and bungee cord. Since he was loaning me a Simmon's Roller chest harness, these few items enabled me to transform my current frog system into a ropewalker. We also found that Ray Sira and Nikky LaBranche had arrived and set up camp in the field near Mike, Molly, and Birch from the Bat Ranch.

## **FRIDAY OCTOBER 5, 2001**

We woke up early this morning to get a head start on caving, fearing that if we started too late there would be many people going to Ellison's Cave. Why? Because Ellison's Cave has the deepest free rappel in a cave in the continental United States! The drop is called Fantastic Pit, which is our target for the day. If rigging from the Attic Area, the rappel is 586 feet. Another rig point is accessible at the Balcony area that provides a mere 512-foot rappel. In addition, there are several other drops in the cave over 400 feet, plus several miles of horizontal caving.

So, after choking down some oatmeal and hot tea on this brisk morning, we piled into the slightly less full but more disorganized car and drove an hour or so to Crockford-Pigeon Mountain Wildlife Management Area near Blue Hole. Blue Hole happens to be the resurgence from Ellison's Cave near the parking area. As we pulled into the parking area, we noticed two other cars and several cavers milling about. After talking with them, they inform us that they are headed for Flowing Stone Cave, which

is a recent discovery not far from Ellison's Cave. We were relieved to know we were the first trip into Ellison's today; it would make logistics difficult if many groups were rappelling Fantastic Pit.

Meanwhile, Pam unloaded the car, including Walt Pirie's 750-foot rope that he generously loaned to us. Pam coiled the incredibly long rope into two coils so it could be escorted through the cave. Meanwhile, I began building my ropewalker system with Kirk's guidance and a few blank stares from other cavers in the parking lot. It involved tying a few pieces of webbing around my ankles, attaching a couple of Petzl ascenders with quick links, and sizing the bungee cord. In less than 30 minutes, I had a working ropewalker.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** I do not recommend building an ascending system immediately prior to a vertical trip, especially if you are not familiar with it. It is always best to experiment with your gear above ground before using it in a cave, where many things can go wrong. I have prior experience using a ropewalker and had the equipment and knowledge necessary to change to a frog system if needed.

So, we finally get our gear together and are ready to go caving. Since I was feeling good on the clear, crisp morning, I offered to carry the entire 750 feet of rope. A fair estimate of rope weight is 7 pounds per 100 feet. A simple calculation in my head reveals that the rope weighs about 50 pounds. (**Hint # 2** to trainees: carrying heavy ropes long distances is tiresome. But, if you wish to make a good impression to the "older" members on the trip, offer to carry it.) First we had to stop and sign the visitation card required by the park rangers. They monitor the amount of visitors to the cave. Then we walked by Blue Hole and started the long hike up the mountain. The path is a shallow dirt trench that weaves through one huge continuous patch of poison ivy. We flushed out a few deer and turkeys along the way.

Pam's strategy for the long hike is to be slow and steady, which is probably a good idea. On the other hand, the rope is uncomfortably digging into my neck and shoulders. Therefore,

my strategy is the less amount of time the rope is on my back, the better I will feel. I plunge ahead and scramble up the mountain. Forty-five minutes and several breaks later I arrived exhausted at a cave entrance. I throw the rope off my shoulders and wait for the others to come. It turns out that this entrance is one of four. Unfortunately, the entrance that provides the easiest access to the part of the cave we plan to visit is located another 100 feet up the trail. So, I wearily threw the heavy rope over my shoulders and hauled it up the trail to the preferred entrance.

We took a minute to catch our breath and replenish some fluids before repacking our cave packs. For some reason this took Kirk the longest time to do. I tell him he is getting slow in his old age. As we get loaded up with 1100 feet of rope and our cave packs, Kirk mentions (i.e. makes a lame excuse) that he cannot carry any rope because he fears taking a wrong turn and does not want to haul the extra weight around. Since Kirk was the only person on the trip to have previously visited the cave, Pam and I naively believed him. It turns out that the first several hundred feet is linear stream trunk passage with no possibility for a wrong turn. D'oh!

The trunk passage leads to the 125-foot Warm-up Pit. I find it very fascinating that people in the TAG area consider a 125-foot pit, a "warm-up." In SW Virginia, that would constitute a very significant drop. We rigged the rope to two of the dozen or so bolts drilled into the surrounding walls with a self-equalizing rig. I had the luxury of rappelling with 50 pounds of rope hanging from my harness, which forced me to engage another bar on my rappelling rack to the rope.

Next, we approached the first of two nuisance drops. The rope (which is permanently rigged) was badly frayed, so we took a few minutes to fix the rigging. While we did, I noticed a rope hanging down from the ceiling on the far side of the room. We believed this was the rope to the Attic Area, where one can descend 586 feet into Fantastic Pit. We were headed to the Balcony Rig (only a 512-foot drop), and were soon on our way. After rappelling the second nuisance drop and climbing through a pinch,

we came to a room that ends in a dark abyss... Fantastic Pit. But first we needed to crawl about 15 feet on a ledge along the right wall. Sounds scary, but the exposure is not too uncomfortable. I had to be careful not to drop my pack! On the other side, we located another ten bolts, four of which we chose to rig another self-equalizing rig to.

A few minutes before Kirk is ready to descend, his attitude changed drastically. All of a sudden he started running around clucking like a chicken. When I asked what was bothering him, he informed me that he is afraid of heights, especially drops over 200 feet! I have been caving with him for over five years, including many vertical trips in Virginia, but never knew about his fear of heights. To his credit, he overcomes his fear every time when he goes vertical caving, and I respect that.

We pulled our gear together and decided to carry only one pack to the bottom to eliminate extra weight for the ascent. We also decided to use whistle blasts instead of rope calls to eliminate confusion on rope. You would not believe how many echoes a noise makes in that pit. Before descending, Kirk reminded us to extinguish our carbide lamps while on rope and to be extra cautious on the descent. Going too fast can heat the rack to the point it liquefies the rope sheath resulting in an out-of-control rappel! This would qualify as an unpleasant experience.

Ten minutes later, Pam and I heard the jingling of metal at the bottom of the pit and eventually the short "tweet" from a whistle - Kirk's signal for "off-rope." Pam rigged into the rope and tried to lower herself over the ledge. After struggling with the heavy rope for a couple of minutes, she doubted that she had the arm strength to feed the rope through her rack. Reluctantly, she gave up and climbed back to the top. Pam's decision not to rappel was a good one because she was not totally comfortable. This is an important lesson to all of us.

I am the only person left to rappel and I too found myself clucking like a chicken. This was the deepest rappel that I had ever attempted; in fact, it was my first drop over 200 feet. The

butterflies were flying around uncontrollably in my stomach but I loved the rush. I clipped a 'biner into a bolt as a safety. Pam assisted me by hauling up the heavy rope to give me enough slack to weave the rope through my rack. I double checked and triple checked my rig, making sure I did not zipper rig the rack and that all biners were locked off. Then I weighted the rope and leaned back over the dark abyss. I could not even see Kirk's light at the bottom. I nervously negotiated the lip of the drop, which was not too difficult because there are footholds in the wall, and away I went.

I started out with five bars because I didn't want to go too fast. At first, it was slow going and I needed to feed the rope through the rack. This became tiresome on my right arm but I took a short rest when I needed one. In retrospect, I should have started with four bars on my rack and added a fifth when I began to pick up speed. However, my nerves had the best of me and I continued to rappel with five bars. Shortly thereafter, I was rappelling smoothly and began to enjoy the ride. The shaft was huge; I could barely see the walls with my electric light. I can now see the dim glow of Kirk's lamp far below.

Before long, my feet were back on solid ground at the bottom of the pit. I unclipped myself from the rope and let out a short blast on my whistle to let Pam know I was off rope. The first thing I noticed was a large pool of ankle deep water. Upon investigation, I found two salamanders and a skinny frog. We assume the frog washed in with the stream water but we will never know. The salamanders were unlike any species that I have ever seen before. They were brownish and had obvious external gills. I vaguely recall seeing similar species in pictures in my *NSS News*.

Upon further exploration, we found a register and both signed our names and a brief comment. To relieve some tension from my nerves, I wrote a joking comment to the effect of "Uh-oh, forgot my ascending gear!" Before long, we clipped into rope with our ropewalkers and began the long upward ascent. To save time, we climbed tandem; that is, both of us climbed together, Kirk ahead of me. I could not look upward for the entire ascent

without having dirt fall into my eyes. It took us nearly forty minutes of labor, but we finally approached the lip. Kirk's next challenge was to go over the lip with the rope loaded. He was prepared for this by having an extra ascender available to systematically unclip his ascending gear from the rope below the obstacle to the rope above the obstacle. In the meantime, I just chilled out and caught my breath. Soon he was off rope and I finished my ascent.

Overall, my ropewalker system did well. However, the right foot cam was digging into my ankle and causing much pain for most of the ascent. I decided to use my frog system for ascending the remainder of the pits. It took us a good fifteen minutes to recover physically from our laborious climb, at which time we began hauling and coiling the rope. Again, Kirk was prepared for such a task and rigged a pulley system to make the hauling easier. Pam coiled the rope as Kirk and I pulled the never-ending rope up the drop. (**Hint # 3** to trainees: hauling ropes is much fun. You should always offer to haul rope for the "older" members on the trip.)

With the rope coiled into two halves (so two people can share in carrying the rope), we again had to wait for Kirk to repack his pack. Personally, it is my observation that Kirk is getting slow is his old age and this is an excuse to slow the young folk down a bit. So far we had been in the cave for about six hours and we were beginning to feel fatigued. Knowing that we were leaving the cave and that the toughest part of the trip was over, our spirits were lifted.

We ascended the nuisance drops and Warm-up Pit. To make our lives easier, we hauled the ropes up the drops instead of climbing with them attached to our harnesses. It was still laborious. Fifteen minutes later we exited the cave into a warm but overcast night. I was hoping the sky would be clear so we could take advantage of the near full moon. It took Kirk another fifteen minutes to repack his pack and then we were on our way. Pam and I each carried one coil of the long rope, so we were attached on the way down the mountain. Forty-five minutes later we were sitting at the car drinking some cold beverages and reminiscing about the experience. I know Kirk was exhausted because he made not a single attempt

to scare Pam and I by jumping out from behind a rock along the trail. We spent about nine hours underground, plus another two hiking to and from the cave. It was midnight by the time we arrived back at camp. We were so lethargic that we did not even want to drink a beer, so we all went to bed early to get a good jump on Saturday's festivities.

#### SATURDAY OCTOBER 6, 2001

We woke up leisurely Saturday morning. We contemplated bouncing a pit or two while we ate our breakfast, but decided to hang out around camp and enjoy the many activities. Our aching bodies were still recovering from the trip to Ellison's Cave. Instantly after making that decision, I heard the pop-fizz of a beer can being opened. Kirk was starting his alcohol consumption early, possibly to make up for lost time last night.

Throughout the day we revisited Vendor Row several times. Ray convinced Nikky she needed a flattering fleece halter top. This decision was confirmed by most males in the vicinity. Nikky and myself competed in the squeeze box and rope running competitions. For our efforts, Nikky won a carabiner for taking second place in the women's ropewalker, second only to Berta Kirchman. I also won a carabiner for taking first in the men's mechanical sit-stand (frogger). Berta ended up winning a 150 foot rope. We occupied ourselves all afternoon by playing poker. Kirk and Nikky cleaned house and spent their winnings at Vendor Row. (**Hint # 4** to trainees: participate in the rope running contests, you can will free gear!)

Bill Stringfellow invited all of us to a spaghetti dinner with nearby cavers. Once again, I found a free meal (see Hint # 1). After filling ourselves with pasta, garlic bread, and "Death by Chocolate" for desert, we meandered down to the campfire area for the awards ceremony. This is where we collected our prizes, tried to win some door prizes, and recognized the hard work and dedication of the many people who organized this great weekend. The crowd of 1400 people got restless anticipating the lighting of the bonfire as darkness fell upon us. Mike Newsome is a member of the ignition crew for this house-sized pile of wood. For

those of you who know Mike, you are aware of his creativity with pyrotechnics. We were not disappointed. Two rockets were fired up a wire which ignited both fireworks and the large stack of wood simultaneously, resulting in a colorful shower of sparks and fire. The fire continued to rage, with flames shooting fifty to sixty feet into the crystal clear sky.

In addition to the enormous fire, individuals set off fireworks and carbide bombs. I also witnessed my first flaming hot air balloon. It was awesome to watch the fireballs float over the ridge of a nearby hill. I could only speculate as to what the residents on the other side of the ridge thought of the flying fire.... There was also a coed Raman noodle wrestling contest and various other activities.

#### SUNDAY OCTOBER 7, 2001

We woke up early to break camp and pack the car. Then we all headed down to the pavilion for a hot pancake breakfast. We paid only \$5 for this fundraising event, and it was worth every penny of it. (**Hint #5** to trainees: it wasn't free, but I did not have to make it and it was delicious and filling.) Then we crammed into the car and headed for Blacksburg.

I highly recommend this caving event to anyone in the club. It was a great weekend experience. Next year is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of TAG Fall Cave-In. It would be awesome for a large group of VPI Cave Club folks to participate. I am sure the bonfire will be bigger than ever!

## To Test or Not to Test

by Pam Mohr

One day while practicing rope work at the Quarry, I dropped a biner. I dropped it about 10 feet and it landed on rock. "Well, there goes \$10," I thought. Being very frugal with money, I really did not want to retire a biner I'd only just purchased. Of course I should not have dropped it; it should have been tied on, so that it couldn't fall and be damaged. Even worse, it could've hit someone – someone I liked.

So I learned the basics of not having any loose gear on me while on a rope. But what about the biner; is it safe to use or not? It really did not fall that far, but did I want to bet my life on "iffy" equipment? Caving and rope work is dangerous and difficult enough.

