

# **THE TECH TROGLODYTE**



**SPRING 2017**

The *Tech Troglodyte* is published each semester (assuming that people bother to submit articles, which they often don't) by the VPI Cave Club, a student grotto of the NSS. All submissions, subscriptions, inquiries, donations, and comments should be sent to: Trog Editor, VPI Cave Club, P.O. Box 558.



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# **THE TECH TROGLODYTE**

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



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## **LETTER FROM THE EDITOR**



**Good Afternoon, VPI Cave Club,**

Thank you to everyone who submitted articles and let me use pictures they took to make this year's Trog. Reading all the wonderful articles and editing this thing was a wonderful way to spend my time when I wasn't busy getting stuck at the bottom of climbs I shouldn't have attempted or in tight squeezes I didn't want to go down in the first place. And (as always) thanks to everyone for making this filthy, ragtag community one of the best ones out there. Cave on, you intrepid weirdos. I hope you enjoy this year's Trog!

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Amy Skowronski**

# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

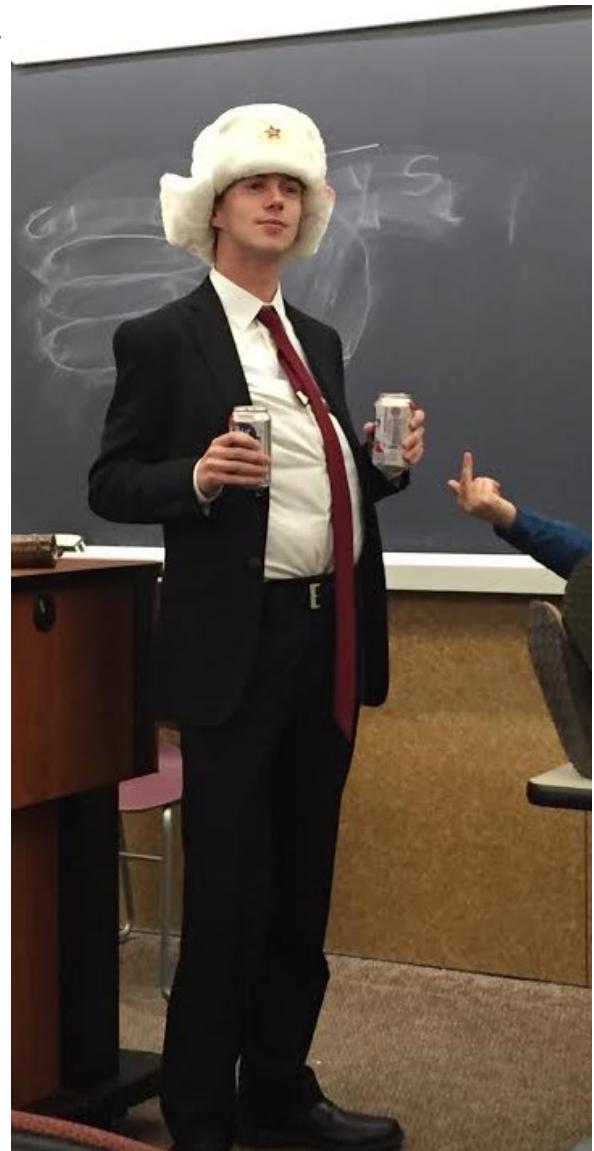
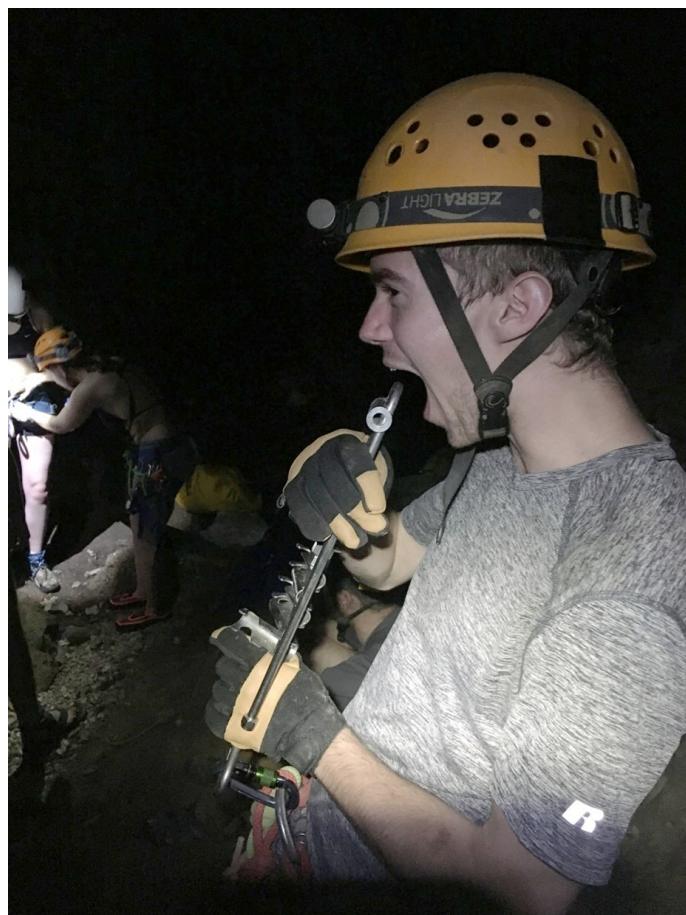
Dear Cave Club,