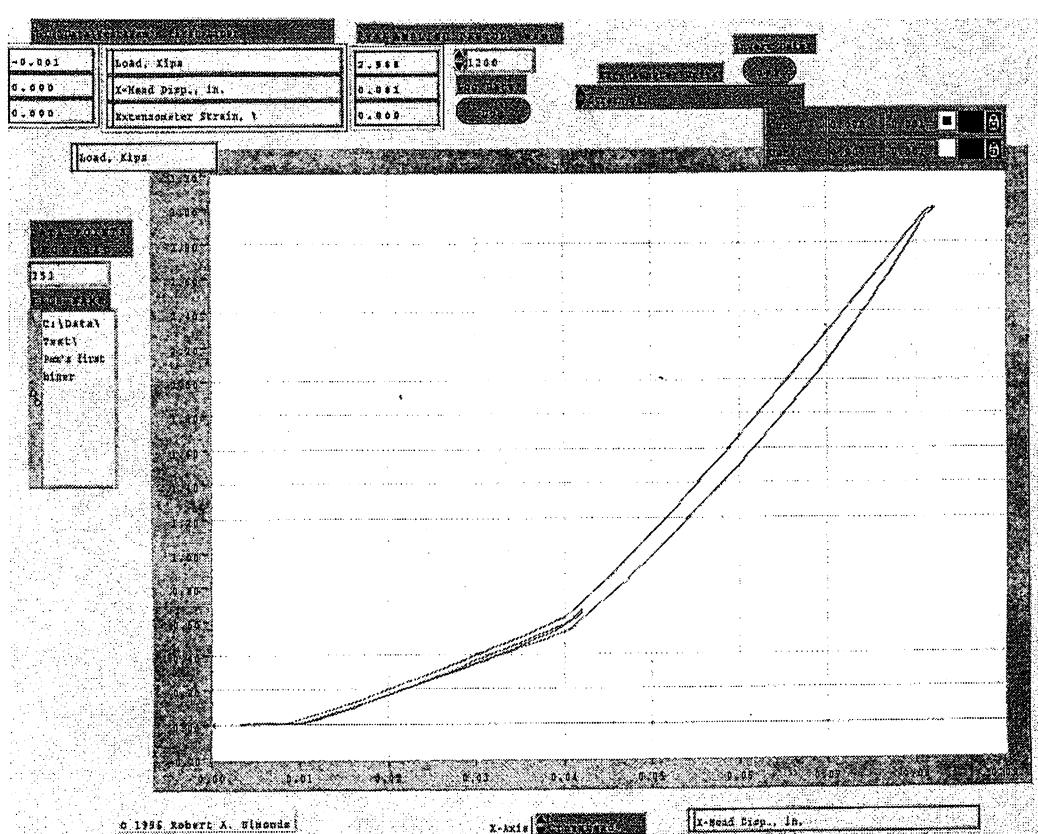
So I decided to have the biner tested. I remembered that at a get-together in the past, Bob Simonds had offered to pull test any equipment folks might have questions about. I called him up at work and he said to bring the biner right over. Kirk, of course, found another retired biner lying around the house and we

brought it along as well.

A machine applies tension on the biner that is increasing at a constant rate, and graphs both the load applied and deformation of the tested item. See the graph below.

Bob explained to us that if the biner had a flaw or weakness, the graph would not be a smooth constant sloping line, and that furthermore, the second line on the graph (drawn as the testing machine incrementally released load) would not closely approximate the first (drawn as load was applied). The only irregularities shown on the curves are caused by the gate beginning to load at approximately 500 pounds, which caused the biner to stretch less per additional pounds applied, and some small inconsistencies at the beginning of the test caused by a bit of slop in the test rig's attachment hardware.

The biner was tested to a load of 3,000 pounds, way more than 10 times my weight. So I feel sure that the biner is now safe for me to use.



## An Honorable Insult

by Aaron Thomas

"So I hear that you're one of those spelunknikers." The words burned in my ears as I fought to push them from my mind. "Yeah, I used to do a bit of that spelunkin myself when I was a kid...."

Quickly becoming impossible to ignore, I looked disapprovingly at my father's best friend and decided that he, like so, many would soon need a little lesson on the difference between cavers and spelunkers. But as I sat there smiling, contemplating the best way to tactfully address the insult which had just been unwittingly hurled at me, I realized that this term was not always such a foul utterage and that once many years it ago it had actually been a badge of honor.

For while the term "spelunker" is annoying at best, it clearly stems from the word speleology and was named thus by the founder of our craft, Edouard-Alfred Martel. Martel is perhaps best remembered for the founding of modern caving .- the implementation of proper equipment, and utilization of standard technique.

Like so many of us, Martel was not just some jerk with a lamp who aimlessly dug around in caves, but he was also a student, a scholar, and even obtained high positions with various societies dedicated to earth science. The son of a lawyer and paleontologist, Martel's father had wanted him to become an attorney. But soon after completing his degree in Law, his passion for caves became too powerful for him to ignore and he was soon devoting as much time as possible to cave exploration and the development of caving techniques. The year was 1883 when Martel began his legendary career. After discovering his lawyer's high collared shirt and bowlers hat did not stand up well to the harsh underground environment, he substituted a specially made pair of coveralls which supported a myriad of pockets. These pockets contained a whistle, six large candles, magnesium wire, matches, flints and steel, a hammer, two knives, a plumb line, 10 yards of measuring tape, two thermometers, two

barometers, pencils, a compass, a notebook, a first aide kit, several cakes of chocolate, and a flask of rum. Most admirably, however, was the personal 14-ounce telephone that he strapped across his chest and used for communication with his team waiting above ground. From this long list of items, we can see many things that we still require for any horizontal or vertical trip and several items that are still required during modern survey.

While Martel's version of cave survey and rappelling differs from today's techniques, his original innovations birthed many our own current methods. For example, during survey to measure the height of the deepest pits, Martel would measure barometric pressure at the top of the pit and compare it to that of the bottom. For measuring the height of a specific chamber, he would take a small paper balloon attached to a small platform and a ball of silk twine. The sponge on the platform would be soaked in alcohol and lit, and as the balloon rose the twine would unwind. Measuring the twine gave him a fairly accurate measurement. When it came to rappelling, Martel was often up against what the English refer to as a "pot-hole." Descending into these deep pits - sometimes 400 to 500 feet deep! - Martel relied upon a rope ladder which could be lowered by his team and lengths added to it as needed. As with its wire counterpart of today, Martel realized that a rope ladder was not adequate for life support and also relied upon a rope belay from topside.

Though Martel continued to explore caves until around 1914, he began shifting more and more of his attention to "organizing and codifying the infant science of speleology." He had already formed the French Societe de Speleologie by 1895. Interestingly enough, their newsletter was titled "spelunca," of which Martel himself was editor. It is not hard to imagine that soon afterward those who subscribed to this newsletter and followed in the footsteps of Martel fashioned themselves "spelunkers." By 1928, his achievements earned him the position of the president of the

Geographical Society of Paris. This position required him to become more of a scientist, a position that he accepted with enthusiasm but was not as well qualified for as exploration. For example, Martel frequently lectured on the eccentric warnings that the earth was quickly drying up due to all the ground water that plummeted into the bowels of the earth. "Many centuries will not elapse," theorized Martel, "before men will die of thirst and the earth itself perish of dryness." To combat this particular danger, Martel encouraged the damming of rivers both above and below the ground as well as planting trees to curve the amount of water allowed to seep freely through the earth.

Other scientific theories of his, however, had more success and are still used to this day. Perhaps his greatest scientific contribution was for determining how subterranean water circulates. This research was prompted by a bout of ptomaine poisoning that he contracted from spring water in 1892. After recovering, he took fluorescein dye and put it into a nearby stream sink. When the stream turned green he descended the pit to find a decaying carcass of a dead calf which he referred to as veal bouillon. This research was again used while determining the cause of typhoid in a large Army garrison. After this success, the government not only demanded that future drinking water be tested by a geologist, a

chemist, and a microbiologist, but in 1902 a law was also passed which prohibited the dumping of trash and dead animals in chasms, potholes, and underground streams. By 1908, the typhoid epidemic in France had been cut by 50% and the French government awarded him its gold medal for epidemics.

Martel passed away in 1938 at 78 years of age and definitely the world's first "old fart" caver. While his actual scientific achievements are few, he is remembered for his persistence and dedication. From rigging to caving equipment and survey technique, Martel was among the first to treat the budding science of speleology as a serious study and not something drugged from the depths of classical mysticism and superstition. Though the term caver - someone who is just as dedicated to protecting the underground environment as exploring it - had not been developed, Martel is perhaps the world's first. Instead, the world at large fashioned him a "spelunker." And if taken in that context, it is a term we should all feel rather fondly toward.

So again, as I sat there smiling, contemplating the best way to tactfully address the insult which my father's friend had just made toward me, I decided in the end the best response was just to smile and say, "Yes I am and I'm proud to be one."

## Trip Report

by Jeff Leach

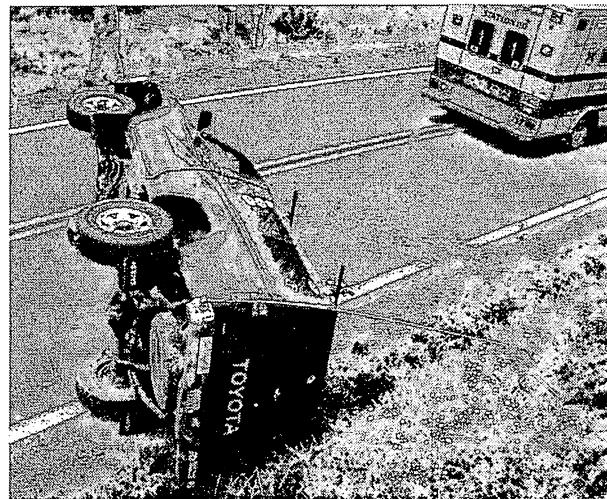
Coming back from OTR, Travis gets bored and wants to go caving since very little of it was done by VPI this year except for a few that were volunteered to rescue some ill-prepared rock climbers. Yet when this wave of emotion came over him in the back country of West Virginia, there were no caves in sight.

Seeing a rock mountainside that may or may not have a significant amount of limestone in it to form a karst system, we tried our luck. Since the road was more or less going parallel to the mountainside instead of veering towards it, we went off the right shoulder some and made a sharp fishtail towards this large rock formation.

Unfortunately, 60 m.p.h. wasn't enough to form a new cave entrance. This being the case, it was decided that perhaps there was an entrance further up the mountainside. Using our vertical experience gained from VPI, we start to flip up the mountainside a few times. Alas, our search is in vain and we find no entrance. We start to go back towards the road, though at this point we forgot to maintain three points of contact and slide down on the side of the truck quite fast. When the road is finally upon us, I get a close encounter of the natural asphalt formations that occur along this scenic stretch of West Virginia. Travis manages at the same time to finally break off the passenger side view mirror that had been hanging precariously the past few years.

Eventually, we stop and lose momentum from our slide and decide we should get back to Blacksburg. Unfortunately, trucks don't drive very well on their side, so we attempt to rectify this situation. Travis hangs from the ceiling and unhooks a less superior variation of the VPI tied seat harness that comes standard with most vehicles these days. Travis forgot again to maintain three points of contact when there was a danger of falling. Travis then hit his thigh on the stick and comes crashing down on me. We sit there for a few seconds... it's dark, and we have no functional light sources within reach. We are in luck; we begin to look upwards

towards God and see light. We climb out the driver's side window and emerge into the basking glow of the morning sun.



Another caver vehicle succumbs. Photo by Travis Coad.

Uh oh, we forgot to obtain landowner's permission before starting this expedition. One landowner was on the toilet at the time and was disturbed by having the shockwave shake her bathroom door. We apologize for scaring her and remark that it was fortunate that she was on the toilet and thus didn't sh\*t her pants. Looking around, traffic is backing up. We go back into the darkness of the truck to obtain FRS radios to direct traffic, GPS, cell phone, and a digital camera (yes, this is one of those dreaded photo trips). What a surprise, no phone service in this part of West Virginia.

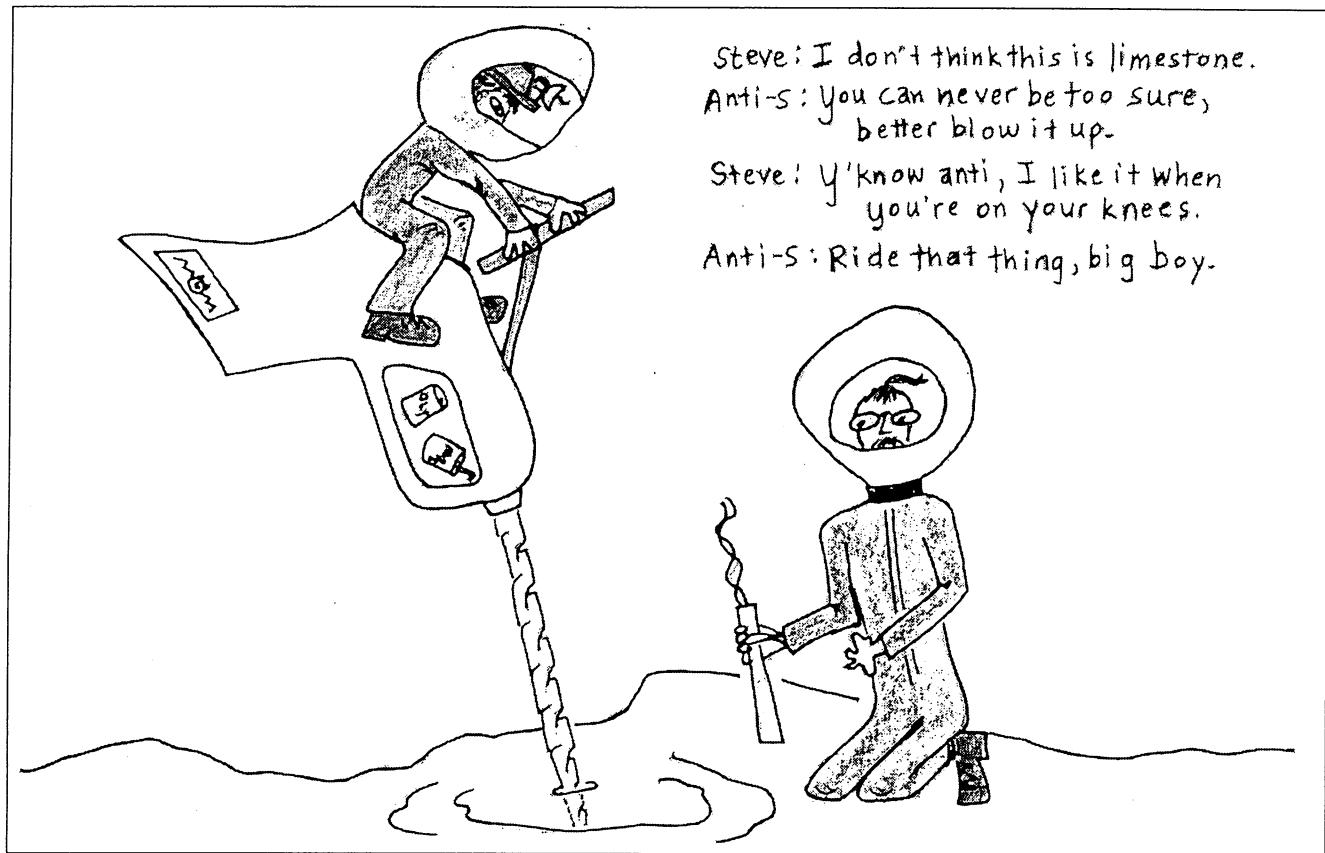
The landowner graciously called the Rescue Squad and the Fire Department, even though I insisted that the dark brown liquid leaking from the back of the truck was not gasoline. We then examine the truck and begin to think about setting up a 4-to-1 pulley system, though having lost most of the beer we realize a 3-to-1 pulley system is sufficient. Being lazy, though, we decide to send for a rescue instead and have a tow truck come and flip over the truck for us.

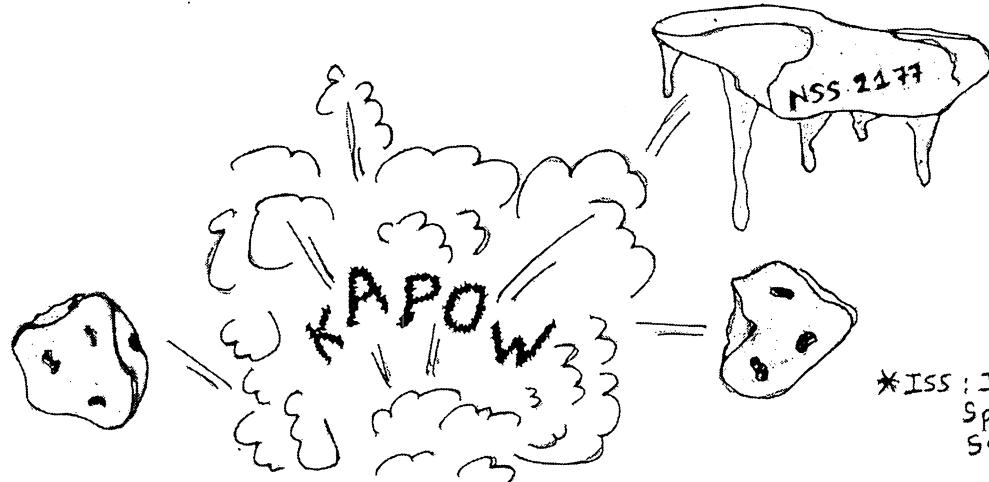
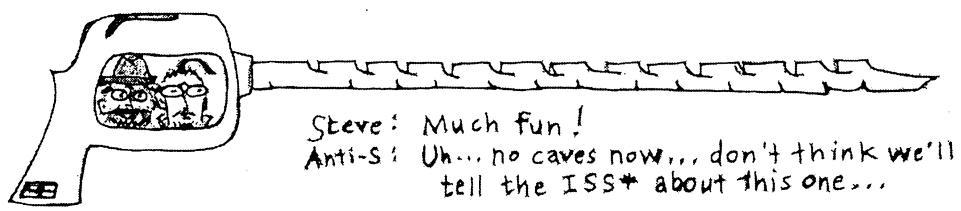
The truck now has three points of contact with the pavement. I insist this is enough for us to get back to Blacksburg, though Travis is



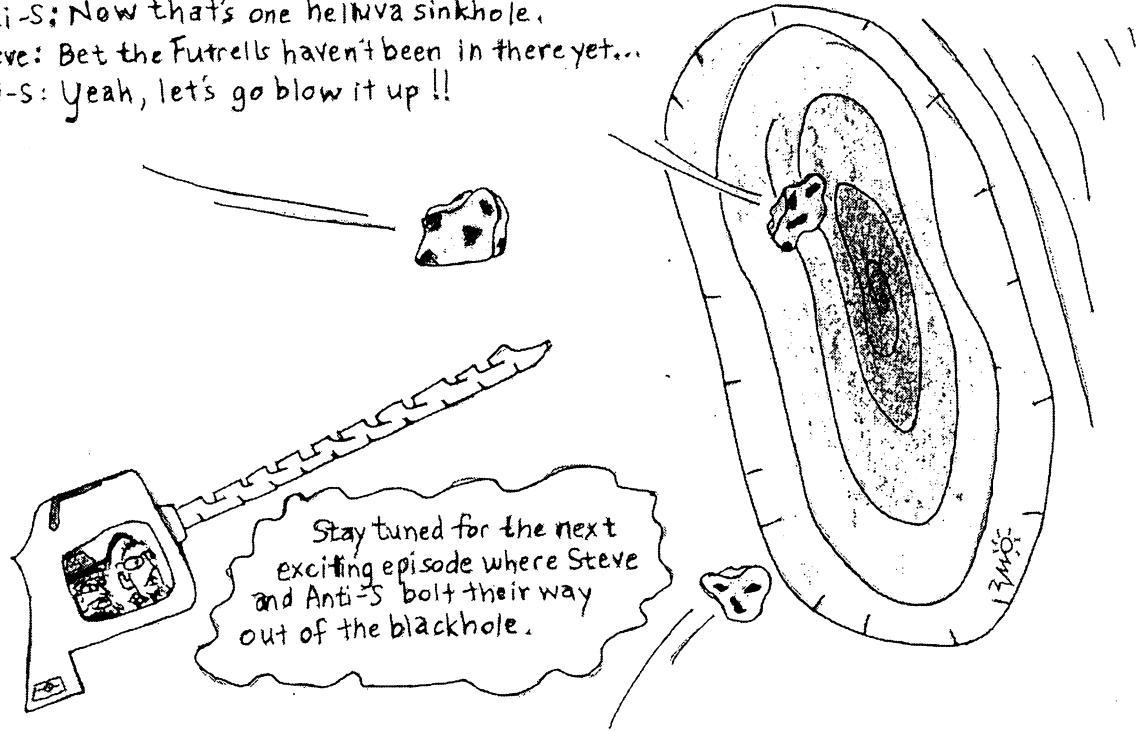
sometimes a safety freak and wants to change the tire so we have four points of contact.

Travis the boy scout – always prepared – has a to come-a-long in the back and uses it bend the frame back into shape so that the radiator fan can freely spin without trying to dig another hole in the frame from the inside out. Tying the hood down with our mandatory set of webbing that we always carry, we start the 2-hour drive back to Blacksburg having completed another successful trip.





Anti-S: Now that's one helluva sinkhole.  
Steve: Bet the Futrells haven't been in there yet...  
Anti-S: Yeah, let's go blow it up!!



## My Story of Serious Leisure at Ellison's Cave

by Kirk Digby

For most of the summer, and certainly throughout the month of September, Pam and I had been looking forward to attending the 24<sup>th</sup> annual Tennessee-Alabama-Georgia (TAG) Fall Cave-In. In short, it consists of an approximately 100-acre campground camp out attended by 1500 members of the National Speleological Society and their guests. One of the unique features of this event is the bonfire, and not just any bonfire either. A notched and stacked pyramid of timbers is built 40 feet or higher, and filled with chunks of timber. However, for me, the most compelling reason to attend TAG Fall Cave-In is to go vertical caving. Some of the deepest and most well known vertical caves are in the approximate area surrounding Chattanooga, TN, where Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia come together, known in caver speak as TAG. In fact, the deepest in-cave rappel in the continental U.S. is about an hour's drive from the campground. This is where we hoped to go.

Ellison's Cave: the very name evokes a myriad of feelings in me and in other cavers. Inside Pigeon Mountain, in northeastern Georgia, the cave presents a convoluted and contorted three dimensional maze, with many vertical shafts. I hoped to revisit the Balcony rig point in Fantastic Pit, 510 feet above the floor. I had done the rappel and ascent of this particular drop over Thanksgiving weekend in 1998, and I had mixed feelings as I recalled the experience. I suspect that a large part of why I enjoy a hobby that often brings me into a vertically exposed environment is my acrophobia. In the caves around Blacksburg, the deepest rappel is around 200 feet, and, for the most part, the pits are small enough in diameter that a good light will allow you to see not only most of the walls but also the floor. Over the 12 years that I have been going vertical caving almost every weekend, I have learned to trust in my knowledge, teammates, and my equipment. Even though I know that if the rope failed on a drop here in Giles County that I would croak, I almost never experience

the willies. On the rope halfway up Fantastic pit, all one can usually see is the occasional dim outline of a wall feature, your climbing partner on rope above or below you, and the rope itself fading up or down into blackness. It is this unique mixture of an acrophobic and claustrophobic experience that tends to make me start to quietly freak out.

Of course, none of this was really on my mind on the days leading up to Pam and my departure for the Sequoyah Caverns Campground near Cloudland, AL. Rather, my thoughts were on schoolwork, equipment maintenance, packing, and recruiting a sucker – er, I mean, friend – to ride in our rather cramped and over-packed four-wheeler to share driving duties and gas costs. Chris Hibschman, another longtime VPI Cave Club member and a longtime friend, decided that he could.

Thursday afternoon on 10/4/01 found me leaving Blacksburg after attending Careerscope. As we headed down the interstate, I felt a sense of relief, but also, a bit of trepidation; would I freak out on rope on one of the big drops, or would I be able to hold it together? Quashing my doubts, I focused on the mundane tasks involved in hurtling down the pavement at 125 m.p.h. We arrived at the campground a few hours after dark, and pitched camp in a hurry; I needed to get Chris down to Vendor's Row. Set up at many caving conventions (and others, for that matter), Vendor's Row is an experience all by itself. You can buy anything from miniature cyalume™ earrings, to 1500 feet of continuously un-spliced rope. I had to take Chris and convince him to pick up the \$10 worth of miscellaneous items that he would need to convert his rope-climbing system to a more speedy and efficient system. Little did I know that I shouldn't have bothered.

Also on Vendor's Row was a booth manned (and womanned) by members of the Southeastern Cave Conservancy. We needed to stop here to get the all important directions and

access policies to a handful of caves. Once I learned where we could go, I would figure out where we would go. Up to this point, I wasn't sure which deep drops, if any, we would visit. Andy Zellner, of the Dogwood City Grotto (Atlanta's NSS branch) was extremely helpful. He told us that if we planned to visit Ellison's Cave early Friday morning, it would be unlikely that any other groups would be there. Access is controlled by the Georgia D.N.R., if I recall correctly, and Andy informed us that we were authorized to visit the cave. He also gave us superb directions, both to Ellison's and to many other caves around the area. I vowed to return the favor when he came to visit B'burg, which has its own reputation in the American caving scene as a great place to visit.

Now the willies began to make themselves heard, although I was careful to keep them under wraps. I was going to be the trip leader; I was the only one of the three of us that knew how to get to the entrance from the parking area, and I was the only one who had been to the cave before. I was also, despite my acrophobia, the team member with the most deep drop experience by far. I had rappelled Sotano de las Golondrinas, (approximately 1200 feet) in Mexico, the New River Gorge Bridge (700ish feet), Surprise pit in Fern Cave (another TAG area pit at 400 feet), and many others, while Pam and Chris had only done a few 200-foot drops. They would be looking to me, and I hoped that I wouldn't start clucking like a chicken at an inopportune moment.

The rest of the evening passed uneventfully, as I drowned my fears with a couple of cheap brews (Icehouse, I think), walking around the campground and visiting old friends, some that I hadn't seen in years. Friday morning came swiftly, and at 7:30 a.m. local time (Central time zone), we were headed to the cave. We encountered another group of cavers at the parking lot, which I was rather happy to find in the first place, passing my first trip leader test with flying colors. At first I thought that we might have to find another cave to enjoy, since they had gotten there first, and one generally didn't want more than one rope down a large drop, as that can often cause all kinds of problems. But, as it turned out, they were

trying to find another cave in the Pigeon Mountain Preserve, where Ellison's is located. I gave them the directions that Andy had given us for the cave they were looking for, and they began to pack their toys, as we unloaded ours.

Packing for an expedition such as this can take a while; today was no exception. The rope that I had borrowed for our trip was about 750 feet long, and was stuffed loosely in a bursting Army duffel. If you have never handled PMI caving rope (Pigeon Mountain Industries, which, incidentally is named for all the vertical drops in Ellison's), it handles almost like steel cable. It is so stiff that you can stick the end about a yard of it straight out in front of you. Tough to coil, especially when there is so much of it. The duffel would be much too unwieldy, so we coiled the rope into two 375-foot coils, and proceeded to pack our stuff. The other group of cavers watched Chris and I rather incredulously as I helped him to assemble his climbing rig out of loose one and two meter lengths of webbing. I took a moment to make sure that Chris and Pam had all of the equipment and emergency supplies they would need for the trip, and nothing extra. Finally, after about an hour, we were ready to hike maybe two miles and 700 feet of vertical relief up to the entrance to the cave.

We arrived at a cave entrance about 40 minutes later, and Pam immediately plopped to the ground, rather exhausted. In a failed effort to slow Chris down, (5 years younger than me, and more than 15 years younger than Pam), we had asked if he would carry the 750-foot rope and his gear up the hill, while I carried a 300-foot, and Pam brought a 150-foot rope. I'm sure it would've made a humorous picture. I looked at the entrance, and it didn't exactly fit with what I remembered, so I walked another maybe 50 feet up the hill where I found the cave entrance that we wanted. Fortunately, I had been to the cave before. You can enter through the lower opening, but it makes for a much more unpleasant trip; one that I didn't know the directions for anyway.

1000 feet of walking passage got us to the 125-foot drop, known as the Warm-up Pit. Chris made quick work of rigging the rope in a rather complicated load-sharing anchor between two

of the many bolts and hangers fastened to the rock walls, using the 300-foot rope. Many of the deep pits frequented by large numbers of American and international cavers are virtually festooned with these anchors, and Ellison's is no exception. At some entrances, it's so bad that they are referred to as "bolt farms." I related this to Chris and Pam. Two or three anchors would've been sufficient; here I had stopped counting at ten. Like many who engage in "serious leisure," vertical cavers are keenly aware of actions that may be detrimental to the resource, and we are not strangers to concepts like LNT.