I'd like to tell a story. This summer, I was on a surveying trip in Fallen Rock Cave. We spent a lot of time in passage that was everything you could hope for – walking size (sometimes enormously so), wind in your face, a big stream not far away, and, most importantly of all, new to me. As with most caves, it was dark, wet, cold, and it fascinated me. When I'm caving, the spaces convey a sense of geologic time that is almost impossible to wrap my head around. It would be hard to find a more striking contrast to day-to-day life. The word I often use to convey this feeling is 'alien.' The environment underground is just so far removed from every common reference point that it may as well be another planet altogether. That's the mindset I try to capture whenever I'm caving, and it's why this trip stood out. We reached the end of our survey, but not the end of the cave, turned around, and left. When we got out, I felt the same way that I usually would underground. We were walking through a field – very short grass, but every few feet was a tall sprout that came up almost to our waists. The sun was so low that the sky was starting to turn red. The moon was out. Against this backdrop, the other cavers walked ahead of me. They were covered from head to toe in bulky, colorful gear stained brown with mud. There wasn't another creature in sight, despite the open landscape. The scene could have been pulled straight from a campy sci-fi. Explorers on a brave new world. It was surreal.

There have been a lot of great trips the last four years.  
Thanks everyone.

Sincerely,

Tommy Cleckner  
President, VPI Cave Club



# **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to the VPI Cave Club, where everyone fits in whether they do or not. We had a wonderful year full of caving, training, and general absurdity. The Cave Club is really a grand group of people—the kind of group in which old farts and newcomers can run freely through keg-infested cow fields together in harmony, though some complain more than others.

I hope this Trog does a decent job of capturing what we as a club do, whether it's below ground or above. The Cave Club is really an odd but special group full of rad, kind, and off-the-wall people that I've never found anywhere else.

Here's to another great year! Let's keep the traditions going, the weirdness alive, and keep on caving on.



## NEW MEMBERS



Dwayne Sykes #455



Eric Hahn #456



Jason Sargent #457



Jason Delafield #458



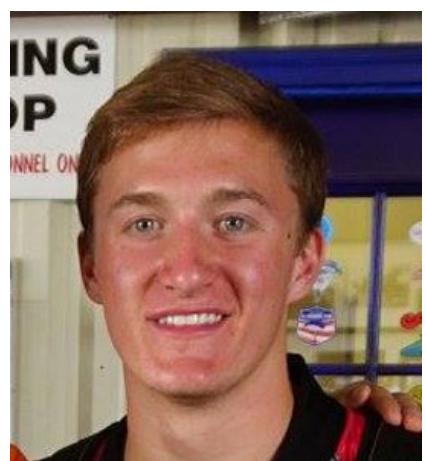
Jenn McGuire #459



Tommy Polson #460



Reilly Blackwell #461



Will Borin #462



Skylar Hopkins #463

# PICNIC



The fire burned brightly (MORE WOOD!), no cars were hit by golf balls, and people actually went caving!



It isn't Picnic if someone's car doesn't get at least slightly battered, and this year was no different - two vehicles were down and out for the count and everyone ended up riding back to the main field in the back of Wells' pickup.



# FLOAT TRIP



The weather was perfect for Float Trip. There was a handful of smaller floats instead of one large one, and a singular kayak that held an individual with a wonky knee. The water carried the merry band of floaters down the New River to the take-out point where they adjourned their trip and headed back to the Bat Ranch to spend some time with those Jersey cavers who came down for the event.