I rigged my rappel rack into the rope, and went over the edge. I could hear the clucking beginning inside my head, but was able to easily distract myself with a Billie Holiday tune. The scenery as I rappelled was nothing short of superlative, my senses heightened by my trepidation. I reached the bottom, dragging the pile of extra rope on the ground, my gear, and myself out of the most likely rock-fall zone at the bottom of the drop. Soon the others joined me, and we continued to the next drop, a 40ish footer. The permanently rigged rope

was badly damaged as it lay over a sharp rock. I removed the damaged section, melted the ends with my carbide lamp, and spliced the two short ropes with a double-fisherman's knot (an appropriate full-strength bend, or rope-joining knot). We continued down the passage, as I struggled to remember the route to the big drop. Another permanently rigged 30-foot drop was encountered, and we regrouped at the bottom. The two short "nuisance drops" were why I had brought the 150-foot rope, as I couldn't find out if they had stayed permanently rigged or not from the folks in camp last night.



The author bears an uncanny resemblance to this Cave Troll photographed in Wind Cave, South Dakota. Photo by Carl Bern.

The last real obstacle between us and the rig point lay maybe 150 meters down the passage from the bottom of the second short drop. As I led along a low crawling passage, I saw a spot of impenetrable black on my left, and a small waist-sized rectangular box on my right. I warned the others of the deep drop on the left, (DON'T drop anything here), and proceeded through the tight rock squeeze. It was definitely small enough that I had to slightly exhale to fit through, since I wear a size 44 jacket, but I knew that if I could do it, the smaller folks could too. Turning around after the pinch, I helped Pam and Chris relay two packs and two coils of rope through. Standing up, I could see that I was in the correct spot; I remembered the precipice on my left, and the four large stainless steel bolts and hangers on my right. The room was so big, even at this smaller, upper level, that one could barely see the other walls. The ceiling curved up out of sight, as did the precipice. From this ledge, the floor was 510 feet below. More motivated folks travel to the "Attic" rig point, to get a 586-foot rappel, but 510 feet seemed enough for us.

Eventually, I finished rigging a load-sharing anchor to the four bolts, and we lowered the rope. My stomach was definitely churning as I made my final preparations, installing a denim pant leg complete with a boot lace to pad the rope at the one spot it touched the rock. I told Pam that I loved her and that I would see her soon, and with my blood rushing through my ears, I rappelled off the edge. Due to the kinks in the rope caused by coiling and storage, I immediately began spinning slowly. This continued for the whole way down. My rack, which had been covered with slime at the top of the drop, from the wet, muddy ropes at the two preceding drops, was dry in short order

from the heat of friction, and it now was covered in a sort of light tan, powdery rime-dehydrated mud. As I rappelled slowly, I continually tried to shine my rather powerful halogen torch down attempting to discern where the floor might be. Nothing could be seen for the first six or seven minutes. Finally, I could see my light reflecting off of a smallish puddle, next to the bottom of the rope. As I got closer to the bottom, I realized that this "puddle" was really about 75 meters wide.

After I took shelter from the rocks under a near ledge, I blew my whistle once to signal that all was clear for the next person. I had briefed the crew about rope communications on long drops earlier that morning. Voice contact is basically useless; the echo is so strong that a sneeze sounds sort of like a very loud machine gun. It had taken me 10-15 minutes to rappel the drop. A while later I saw a very faint glow overhead, but only because I had extinguished my own lantern. Five minutes later, I was joined by Chris. Pam had opted to wait and experience a bit shorter rappel before tackling one so big. Years ago, she had injured her hand, and although it wasn't a problem usually, she felt that it might not be strong enough to allow her to maintain good speed control on her rappel, due to the 40-50 pounds of rope weight.

Chris and I walked around the huge bottom of the pit, and he asked me, "How much cave is down here?" I replied "About three days worth." We spotted a live frog about six centimeters in length, and a number of ten centimeter salamanders with external gills in the 75-foot "puddle," as we walked over to sign the cave register. Each of us wrote a comment and signed in. Now it was time for the long climb out. The rope and bolts are easily strong enough for two, so we climbed out tandem, a few feet apart, in order to save time. Having someone weighting the rope below you can make getting off rope at the top extremely difficult, especially for the inexperienced, so I opted to be on top. As we climbed I began to realize that I could've probably allowed Chris to use his original climbing rig, as long as the bounce didn't make me puke. His original rig was much more wasteful of energy, and bouncy, but as he kept spurning me on to climb

faster with shorter rests, I wondered about my choice. It's hard to relate in words just how exhausting, daunting, and downright uncomfortable it was for me to climb that drop. Near the top, I was so whipped I must've stopped for a rest about every 50 feet. Eventually, I made it to the bolts, where Pam was waiting for us. I got off rope, and went over to lie on the ground, panting.

After Chris and I regained our breath (he was much faster, of course), we derigged, and began to head out of the cave. At this point, each one of us was pretty much exhausted. I chose Pam and Chris carefully for this particular trip because I have been in a cave, or in the bush with both of them before, and I know that they have that will to continue when it seems that all your energy is spent. At such a moment, one cannot allow oneself the luxury of feeling tired, or of rest. You have to slog it out and continue out of the cave or up the hill, until you are done. No prodding was needed. These two just kept on. I could tell that they were suffering as much as I was, by how quiet they were, and by the looks on their faces.

Chris and I climbed the Warm-up Pit, and before I had begun climbing, I had tied the 750-foot rope on the end of the rope, so that he and I could haul it up the drop. Damn it was heavy. Even with the haul system that I had rigged to the bolts, it was a lot of hard work hauling that behemoth up. We toiled happily, however, knowing that we were an easy walk to the entrance. As a nice gesture, we hauled up Pam's equipment as well, so that she could climb the 125 feet unfettered. She arrived spent, and once she was safely away from the edge, Chris and I derigged and coiled the last rope. As we stumbled out of the cave and down the mountain, I could barely contain my elation. We had accomplished quite an achievement, and the fish stories in camp would be merry and boisterous tonight. At the car 30 minutes later, the two beers I had before Chris and Pam emerged from the woods were like ambrosia, even if they did cost only \$6.99 a case. As I remember that cave trip, it's hard for me to believe that something so fantastically unpleasant, and seemingly foolish to so many others, could be remembered by me so fondly.

## Club Quotables

submitted by your "friends"

SL to group: "There's a biner in my crotch."

RS to SL: "I wish I were that biner!"

ES to SP: "My nuts are in three sizes."

SL to JT: "If I could get all that beef in my mouth like that, it might be different."

AW to ZO: "You only have to scratch it once, and then they won't let you touch it again."

PB to SK: "Well that sure makes me wanna go home and play with my drill."

MB to SW: "Everybody's gotta have a ball to ding."

SK to KD: "You can put it in my mouth. That's the only way it's gonna happen."

SL to group: "Everyone stop. I'm unhappy."

SK to CR: "There's one piece of pizza left and it's crying, 'Come eat me!'"

ES: "It's the only time in his life that he will hear that."

MB to AY: "Hell, I'm not gonna do it to her. You do it."

WO to group: "What?! You're not going to wear the blindfold for the straddle pit?"

SK to SR: "If I bring over my own Eco-Lube, can I play with your gizmo?"

# The National Speleological Society

Awards this

## Certificate of Merit

to

VPI Grotto

for field support to document karst resources in southwest  
Virginia at the request of area landowners.

Given under my hand and seal this 27th day of July 2001

William F. Tozer

Chairman, Awards Committee

Michael R. Head

President

## What's Your Super Power?

by Nikky LaBranche

Everyone in the Cave Club has a super power, and at dinner one night, the group decided to try and take this from oral tradition and write them down. Most members had their super power bestowed upon them; they did not choose it. And the intention was not to give anyone special privileges, but rather to offend everyone equally. For those of you that are new to the Cave Club, or just haven't figured out some of the people yet, this might (or might not) be a good way to learn about them. I know that I learned a lot and heard some interesting stories in compiling this list from some of the members.

**Phillip Ballister:** has the ability to expand to occupy the space available, much the same way a noxious gas does. He also has the power of time travel, which is why we haven't had a meeting start on time since he took office.

**Sandy Knapp:** has the power to forget any negative information.

**Kevin Rock:** has the power of being 'Clueless Man.'

**Scott Rapier:** has the power of having a Land Cruiser that actually runs.

**Andy Yeagle:** has the super power of... what? What? I don't know, I couldn't hear him.

**Wil "the bastard" Orndorff:** has the power to know exactly the wrong thing to say in every situation.

**Dr. Zenah Orndorff:** has the power of being married to Wil the bastard, and that's all the superpower she needs.

**Dave Colatosti:** has the power of time travel; no matter when he leaves he will always arrive an hour late.

**John Deighan:** has the power of being the bull in the china closet. He also has the ability to do the most caving in the least amount of clothing.

**Kirk Digby:** has the ability to acquire lots of cave gear as well as the power to absorb any insult. Kirk also possesses the ability to try to

sleep with anything. Also, vegetables are kryptonite to him.

**Mike<sup>3</sup> Horne:** has the power of being ignored when right, and the more right he is, the more he is ignored.

**Mark Eisenbies:** has the power to hell-out anybody and the ability to doubt Mike<sup>3</sup>'s powers.

**Ray Sira:** has the power of being well hung, and women still don't want him.

**Craig Ferguson:** has the power of disco and the power to summon Elvis.

**Steve Wells:** has the power of invincibility and the ability to have no discrimination in who he will sleep with. His kryptonite is a motorcycle (which is why he needs the invincibility in the first place).

**Steve LePera:** has the power of pure cynicism.

**Chip Mullins:** has a more nonspecific super power, it's whatever power Sam lets him have.

**Travis Coad:** has the ability to throw great parties that no one shows up to.

**Nikky LaBranche:** has the power of putting up with Brad.

**Carrie Blankenship:** has the ability to never get served correctly in a restaurant and the power of not being a *total* blond.

**Chris "Guido" Garguilo:** has the power to never be first, always second, and the inability to focus or make a point.

**Brad Atkinson:** has the power of being gear king (and some of it is still spotless). He also has the power of testosterone poisoning and the power of the most excuses.

**Reggie Ried:** has the power to take anything rectally, especially when jumping out of trees.

**Trudy Teeter:** has the power to fit through a coat hanger.

**Nick Zeigre:** has the ability to sleep with anyone he wants to.

**Captain Ed Fortney:** has the power of invincibility.

**Bryce Bolton:** has the power to melt minds, including his own.

**Mike Newsome:** has the power of an inhuman tolerance to substance as well as some sort of funky 70's charismatic power. Mike also has the ability to speak in the tongues of all children and to make a game out of everything.

**Joe Thompson:** has the power to fly, however each use of this power costs one vehicle. He also has the power of testosterone poisoning.

**Naomi Orndorff:** has the power of having anything dropped on her and she will still laugh.

**Sue Setzler:** has the power of being almost as strong as Berta.

**Mike Malsbury:** has the power of being a helicopter.

**Matt Burnett:** has the power of being the most mild mannered.

**Penelope Pooler:** has the power of cluelessness and the power to engage mouth before thinking.

**Ed Richardson:** has the power of fire. More WOOD!

**Jim Washington:** has the power of GCCS as well as the power of trivia.

**Cecile James:** has the power of chaos.

**Jake Brown:** has the power of a truly foul mouth and like Kirk, he is also afraid of veggies.

**Mandie Aldrich:** has the power of drama.

And last but not least, **Dave "Chummer" Warren:** has the ability to attract fish.

The are many fun and interesting stories behind the super powers of a lot of Cave Club members. Even the creation of this list has a story. It was written on the back of a napkin, while waiting for dinner at a restaurant with really slow service. This restaurant wouldn't serve us Guinness in a pitcher, and also wouldn't let us have our burgers any way but well done. And of course they couldn't serve Carrie right. The restaurant's super power is definitely not making the Cave Club members happy.

## 90 Useful Caver Tips

by Kirk Digby

In no particular order:

1. Bats aren't bugs.
2. Convention is really cool.
3. If you can, stay out of the water.
4. Cave mud is an aphrodisiac.
5. Female cavers can be rare; cherish them.
6. Sunlight causes cancer.
7. Carbide lamps make a good heat source.
8. Awakening hibernating bats can kill them.
9. Avoid purchasing used vertical gear and helmets.
10. Know when you've had enough, and tell the trip leader.
11. Don't jump in caves.
12. Remember, your actions affect everyone on the trip.
13. If anyone wants to leave, it's time to turn around.
14. After negotiating an obstacle, help the person behind you.
15. Make your next car purchase a four-wheeler.
16. Know your limits.
17. Learn to tie some knots; at least a bowline or figure-eight.
18. Don't camp near a port-a-john.
19. Leave keys, wallet, and jewelry above ground.
20. Carry a first aid kit with pen and paper in a waterproof/smashproof container.
21. Turn around and look at the passage behind you on the way in. This will help on the way out.
22. Before choosing a cave food, consider not only flavor, but also structural integrity.
23. Keep the group together.
24. Don't shine your light in someone's eyes.
25. Dress in layers. Wool and synthetics are best. Avoid cotton.
26. Don't assume.
27. Keep It Simple, Stupid. Not to be confused with Keep it Stupid, Simple.
28. It *will* rain at all caving events.
29. Duct tape.
30. Find out about histoplasmosis and blastoplasmosis.
31. Learn how caves are mapped.
32. Learn about the cave protection act in your state.
33. Jack Daniels is made with cave water.
34. If someone yells rock, DON'T LOOK UP.
35. Do not climb above someone else, and conversely don't hang around below someone climbing above.
36. Eat and futz with your gear while waiting for others.
37. Stay out of caves known to flood if there's rain in the forecast.
38. Use three points of contact when climbing.
39. It's *better* in a cave.
40. Take three helmet mountable sources of light.
41. Wear a UIAA approved helmet.
42. Dress up for court.
43. Wear a seatbelt.
44. Save partying for *after* the trip.
45. NEVER CAVE ALONE.
46. Tell someone where you're going, when you'll be back, and what to do if you aren't.
47. Learn and live by the NSS motto.

- 48. Avoid caves with names like "Grim Rock."
- 49. If it looks sketchy, it probably is.
- 50. If she looks sketchy, she probably is, too.
- 51. Don't eat chili before a crawly trip.
- 52. Practice vertical above ground with a qualified instructor.
- 53. Watch the trip leader pack if you aren't sure what to take.
- 54. Know and follow access policies for the caves you visit.
- 55. Bring a change of clothes.
- 56. Beer is good.
- 57. Find out the local rescue callout numbers for the areas you cave in.
- 58. Know how to give a belay and carry approximately 35 feet of webbing always.
- 59. Watch for hypothermia.
- 60. Be nice, caving is supposed to be FUN.
- 61. Leave your troubles above ground.
- 62. Anyone who asks for a belay gets one.
- 63. Ask for a belay *before* you fall.
- 64. If you don't feel well, stay home.
- 65. Keep the caver behind you in sight, or at least within earshot.
- 66. See trash? Pack it out
- 67. Keep batteries and vertical gear separate.
- 68. Borrowed gear? Make sure to return it.
- 69. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO PUT WOOD ON THE O.T.R. FIRE.
- 70. When changing at a cave, be discreet.
- 71. If you make a promise to a landowner, make sure to keep it.
- 72. Survey as you explore.
- 73. If you encounter spelunkers, help them find the NSS.
- 74. Cave with a waterproof watch.
- 75. Wear boots.
- 76. Knee pads are good.
- 77. Seek out First Aid training. Consider an EMT course.
- 78. Become an NSS member.
- 79. Join a Grotto. The fellowship of caving is easily half the fun.
- 80. Be wary of surface people; they don't understand us.
- 81. Share your knowledge. Many beginners can benefit.
- 82. Take pictures.
- 83. Avoid photo trips if you aren't the one taking pictures.
- 84. Survey trips can be cold.
- 85. Don't do or say anything in front of a landowner that you wouldn't in front of your parents.
- 86. Avoid speleopoliticians and their politics.
- 87. Support your local caving vendor and cave conservancy.
- 88. Support your local brewery.
- 89. Polypro is good.
- 90. If you find food in your pack from the last trip, give it to someone you don't like.

## El Tripo de los Tres Barrachos

by Eric Stanley, Chris Rourke, and Brian Ekey

[Editor's Note: the three amigos who submitted this Mexico trip log felt that its poor spelling and grammar adds to the "flavor" of the log, and so it goes unedited. In other words, *it's not my fault!*]

**OFFICIAL STARTING MILEAGE: 82646**

Car Status: Happy

**12/26/01 21:38 I-40 WEST, SOMEWHERE IN TENNESSEE.**

Fucking gear. Fucking avalanches. We've just made our first gas stop. Now kirk wants me to make a spreadsheet for the mileage. Anyway, its all going fairly well so far. We may be the women of this trip (We ran late.. really late), but our car has 10x the electronic toys of any other car and twice the fun. Though it was better before ekey just burped up those onions. But I'll persavere.

-C

**12/27/01 04:28 (CDT), I-59 S, ABOUT 60 MILES NORTH OF NEW ORLEANS**

tired. punchy. So very tired. Eric says his pussy hurts, because the stupid time zone is making the night longer. Also his back hurts. My back hurts too. These seats were designed by a sadistic, deformed dwarf.. Ekey, he sleeps peacefully in the back on the bed he made out of our gear. He sleeps with his head on my soft.. soft pillow... Take pillow. Smother EKey. Then I sLeep ood. Erics says his current state of mind is better than being on drugs. He has been eating mints to stay awake. Running low on caffeine. Bladder under some tension. Road keeps going, mostly straight, but you still should stay awake if you are driver. Road straight, convoy weaves slightly. Stupid time zones. I want the sun to come back. Mississippi is full of sewage ponds. And baptists. Must think of more to write to stsay awake. ekey still sleeps peacefully, dreaming his little dreams. Die. Die. My speech is poor now. Kirk is having trouble staying in his lane. Oh hoh ya, time for a beer! Send money to mississippi so they can buy rumble strips. And tow trucks. I don't know what is wrong with mississippi and alabama, but the roads are littered with

abandoned cars. Maybe they have no tow trucks. Maybe they leave them as a warning to other motorists who would consider stopping. Concentrating now. On the bright side, we're about twenty miles from the interchange with I-10. I have decided this is roughly the halfway point. Soon we'll get some breakfast, and make sleeping bastard drive. Eric says his brain spark plugs are dirty. It took him awhile to get my lesbian vampire joke. Ironic that erics sleepy driving is keeping me scared awake.

-C

**12/27/01 0458 I-10 W, MILE 80**

Glory be, we have found the lumbar support controls on the front seats. Now we can sleep comfortably.

-C

**12/27/01 08:44 I-10 W, MILE 64**

Last mile entry, (mile 80) clearly not correct. I have now slept, but only about 1.5 hrs. Silly ass sun that I once longed to see, now keeping me awake. Ekey back at the wheel now, Chris sleeping in the back, having no problem with the sun. Terrain so very flat, nothing to look at, except Ekey, and that makes me remember my breakfast, greasy and full of gas. I stink. Don't know why, belive it to be my nasty boots. Roads seem to go strait for-ev-er. Just saw pumping oil well, very neat. Landscape as empty as my mind. End Transmission.

-EKS

**12/27/01 10:13 I-10 W MILE 857**

This state looks just like the last one. I think this one is called "Texas".

-EKS

**12/27/01 10:37 I-10 W MILE 827**

Ekey still at wheel, wanted to bitch about Texas. This is what he said. How about some flat? You like flat? Nice and level. How about some mountians and hills? Minus the mountians and hills!

-Ekey, recorded by EKS

OYTFAB = Ohoh Yah, Time for a Beer!

-EKS

**12/27/01 11:37 I-10 W AT HOUSTON**

Wow, what a fantastic map. Chris not bothered by sun. Chris sleep good three hours, waking up somewhere in the middle to go pee. Sadly, Chris still appears to be in Texas. On plus side, daytime texas much warmer than night time alabama. Ooh, neat, houston skyline on the horizon. I'd like to think that if I was in one of those high buildings I could see something that wasn't in texas, but I know it's not true.

-C

**12/28/01 12:38 LEAVING MATAMOROS, BOWEL STATUS: ACTIVE, BUT NOT UPSET**

Well, we made the border cross with little trouble. Deighan's car get held up for a bit because he hadn't turned in his papers from the last trip certifying that he had left the country. So, we had to stay a night in matamoros so we could go to the policia in the morning to get a letter to certify that he still did in fact have his car and didn't sell it on the last trip. After dinner, dos cervesa, and some searching; we found a reasonable hotel. Well, reasonably priced. The hotel would have been pretty good too if it hadn't been for the smell. What started in the hall way as a vague odor of mildew or rot evolved into a strong stench in the room. We guess that either a) there was mildew from a water leak, b) someone had pissed all over the carpet, c) a rat had died in the ceiling or walls, or d) a rat had died in the walls, water had leaked on it, and then someone had pissed on it. In any case, it gave us perspective and we realized that our odor really wasn't that bad. After a good night of sleep and showers all around, we repacked our car. Deighan (who stayed with kirk and pam at a more upscale hotel) showed up, his paperwork complete. We've just grabbed some breakfast (hamburgesa y dos cervesa) and we're heading off to Ciudad Victoria.

-C

**12/28/01 12:47 JUST OUT OF MATAMOROS, BOWEL STATUS, NOT ACTIVE**

Phase one of the mission to Mexico complete. Under the cover of drakness the border was

breached. Papers were aquired without the help of dead presidents. However the secret past of Deighan came to light when he was not granted permission to re-enter. At this time group spirits were low. To fix the problem, cheap Mexican beer was added. Problem solved. Shelter was taken in what may have once been a septic tank. This however was not an issue. (See problem solved) The septic tank did however afford a shower which made the room smell better. Sleep came easy, and with the light of the morning came cheap mexican food and beer. Can there be a better place than this?

-EKS

**12/28/01 14:47, 1/2 TO VICTORIA, BOWEL STATUS, ALL QUIET**

Dos Cervesa y yo quiero bano!

-C

**12/29/01 10:55**

Ekey says "Please be gentle [with my car]." Chris says, "Ya, ya, just spread your legs and shutup."

**12/29/01 12:19, M-85, 36KM NORTH OF MANTE, BOWEL STATUS, EVACUATEDx2, CURRENTLY PEACEFUL**

Yesterday we made our way frrom Matamoros to Victoria. Ekey got his first introduction to mexican driving and he approves. Most of the day was spent driving across the plains on a 2 and 2/2 lane road. Two travel lanes, + generously sized shoulders that allow slower traffic to pull off to the side and let you pass. Assuming the oncoming traffic also cooperates and pulls over you can pass with ease. When the oncoming traffic doesn't cooperate, you pass with a fair amount of unease. But no mishaps so far. We came into Victoria in the afternoon and got our rooms at the hotel Sierra Gordo, the traditional stopping point of wandering cavers. Our room was 260 pesos, which comes out to a grand total of about \$9/person. After checking in we wandered through the commercial district in search of bombas, but we had no luck. We still had an hour until dinner so we found an open air bar to get a cervesa. Technically, the open bar wasn't open, but the restaunt it's attached to dispatched a waiter outside to bring beer to the gringos. For dinner, Deighan led us on a jog to a restaunt which turned out to be closed. Instead, we went

to the Cafe Canton, a chinese/mexican restraunt. We were crestfallen when we learned they didn't serve beer. Said Ekey "Yo necessito cervesa". Understanding that we were prepared to go elsewhere, the proprieter agreed to get us beer. He sent someone out to the store for three sixes of Modelo Especial and we stayed. The food was good and the beer was cold. Afterward, the group went shopping for booze while I went back to the hotel to tend to my bowels. Soon everyone return with beer, limon, vampiro (a hideous premixed tequila drink), and two bottles of the dreaded aguardente. Serious drinking commenced. The aguardente is nearly unpalatable. The dumbest thing us three amigos did was to finish a bottle of vampiro in a couple of minutes. Ekey said we'd just pass it around and who ever held it and didn't drink was a pussy. Well, none of us were pussies, but we felt less than good about that fact by the time we were done proving it. Other adventures from the night included opening the doors to the elevator to stare down the shaft, throwing the bouncy ball into the ceiling fan to watch it ricochet, throwing bottle caps into the ceiling fan, throwing a cravat into the ceiling fan, and throwing beer cans into the fan. Oh, and I proved that even in mexico, I can still spill beer on Ekey's bed. Finally we kicked everyone out of the room and went to bed. Morning came all too soon. We missed breakfast but I guess I could feel worse. We did manage to get up to the roof of the hotel this morning. The view was great. The roof also houses neat stuff like the elevator equipment. Speaking of the elevator, it was great. It had a real live elevator operator. You squeeze in, he closes the gate and with a very sudden jolt, the

elevator heads up. Maybe it goes all the way up smoothly, maybe it jolts once or twice again. It definitely jolts in the end when it stops at your floor. I think the elevator operator derives a lot of pleasure from scaring gringos in this manner. But you get to your floor safe and sound, or at least close to your floor.. the elevator always seems to stop about a foot low. But in any case, the machinery for the elevator is up there on the roof, along with the weird drum washine machines for the linens. Oh, and a maid, who didn't seem to care a bit that we were on the roof. We grabbed some pictures and descended back down. After packing up we headed out of victoria. And that's all I can write for now because this laptop is damn warm on my lap.

-C

**12/29/01 12:51 UNSURE OF LOCATION (N223630  
W990120), BOWEL STATUS CURRENTLY PEACEFUL**

Things that I have observed

- 1) Mexicans love to burn things, there are fires all over the horizon.
- 2) Ekey is a "Car Sally" he fears what I do to his car.
- 3) Were at the cave, time to stop!

-EKS

**12/29/01 19:52 IN FRONT OF  
EL ABARA BOWEL STATUS, NOT  
HAPPY**

Bees!! Run! Run! Run! We came we saw, we found bees! Its a sad thing to admit defeat on the first cave, but rather than take it up the ass

from small insects with a bad attitude, we decided to just do a very small drop. But lets back up for a sec. We arrived at the cave, which to my chargin, was up on the side of a cliff. After the initial ass rape of getting to the top, we rigged the small pit which thanks to Kirk took more than 2 hrs. Next we tried to bushwack,



Weird structure at Las Pozas. Photo by someone on the trip.

which was an assault on the body, damn mexican plants were out for blood. We decided the path we had found was unpassable, we did what we always do when it looks to dangerous for us to go up, we sent deighan! After a long time, he decided he found a path the was suited for all up wimps. There was however a problem, really pissed insects. Ekey, Chris, Kirk and many other suffered their wrath. I however told the bees to fuck off, so they left me alone. We then played on the small drop that was rigged, the day was salvaged by the fact I got to "batman" up the drop. Chris and i then exited the mountain, at the bottom we decided we need to do something about the fact we didn't carry the rope down the hill like we were told to. So we did the next best thing. We went to a small mexican bar and got beer. Which was an adventure in and of itself. Now I sit here with a buzz, and laugh at the fact that i am in mexico with 2 of my best friends, drinking beer and being silly! I love Mexico!!

-EKS

**12/29/01 19:16 IN FRONT OF EL ABRA; BOWEL STATUS: CALM BEFORE THE STORM**

Fucking Bees. Fucking Sketchy down climb. I was in the original group that trecked through the killer bee's hive. I was the first to discover the killer bees. They stung me in my eye. Then myself, Pam, Deighan, and Kevin found ourselves stranded above the hive. We had to find another way down while avoiding the bees. After taking all the stingers out of our various wounds, we looked around for another 'Deighan certified sketchy' way down. We found it, but it involved some doubled up webbing - short sleeve arm rappelling - tree and rock avalanching crap, twice. Fucking Bees. I hate bees. If another bee comes at me again, I'm devoting my life to killing bees. On the brighter side, this is my first entry in the log. What a great place Mexico is. I've thrown caution to the wind and eaten fresh vegetables and drank the sketchy water at the hotel. Oh well. If I get sick, at least I'm taking these two others with me. We have a can opener that talks. What a great idea. "Oh ho yeah; Time for a beer!"

-Ekey

**12/31/01???:?? WICHWYANNE; BOWEL STATUS: SEVERE THUNDERSTORM, FOREHCAST: CRISIS IMMINENT, RUN FOR YOUR LIFE**

This morning was no bueno. I woke to a full out hurricane in my lower intestine. I tried to vent it into the local bano, but the storm got worse, and ended up taking the entire bano with it. I was lucky to escape with my life, and the bano was closed for the rest of the day. On the bright side of things, I had a liquid breakfast which seemed to calm things down a little. As we were leaving a local taxi came into the campsite, and the driver got out with a large man and a rifle. Both were drinking cervesa. What a great country.

-Ekey

**12/31/01 16:27 HEADING TO XILITA, BOWEL STATUS: BEEN A HARD DAY**

Sadly it looks like we lost some of the entries in the log to a computer, so I will start at yesterday. We spent the night at Wichwain, drinking and dealing with a strange drunk mexican. We drove to the Hotel Taninul, and on the way stopped to look for some good mexican fire crackers. It would seem we did well. We got some really cool looking bottle rockets, they look like kind you see in cartoons, big, short fuses, and really dangerous! From there we went to the hotel, but they would not let us check in till 2, so we had some time to kill, we did this by going in the cave by the hotel which had a bar in it. The cave, not the hotel. When they lets us get the rooms, it was to late to do the cave we had hoped to, Rio Choy, but we decided to hike to it anyway to swim and watch the bat flight after dark. The hike was long but well worth it, clear blue water, a rapid in the cave, and a rock to jump off made the day a blast. We saw some bats fly and called it a day. We spent the night drinking by the pool, with the exception of the adventure into the back of the hotel cave. The smell of sulfur was strong, but the worst part was the walls, alive with insects, thousands of roaches call the cave home. Was we ventured to the back, chris found the fact that roaches we crawling all over my bare feet the funniest thing ever. We awoke all to early, and were off for the day at Rio Choy. We got the pit rigged and on my first rappel the rope touched the water, we

deemed this to be lame and pulled some 25 feet of it up. The next trip down the rope was far better. With the rope weighted it looked to be 22 ft off the water. A very nice day of play. Now we drive to Xilita, to meet up with more VPI folks, get wasted and ring in the new year. We stopped at a gas station to make some phone calls, and Deighan's starter gave out, so I quickly fixed it with a swift knock from a wrench. Also, as a footnote, chris is going to build me a bano.

-EKS

**01/01/02 11:41, TRYING TO LEAVE XILITA, TAKING WRONG TURNS. BOWEL STATUS, RELIABLY UNRELIABLE, EKEY STATUS: SEMI-GIMPY**

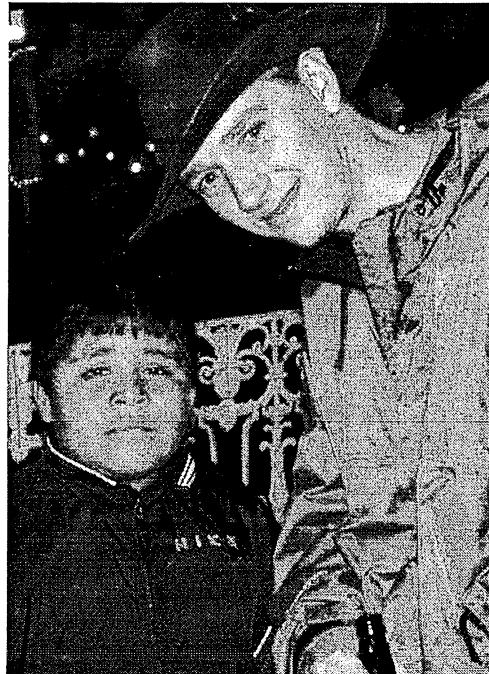
A Happy New Year. We celebrated ours in the square of xilitla, aka, gringo central. We had met up with the other group of vpi cavers, a contingent of cavers from missouri, and some boaters. The weather was drizzling, so we took shelter on the second floor of the gazebo in the center of the square. Actually, first we went down the street to set off big fireworks discretely in front of the missouri cavers' hotel. They were rather lame. The missouri cavers, that is, the fireworks were excellent. Giant bottle rockets, big triangle bombs and little firecrackers. Eventually Jeff made a bonehead move and dropped a bottle rocket before it launched. It went wild, for a moment I thought it had gone right into the lobby of the hotel, but luckily it detonated somewhere on the front stoop. This apparently did not ingratiate us to the management who began threatening to call the police. We initially responded by lighting off more fireworks. I won VPI new enemies by

attempting to toss fireworks on the hotel's balcony which was packed with missouri cavers. Eventually we reconsidered our situation and decided that this was a time for discretion, and we attempted a stealthy retreat to the square. Our stealthiness was somewhat inhibited by an uninhibited Fifi who tossed many firecrackers as we went. The gazebo ended up being dominated by gringos, cervezas, y bombas. There was this mexican boy there who spoke no english, but we were able to communicate in the international language, fireworks. We'd give him some firecrackers, and he'd light them and toss them at people we didn't know. Eventually things degenerated to a fireworks fight between myself and Enrique. I stayed up in the gazebo (bunker) tossing my tiny firecrackers at him, trying to time them to go off right in his face. From down below, he tried to do the same thing to me. They must not have been very powerful, one went off in my hand, I think. At the very least, no eyes were lost; it remained all fun and games. Oh, and our powers of drawing barrachos did not fail us. We drew a particularly gimpy one who annoyed us all night. I think the only english he knew was "fuck you". He was pretty filthy too, even by our standards, and he insisted on shaking hands or slapping your back annoyingly often. It was amusing watching him chase Susie around though. We did meet one local whose english vocabulary went beyond "fuck you". He had lived for a few years in North Carolina. He told a compelling tale of love, devotion, assault, prison, and a 14 year old girl he said he wants to marry. Anyway, somewhere in all of this, 2002 arrived, so we cheered, drank, and blew shit up.

-C

**01/01/02 12:32, ON OUR WAY TO SOPIA, BOWEL STATUS: GREAT, COMPARED TO MY BLADDER STATUS**

Just some stuff I forgot to add. We all must have drank enough last night, because for the first time in mexico, we didn't have any beer for



Eric befriends a local. Photo by someone on the trip.

breakfast. An hour or two after the new year, things started to wind down and we went back to our hotel. I think the only reason mexicans put roofs on their hotels is to give drunken cavers someplace to go.

-C

**01/02/02 SOPIA, BOWEL STATUS: KEEP DRINKING, DON'T STOP TO THINK**

Yeah, so I didn't write this on the second but I wanted to talk about the pit anyway. The hike into 'drinas last night was tough, and to top it off we had no beer and no dinner. That was rotten. Today is better. We had beer and breakfast. Well, we had breakfast that wasn't beer, and still got to drink beer. The pit (Sopia) was great too. Weather topside sucked but the cave was warm and much better. Climb out was great too. I'm ready for 'drinas.

-Ekey

**01/04/02 11:36, IN XILITA AGAIN, BOWEL STATUS, FINE NOW THANKS TO DRUGS, THIS MORNING WAS A "BLAST"**

Been many days since this was updated, so lets start back on the 1st. This was the day we were going to sopia, but true to the style of this trip, we got a late start. Our late start cost us the cave that day. But we did have some fun looking for the camp site by golandrinias. As we started up the high class mexican highway to the cave and camp sight, our car picked up a strange parasite. Back in the states we would call them kids, but the mexican kids seem to have no fear about jumping onto a moving car and riding it up a road that we in states would call a 4 wheeling trip. These kids road all the way up the hill with us, about a 45 min ride, they seemed to lead us to the home of the guy who ran the camp site. After some time, we came to conclusion that we had to pay to camp and had pay to drop the pit. This we did and to the camp site we went, 15min down a slick wet hill. By this point the day was shot the car slagged and i was pissed. But on the up side, i got my first look at the BIG pit, and holy shit, it was big pit. So, after tents were pitched, Lepera, Chris, Ekey, FeFe, Kevin and I rigged the pit. Kirk and others rigged the other side. After this, it was dinner time, and it did not take long to realize that the other trip had been eating much better than us. It took less time for us 3 amigos

to see that there were no plans for a group dinner of our own. We did however eat, the other group took pity on us and fed us. We awoke the next morning and set out for sopia, the first real pit bounce of the trip. In the small town of Tomapatz we had breakfast, which looking back was the start of my downward bowel spiral. The food was really really good, and after we ate we found a local kid who took us to the cave. He took us there quite quickly, in mexico the kids are hardcore, and kick all our gringo butts. Next came a place to rig, there were many rocks about with many bolt holes, none of which any VPI person would rig to. So in true VPI style we found a big ass rock and put some friction wraps on it, and away we went. The pit was very cool, neat stuff to play all over. The climb out was with Chris, and my rig was sucking ass, but i made it out alive. When i got out i saw that the same kid who had showed us the way was there again, hoping he could carry something from us and make some more money. As we were all sitting around waiting to finish de-rigging, the kid was having a great time making fun of jeff. Calling him an astronaut because of his big down jacket. We got off the mountian, in the dark wet cold that had been with us since we had first went to the campsite, and went to the same little place for dinner. This was a bad idea i think, but the food was good, but kevin would not know, he was in the car with the shits. Just after he had climbed out of the pit, he puked and had the squirts, but we didn't get to see the proof, thanks to a pero. So we drove home after a meal that was, if not good for you, very tasty. My happiness was very high because my bowels, which had been bothering me since we got out of the pit, were unleashed in a very clean bathroom. (resumed 01/06/02 18:32 on the way back to the 'burg) So back to camp we went, the other group had gone, and sleep came to us all very quickly. With the rising of the sun, came the rising of my bowels. In fact, my bowels made a much better showing than did the sun. This was very upsetting to me, for this was the day we were to do the big pit, and I felt like shit. I took some pepto and tried to hold off the inevitable as long as I could. When the time to go to the bano did come, I tied a bandana to my face and forged into the unknown. The experience was a

blast, but afterwards I felt much better and decided to do the pit, as if anything at this point would really stop me. I am sure if it came to it, I would have cut a hole in the ass of my pants and done the pit if it was the only way. As I rigged on my rack over the 1200 ft plus hole, I had to ask if it was really worth doing this and risking death. My answer came from the back of my head with surprising speed and assuredness; it said this kicks ass; do this. So I did, and glad I am that I listened to that voice. The bottom of the pit had a register and other neat treasures in it. but I was very surprised to see only 4 VPI people made it to the bottom of the pit, one of them a tray-nee slug. The climb out with this slug was fun, but not in any way speedy, but that matters not. The overall experience was well worth it. Next came the derigging, a long dull process, followed by breaking camp and making a run to xilita for a hotel and food. With morning light came a site for sore eyes, the sun! With our forgotten friend warming our backs we headed off to the birdhouse. Such a place defies an accurate description, you can only visit to really believe that such a place exists. After this, it was all down hill. We went in search of a waterfall that was never found, but on the up side, i got shitfaced on the way. And when we finally admitted defeat, we drove to Hotel Taninul, and there till the wee hours in the morning, Ekey, Chris, Deighan, to a lesser extent Jeff and myself killed 30 or more beers in the warm sulphur waters of the pool. You could not ask for a better end to a mexico trip.

-EKS

**01/04/02 15:18, BIRDHOUSE, BOWEL STATUS: PROUDLY MADE IN THE USA EKEY GIMPY STATUS: WELL RESTED, WELL FED, CLEAN, WARM, AND HAPPY**

What a wacky place. The lady from texas we picked up wants a photo. Trip log is more important. Texas picture lady take someone else's picture. The birdhouse is a wonderful place. Just imagine being stoned out of your mind and then pouring a lot of concrete with a lot of rebar. Then imagine letting it age about 50 years, and letting silly gringos climb on it. Many sketchy elevated walkways that lead no where. One in particular leads to a 20 foot tall lotus flower that stands a few feet away from

the end of the walkway. As we venture closer to the end of our trip, I feel it necessary to record some of the funnier trends that have developed. Here is a list of stupid things we have come up with:

- 1) Chris's pants keep getting dirtier than the pants in his dirty clothes. So every day he will throw his 'dirty' pants into his laundry bag, and pull out the pair he threw in there the day before. When ever he spills something on himself, he screams "but these are my clean pants!"
- 2) We have now integrated two new words into our vocabulary. Anything that can be reduced in size without destroying it is "smurfed". Anything that spontaneously expands, but can be smurfed is "slag". Hence, we slag our gear every time we throw it in the car without packing it properly. Once the slag-u-lanche covers the third passanger, we smurf the gear. Is the car feeling smurfy today? I think not. The slag is about to eat Chris in the back seat. Luckily we have cervesa buried somewhere in the slag, and all is good.
- 3) Note to self: Everything is funnier if you put it with hola, burro, loco, cervesa and bano. For instance: hola chica loco burro bano! (Hello crazy bathroom donky girl) or Perro loco cervesa bano! (Crazy dog beer bathroom). Time to drive again...
- 4) <deleted>
- 5) So far we have met 5 gringos in Mexico (say Meh E ko). They have all been cavers. Two of them married mexican women. Hmm... Note to self: avoid mexican shotgun wedding.
- 6) If you need to do CPR on someone of the same sex, and there is no one of the oposite sex there to do it for you, you are gay.
- 7) Eric loves stray dogs. Every time he sees one, he says "good dog", but in spanish, so randomly through out the day we hear Eric cooing "bueno pero".

-Ekey

**1/04/02, 20:10, lost**

Eric states that he is a sour sally and cows suck. If he was a rabbit, he would have a huge pecker. Eric has been drinking. (Eric isn't the only one.

Who is driving? Who is drinking? Who wrote this?)

**01/05/02 01:00, IN THE SULFUR POOL, BOWEL STATUS: MUCHO BUENO**

We finished all the beer and had corona buoyancy experiments. For future reference: if you drink your corona until the crown is half beer and half foam, it will float perfectly in the sulfur pool and not sink or spill your beer.

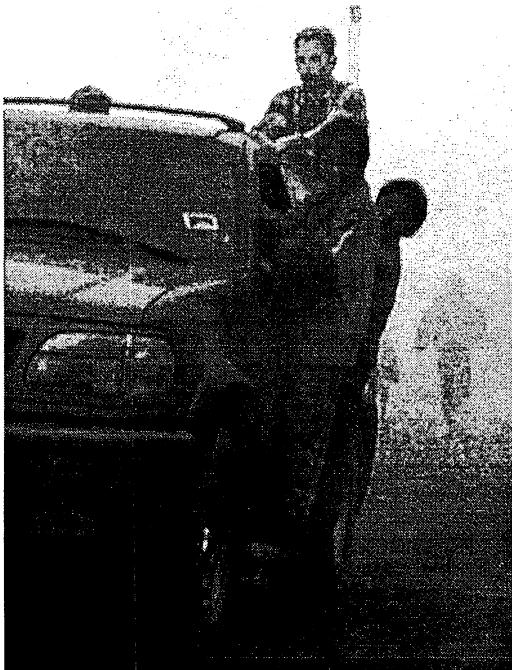
-Ekey

**1/05/02 12:05, NORTH OF VALLES, BOWEL STATUS: A8 REGULAR A8 A SWISS WATCH**

So I'm obviously a bit behind on my entries. I'll skim over the last few days. The ride up to 'drinas on new years day was amusing. The weather was still semi-crappy, all socked in, especially in the mountains. The road up there was pretty rough, and the fact that I had to piss like a racehorse only made it worse. I'm really surprised nothing popped, it was that bad. But I hate to ask the convoy to stop, it just makes us look even more like the pathetic beer swilling drunks of the trip who need pee breaks every 15 minutes. The children latching on to the outside of our vehicles made for a pleasant distraction. I like to think of them as a type of barnacle the will grow on the hull of your vehicle if it travels too slowly. One attached itself to the back of our car. So I opened the sunroof and stuck my head out. "Hola" I said to the face peeking above the back hatch. "Hola" said the face back. This turns out to be one of my most successful attempts at communicating with mexicans outside of the ordering of beer and food. In any case, the ride up was good fun. Camping was a bit of a pain thanks to the rain. By the next morning when we set out to bounce sopia, spirits had sagged. But at taumapats we found a nice restraint. A little bistek mexicana

did wonders for my morale. We also had a nice covered concrete pad to repack the car and smurf the slag. Senior Juan de Gan hired a 13 year old boy to guide us to sopia and we set out. Soon we were climbing up an ancient stone path slicked by rain. While the gringos struggled up the hill trying not to fall, our guide kept up a brisk walk. Perhaps its just that worn out tennis shoes are superior to expensive gringo hiking boots for this sort of thing I don't know. But he was certainly kicking our butts, and offering to carry our packs while he did it. So we gave him Pam's gear. Now we were getting our butts kicked by a 13 year old boy carrying a third of his weight in gear. Eric and I did our best to stick with him to protect the honor of gringokind. I managed pretty well until we started up a long hill with no end in sight. Thankfully I was saved when we unexpectedly arrived at the cave. I let the rope geeks on the trip get to rigging while I concentrated on staying warm and keeping my bowels in check. I did have a good trip to the bano bushes though. The first cavers down reported that the cave was a good deal more comfortable than the surface. So we huddled at the top waiting our turn to go down rope. Jeff was wearing his giant puffy hooded down jacket. I can only describe it by saying that he looked kinda like

the michelin man with a bad bloating problem. Finally my turn came and I rigged in. Knowing that if I pancaked I would never have to return to the wet, cold, cruel world of the surface, I really zipped down the rope screaming "Slack!" to my belayer as I went. It was fantastic right down to the bottom, which came about 10ft sooner than I was expecting. Sopia was gorgeous and I wish I hadn't let the crappy weather dissuade me from taking my camera. Kevin got priority climbing out as he was in



Andy becomes a local. Photo by someone on the trip.

dire need of a bano and we had made it clear to him that he'd never live it down if he use the pit for one. A little after he got off rope, word came from the top that Kevin didn't end up needing a bano at all. Instead he'd gone over to a rock and yakked his guts out. Then a pero came and ate the vomit. Apparently our laughter could be heard clearly at the entrance of the cave. The climb out was semi-sucky since I was having problems with my walker. Like a trainee I put my top ascender and roller right into the lip and had to work like mad to get it off and over to the cow tail. But I made it. Our guide had returned by then and we all stood around freezing, waiting for the rest of the trip to get up rope. Our guide was especially cold, so I gave him my fleece. He was still shivering, so I took Ekey's dump bottle and put a few rocks and some water in it. The boy was very amused when I lit it and tried to burn yeagle's eyebrows off. After that I gave him the bottle to hold. We sat around joking (Chris got bored and stopped to drink)

Damnit whoever wrote that, I stopped to think, not drink. Anyway, that kid was hilarious. Ther best thing: He looks at Jeff in his super large, super puffy jacket with hood, and says "Astronaute!". We just about died laughing. He even pantomimed lighting a large bottle rocket under Jeff and launching him to the "luna". Finally all the climbers got up and we derigged. By that time it was dark and the trail was even slicker so the way back was fraught with peril. Once again I attempted to guard the honor of gringokind by not being beaten by a 13 year old. Somehow he sensed this and we ended up sprinting up a hill. Eventually we dropped back to a safer and saner speed, but I think he knew he had me beat at that point. After we returned to town he joined us briefly for dinner at the restruant where we had gotten breakfast. He further amused us by comparing various gringos to a santa claus decoration on the wall. First yeagle, because of his red cheeks and bright blue eyes, then Ekey because of his silly hat, and then kirk, because he looks like a jolly misformed dwarf.

The next day was 'drinas day. I lagged in the morning, letting John, Brian, Eric, and Brandall get down rope before me. Mary came down

after me, and that was it for the pit bouncers. No one else had the guts, or they had serious medical problems with the guts they had. My rappel was fucking awesome. I didn't exactly zip down as fast as I did in Sopia, though I had a few moments of excitement when I tried dropping down to four bars. Will I ever learn? Halfway down though, something frightened the birds, and for a time I was surrounded by a whirling cacophony. Anyway, I grabbed some pictures at the bottom while I waited for the climbers to get up rope. Finally, Mary and I started up. It was a great climb. Mary had been sick for a few days, so she really didn't have the energy to fly up rope. I got to spend a pretty enjoyable 1.5 hrs climbing, resting, and trying to take pictures of myself with my belayed camera. Then we broke camp real fast and made a run for the soft beds and hot showers of xilitla.

-C

**01/05/02 20:41 BROWNSVILLE TX, BOWEL STATUS- HAPPY TO BE NEAR SHITTERS MADE IN THE USA**

Well Mexico is behind us now. We just got over the border cross, all three cars were in the same line, and all three cars were flagged to be searched. Our car was stopped for all of 2 min while we talked to a young guy who could not give a shit about 3 young rescue squad people who want to get back into the US. So he waved us on, and we laughed as our friends got their cars searched. I love mexico, i love being a US rescue dork, and i love being the assholes of the trip.

-EKS

**01/05/02 21:02 BROWNSVILLE, TX, FLEEING THE BORDER, BOWEL STATUS: WHO CARES, I CAN SHIT WHERE I PLEASE NOW**

Fabulous border cross, funny stuff... We coulda smuggled three mexicans in ekey's stubble and they would never have been the wiser. I will miss mexico and the love hate relationship I have with its food, but I am happy right now to be pulling into the parking lot of Denny's.

-C

**01/06/02 02:28 THE FLAT PART OF TEXAS, BOWEL STATUS: I MADE A POOP AND THE TOILET FLUSHED FOR ME**

OK, Chris and I driving now. Recording funny things we see in stupid Texas. There is a gas

station named "Loves". So you see "Loves Gas" on the horizon. Chris loves gas. Chris also likes the dark. Like some more dark? How about some sun? Nope, right out of that. Can order some in two weeks. Kermit is a frog and an old transfer protocol. This town is so cheap it doesn't even have a Dairy Queen. It has a "Dairy King". Stupid Texas. The border cross was great. We sailed through while Kevin's car got dismantled. Chris bought 5 liters of Aguardente for 8\$. I've never seen a jug this big of something 70 proof. Mexicans make everything better. Taxi? Taxi? Mexico has a taxi service named "Maxi Taxi" I certainly wouldn't ride in anything that starts with "Maxi". Texans love to play with dancing lights on their traffic signs. Some of these signs look better than a christmas tree at night. "Warning! Dancing yellow lights ahead!" Sleepy...

-Ekey

**01/06/02 08:04, LEAVING BEAUTIFUL CROWLEY, LA, BOWEL STATUS: SORE FROM ALL THE EXERCISE IN MEXICO**

Finally, my driving shift is over. I had the 2am - 7am shift, but thankfully I got some sleep before hand. I've had a bit of a tummy ache for the last 18 or so hours, but its starting to get better. Ekey seems pretty sick, he was close to vomitting several times in the wee hours. Now

he's sleeping, and occasionally producing hideous farts. It smells like Ekey tried to smuggle a mexican accross the border in his rectum and the mexican died.

-C

**101/06/02 21:48, JUST SOUTH OF VA, ON I-81, BOWEL STATUS: LO, HOW THE MIGHTY HAVE FALLEN**

Well the trips almost over... we're just a few hours out, driving through snow and rain, a typical return to virginia. The drive back has been fairly uneventful so far, though we just had to detour around a wreck involving a jack knifed tractor trailer. I hope Ekey doesn't kill us all. On the intestinal front, I've finally gotten mine. I blame the american food from the Denny's we ate at in texas. Though curiously enough, there was a strong smell of sulfur at the time, not unlike the pool at Taninul. Oh well, so go the mysteries of the digestive track. Well if I don't get another entry in, its been a fantastic trip. Oytfab

-C

**OFFICIAL ENDING MILEAGE: 86565**

Total Mileage: 3919

Car Status: Happy, one map light down. Shocks? We don't need no stinkin shocks.

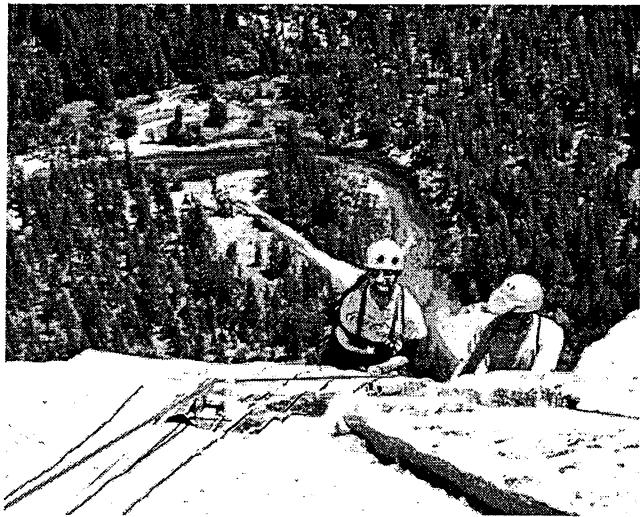
## Grotto Grapevine

by A.I. Cartwright

### CAVERS AREN'T AS LAZY AS YOU THOUGHT

Once again, Elvis Grotto members prove they're tough. Steve LePera, Philip Balister, and Sandy Knapp biked in the Blacksburg Road Race in July and not all of them came in dead last. In September, Natalie Serbu, Kristen (Posson) Chaddock, and Eileen O'Malley raced in a Half Marathon in northern Virginia. They, too, met their goal - finishing before the awards ceremony began.

This summer Steve LePera, Steve Wells, and Joe Thompson joined a crew to rappel and climb El Capitan, a cliff of a mere 2600 feet. Each rappelled a few times. The altitude got the best of Joe on his climb, so he changed over several hundred feet up and zoomed back down. Wells and LePera began a knots climb together, but poorly rigged gear and a deadline for the climb convinced LePera to change over almost halfway up.



Steve LePera dangles on the edge at 2600 feet.  
Photo by someone.

Perhaps it was that knots climb, but Steve Wells got a bit too tired on his motorcycle ride home from El Cap. The road went one way and Steve went another, flipping the bike and casting his gear along the median. The bike was totalled, and his wrist didn't fare much better. Steve's first coup in the recovery was when he was able to hold a beer in the damaged hand.

Pete Sauvigne quit his job earlier this year in favor of hiking the Appalachian Trail. He then took a post-Christmas trip to Mexico to climb the volcano Orizaba. His wife Linda is anxious for him to get back to work, however. As she put it, "If he has a job then he can't keep going away on long trips!"

### AH, CLUB RELATIONSHIPS

Carl Bern and Amy Johnson tied the knot in West Virginia. Despite a small flood, the post-wedding camp-out was a rousing success. Matt Stec and Stacy Graves got hitched in August, followed by Bill Steier and Jen [maiden name here]. After a ridiculously long courtship, Amy Stirlgwolt finally married Scott Jacobs and is living in Connecticut. Kristen Posson married Dan Chaddock over the summer and they have recently purchased a townhouse in NOVA.



Kristen and Dan make it legit. Photo by Craig Ferguson.



Dave and Patricia got hitched on their property by the smelly fish pond. Photo by Craig Ferguson.



Carl and Amy show off their moves. Photo by Craig Ferguson.



Matt and Stacy try to have a quiet moment together. Too bad Craig Ferguson was there with his ubiquitous camera!

On the other side of the spectrum, Sue Setzler and Doug Bruce seem to be heading for a divorce. Sue and Megan moved into their own place over the summer. Despite sending her daughter to school with no shoes, Sue says they're doing fine on their own.

Speaking of the "D" word, are Philip Balister and Sandy Knapp getting divorced or not? It looked like they were going their separate ways a year ago, but they keep dating and taking trips together instead. The rest of us have given up on guessing their next move.

Spot Rapier went beyond the call of duty by flying to Texas to purchase a car for Karen Everhardt. On her behalf he haggled with the dealer, purchased the car, and drove it back to

Blacksburg alone. Once back in town he had to make several repairs. Some speculate that Karen gets the Volvo in place of a ring....

#### LAND RUSH

Wil and Zenah Orndorff went in with Joe Thompson to purchase land on Mt. Zion Road. They plan to begin a caver commune, where clothing is optional and everybody has a pet redneck.

Ray Sira, however, has different plans. He bought some property on Prices Fork Road which comes with a private home and a slightly scaled-down Playboy mansion. Nikky LaBranche is so far the only bunny on the premises, but give him time.

Ray's move prompted a great caver shuffle. Chris Garguilo and Chip Mullins moved into his old place in Newport, Nick Zeigre moved from the other Newport house to Guido's old place. Mike3 Horne and Kristen Matak have picked up a non-caver to fill the space.

To go along with the run-down trailer, Chris and Chip have acquired a run-down dog. The overweight, aging "damnation" came with \$30.00 and the hope that he'll die soon so they can get a real dog.

Just a few months prior, Bill Balfour moved to West Virginia. His rental house in Giles was snapped up by Mike and Andrea Futrell.

Speaking of dogs, why is Aaron Thomas' dog so darned weird?

#### MORE CAVER SHUFFLE

Amanda Stiles has moved back to Blacksburg and is hunting for a job. She has shacked up temporarily at the Wells household until she can find her own place. In other moving news, Chris Rourke has moved back to Blacksburg – except that he never really left, and he has no place to live. He's staying at the rescue squad until the rescue geeks can scrape together enough money to buy him a cardboard box.

Andy Sabalowsky is still living in Oregon, but is currently job-hunting. His company downsized by 20%, and that was Andy. At last report, he was still dating Skye. His friends report that the happier he is, the less often they hear from him so he must be doing well now.

Bill Stringfellow was also downsized from his Georgia firm. Strangely, Bill never seemed too upset about the loss. He's taking the opportunity to visit old friends and new places.

VPI seems to be stealing WVACS cavers. First Kristin Matak moved back to Blacksburg, then Nick Ziegler moved into town. Nick still makes regular weekend trips to his project caves in West Virginia, though he claims he plans to stay here more often to save money. We have plenty of projects around here, Nick!

#### **THIS CLUB IS LOUSY WITH BABIES**

Looks like Molly Lucier and Mike Newsome are at it again. Molly is now about three months pregnant, and Mike is already talking about having three more kids. Pretty soon the Bat Ranch will be with kids like it has always been with cats – there are more hanging around than you can keep track of.

Jim Pugh's wife Kelly has had another baby. It's no surprise, given that Jim has spent so much time on his back.

Hugh Beard and Karen Little had another. Brenner, their new son, was born in early September.

Brian Cruikshank has also been busy. His wife Debbie gave birth to Callum Scott on October 1. Those who have seen how Brian used to live on Spruce Run are concerned that the child will get lost amongst the mess.

And finally, Paul Kirchman and Dabney Hammer are expecting. Let's see, two kids, one dog, a buncha chickens, some goats....

On a somber note, both of Paul's parents passed away in November. Paul was relieved to report that they both went peacefully.

#### **IMPEACHMENT**

A slight problem with academic probation meant that Mike Cole was unable to continue as the club's president. Hasty elections led to Philip Balister becoming President, a decision that most of us are sorely regretting. Hey, wait... is that a leather jacket Mike Cole is wearing?

#### **ONE MORE....**

Jessica Dorr, KG4QJX

#### **WHO'S WORKING FOR LAWRENCE NOW?**

After purchasing some land and old buildings in Christiansburg, Lawrence needs to make lots of repairs before he can use or rent out the space. What better cheap labor than cavers? At last count, he was employing Scott Rapier, Mike Horne, Kirk Digby, Pete Sauvigne, and Travis Coad.

Laine Buckwalter is now working for a local satellite dish company. She works the evening shift, so she doesn't get to make the meetings at the Ton or on campus very often. Maybe she should talk to Lawrence....

#### **CAVER FESTIVITIES**

This summer Carol and Joe Zokaites finished some patio work at their Christiansburg home. To celebrate, they hosted a fine potluck party. Tip to people who weren't there: when asked which patio stonework you like best, say that they're both great and you couldn't possibly choose. This might help preserve peace at the Zo house.

Zenah Orndorff completed her Ph.D. this summer, and in celebration the Bat Ranch hosted Zenahfest. The celebration included frothy beverages, live music (*Las Cucharachas* and *Septopus*), and latex body paint. Perhaps the most spectacular sights were Wil's red-painted ass (can you say baboon?) and the show that Sandy Ramsey and her "friend" gave at the campfire.

Linda and Pete Sauvigne hosted a holiday party in mid December. The house was full of food, drink, and festivity. Many cavers were most impressed by Linda's Austin-Healey and the stories that went with it.

Since Ed and Lynn Richardson have sold their party house, Walt and Lynn Pirie hosted the New Year's Party. All reports indicate it was a great time, and that partiers were up until the wee hours.

#### **CONVENTION**

Yeah, there was an NSS Convention in Kentucky. Some VPI folks went, placed in vertical contests, partied, caved, and had an all-around good time. Most importantly, they proved that VPI still kicks butt in the Medley competition!

## MEXICO AGAIN?

Two separate groups of VPI cavers travelled to Mexico this Christmas. The first group consisted of Sandy Knapp, Philip Balister, John McKenna, Emily Smith, Steve LePera, Eileen O'Malley, Suzie Warren, Dave Warren, and Mark Ruocco. (Natalie Serbu and her friend Mike bailed on the trip shortly before departure and went to Vegas instead - perhaps to get married by Elvis?)

This group spent a week playing on volcanos, though John was the only one able to summit Iztaccíhuatl, the main focus of the trip. To counteract the high altitude, they bounced Golondrinas a few days later.

The second group consisted of John Deighan, Kirk Digby, Pam Mohr, Kevin Rock, Eric Stanley, Brian Ekey, Chris Rourke, Jeff Leach, Andy Yeagle, and four non-VPI people they picked up along the way. Theirs was a more traditional caver trip, and they visited El Abra (they *love* bees), Cepilla, Rio Choi, and Golondrinas.

Chris Rourke learned a valuable lesson about wind patterns above moving vehicles. Ask him what happens when you're too lazy to stop the car for a pee break.

Luckily the two groups were able to meet up in Xilitla for New Year's Eve, because nobody was able to find the usual young folks dance party. Instead, the groups met up with some other cavers and a kayaking group and turned the town square into a party of gringos.

## IMPORTANT UPDATE!

According to sources close to Wil Orndorff, his status as The Bastard has changed slightly. He is now considered The Slow Bastard.

## LOOSE ENDS

Remember when Steve Wells first bought his house? The rule was No Pets! But then Joel Bergstein and Ruth Grolman were living downstairs and wanted a dog.... Okay, as long as the mutt stays downstairs. But then Alison Williams moved back to town with her dog Melba.... Okay, but only for visits. Then Alison started dating Matt Burnett (why?) and staying for overnight visits.... Then came the cat that Matt wanted to adopt. Okay, but as long as the cat goes outside at night. But then it got cold and wintery, so Matt bought a litter box.... Now several pets have the run of the place.

Jen Kitchin (remember Patty's "little girl?") has been spotted at a cave club meeting. Warning to Jen: Beware! The caver men have already taken notice.

Jason Obenshain has finally become a Wilderness First Responder. Congrats to Jason. To all those living in northern Virginia: stay out of the woods!

That about wraps things up. Tune in for the next edition of "As the Grotto Turns...."



This is why Steve Wells is no longer allowed to babysit Elizabeth Ferguson.  
Photo by the concerned father.

## Why Northern Cavers Cave Electric

by Sandra Ramsey

During my time spent caving with the Boston Grotto, I learned that the majority of these cavers use electric headlamps for their main source of light. This was a strange practice to me coming from the VPI carbide grotto. Knowing the warmth benefit of using a carbide lamp, I was under the impression that the colder caves of the north would almost require the lamp's use. When I inquired why they didn't use carbide, the chairman of the grotto, Steve Stokowski, laughed and responded with, "just cave with us once and you'll turn electric too."

The caves of New England can be classified as small. When I say small, I mean these Yankees get excited about going under a boulder and call that "caving." The caves tend to be both short and tight. After you've been up north for a while, you quickly learn the advantage we have down here with all the decent caves so close by. The lengths of most caves in New England are generally smaller than our Links cave. This makes it a hassle for most to fire up a carbide lamp for the short period you are actually in a cave.

Even though the caves up north are generally short (and not comparable in quality to the ones we have southwest Virginia), there are a few decent sized ones if you venture into New York. I am not talking about one recently created by terrorist, either. The downside of many of these caves is you usually have to plan trips a month ahead because of travel time and all the red tape you have to go through to get into them.

However, Clarksville Cave is an exception to traditional northern caves. It has large passage and is decent in length. This causes it to have more traffic than Tawney's cave. I took a troop of Boy Scouts there in January of \*\*\*\* and wished I had a carbide lamp. The trip started off with the traditional excessive speeding ticket in New York; the officer didn't care that we were off to support little scouts. I think it was because my copilot Kevin Flannagan was cursed.

Kevin was the navigator for the cave trip, so I trusted he would choose the best passage for the circumstances. When he said we should do the through trip, it would involve getting a "little" wet. Lights should have went off by the smirk he had - don't listen to Kevin - but he said it would be fun.

We gathered the twelve scouts and scout masters and headed into Clarksville. The trip was going smoothly until the final stretch as the water started to get deeper. Keep in mind the average cave temperature is around 45 degrees, and it is January in upper state New York. Finally came the duck under where you are standing chest deep in frigid water and then have to duck under a rock. Normally you can do this without completely submerging, but with all the scouts splashing it was basically impossible. We were all entirely soaked, and now comes the hard part - leaving the cave. The cars were about a quarter of a mile away, which seems longer because your outer layers are freezing as you're running. I think with the wind chill factor it was probably below zero. As you whipped off layers it froze mid-air and landed frozen solid on the ground. That's hard core northern caving for you.

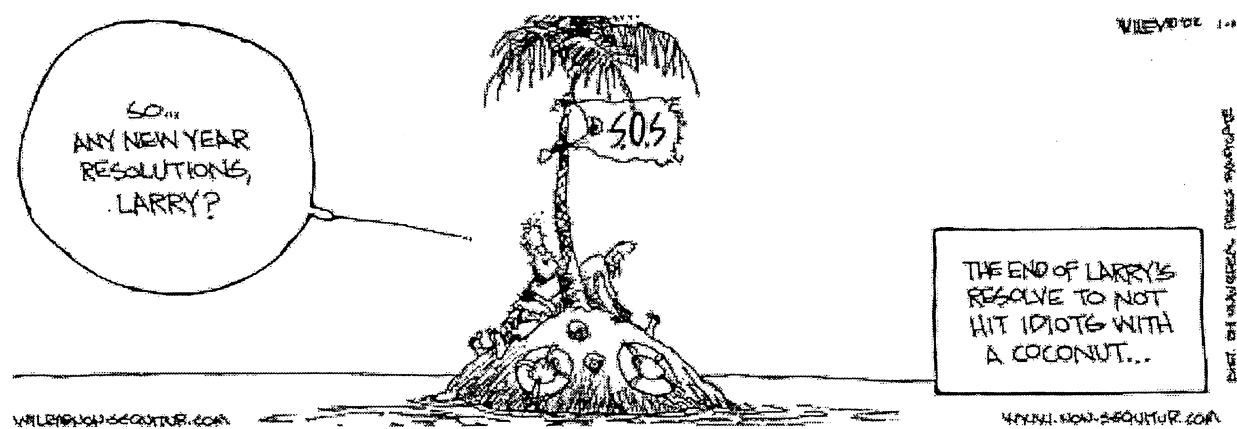
On my main point, a second reason why northern cavers prefer electric headlamps is because the caves are also very tight. Carbide assists would be frequent in the tight crawling passage. When you get standing room it is a miracle. This usually gives you time to crack your back - if you're short enough. Then you continue on your way through the tight passage. Carbide is not as accessible to many people as it is to our grotto, which makes electric power more convenient.

The base line is that the people I talked to in various grottos above the Mason Dixon Line feel electric lamps are more practical for their caves. Carbide lamps can take awhile to set up and light. They also are high maintenance for the short trips of those caves. Also, crawling through a lot of tight spaces increases the risk of burning yourself or your gear (maybe even

light your fellow cavers on fire).

Disclaimer: This article is not intended to bash carbide lamp cavers. It is intended to educate on more than one way to light the cave. There are plenty advantages to using a carbide lamp. For one, they can provide warmth at the top of a drop while waiting for trainees to climb rope. They are also good for cooking food. Other

benefits include cheap fuel, and they are repairable under most circumstances (can fix if falls down pit, cannot fix if ran over by Mack truck). The flame also provides a nice broad view light. It is possible to be both a carbide and electric caver, depending on what is more convenient for you at the time.



**From the Signout**  
**compiled by Matt Burnett and Steve LePera**

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VPI cavers and their guests logged in 2721 caver hours from 5/01/01 to 1/05/02.

07/07/01	Smokehole	Chris Garguilo, Ray Sira, 14 campers from Teen Adventures	I wish I was a 17 year old freshman
07/16/01	James	Joe Thompson, Orndorff family, Anna McGuirk, Drake McGuirk	Caving with people shorter than Kirk, the crawls get worse
08/07/01	Tawney's/Links	Steve LePera, Earl Kneessi, Eileen O'Malley, Matthew Burnett	Earl can cave. Too bad he is moving to Atlanta
08/09/01	Starne's	Kirk Digby, Nick Zegre	That cave has more steel in it now that Steve Wells does
08/11/01	New River (with permission)	Patricia Colatosti, Dave Colatosti, Pam Mohr, Kirk Digby	Despite "strict access control" it's still filled with trash. Big surprise...
09/10/01	Smokehole	Katherine Ferguson, Matthew Burnett	Katherine: 2 Stec: 0
09/25/01	Caldwell	Matthew Burnett, Joe Zokaites, Pete Sauvigne	Apparently trainees make that trip much longer. That's one damn small cave.
10/07/01	Stay High	John Deighan, Rob Payne, Kevin Rock, Matthew Burnett	John remembered his gear this time!!!
10/27/01	DMC	Steve LePera, Steve Wells, Kirk Digby, Chris Hibshman,	"Chris... your pants are on fire..."
10/27/01	Tawney's	Chip Mullins, Katherine Ferguson, Craig Ferguson, Scott Rapier, Karen "Rapier", other people	"This is why God made me above ground!" -- New guy (not coming back)
11/11/01	Pighole	Jerry Redder, Kirk Digby, Jeff Leach, Pam Mohr	"Stop putting survey marks on my car!" -- Pam
11/16/01	Cassell's	Philip Balister, Sandy Knapp, Steve LePera	We were too big
12/01/01	Buddy Penley's	Chris Rourke, Brian Ekey, Pete Sauvigne, Aaron Thomas	Aaarghhh! That's OK I didn't want kids anyway
12/01/01	Deep Springs, Little Roberts	Wil Orndorff, Zenah Orndorff, Naomi Orndorff, TJ Orndorff, Travis Coad	Just cause the original surveyors didn't fit doesn't mean it doesn't go!
12/08/01	DMC	Steve Wells, Steve LePera	Concussion waves are fun.
12/15/01	Smokehole	Andy Yeagle, Craig Ferguson, Matthew Burnett	Different Craig Ferguson, not the one you know
12/21/01	Mexico	Steve LePera, Sandy Knapp, Emily Smith, Philip Balister, Eileen O'Malley, John McKenna, Mark Ruocco, Suzie Warren, Dave Warren	Once again, we failed to reach the breast.
12/26/01	Mexico	Pam Mohr, Kirk Digby, John Deighan, Jeff Leach, Andy Yeagle, Kevin Rock, Chris Rourke, Brian Ekey, Eric Stanley	Border Guard: What are these rocks? That's carbide. You mix it with water and it produces an explosive gas.

**VPI Cave Club  
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