# NSS CONVENTION



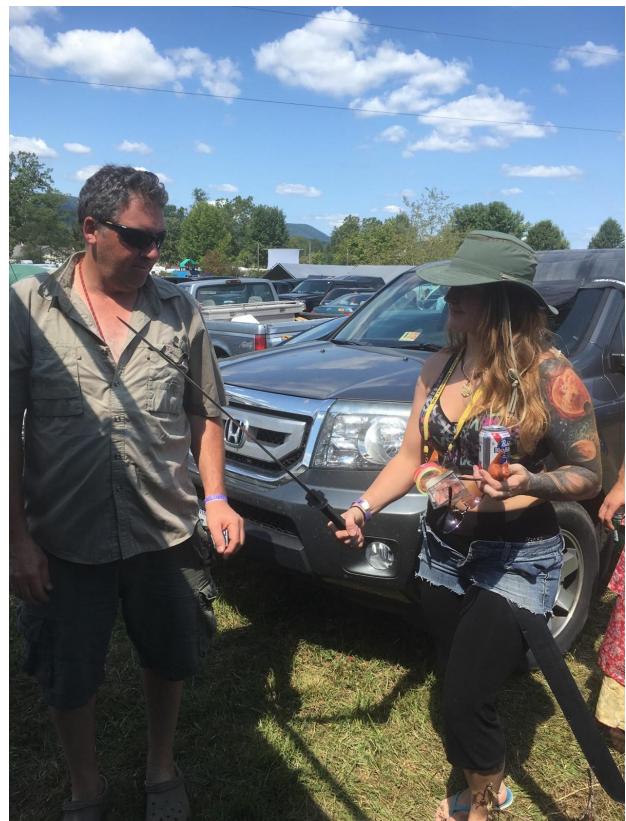
The NSS Convention was held in Ely, NV. Despite the monstrously gusty wind, everyone had a great time at the competitions, exploring the natural beauty of Nevada, and gawking at Balister in galaxy leggings. A group of Horizontal Cavers rigged a traverse line between tents so no rogue cavers would get blown off-track by the wind - good thinking, Horz!



# OLD TIMERS REUNION

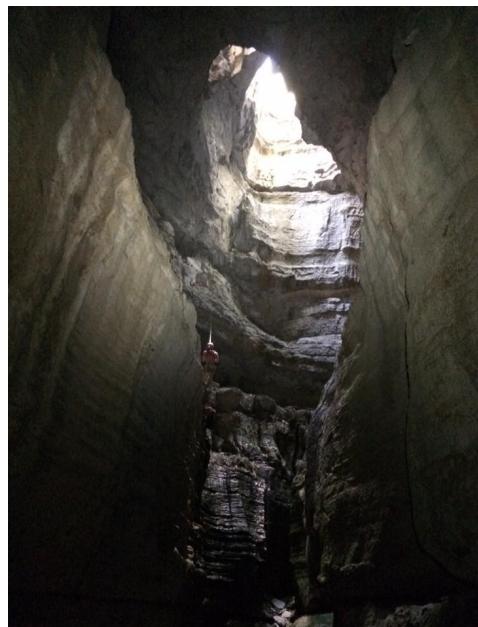


Old Timers Reunion was a blast. Captain Ed kept the coffee flowing every morning, Dave C's pizzas were fabulous, the McCarter family made a surprise appearance, and Steph Petri Like The Dish bought an actual sword. VPI had a great showing in the Speleolympics (well done, everyone!) and a new annual tradition was born - the crawling competition.

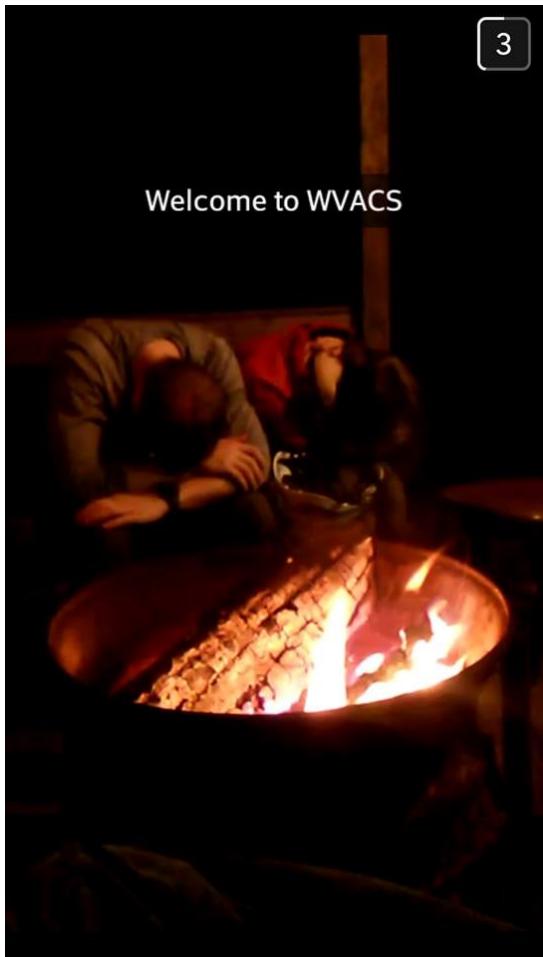


# TAG FALL CAVE-IN

TAG Fall Cave-In was a rip-roaring success for VPI. A handful of folks went to various rogue caves, while others held down the campsite. All in all, it was a great time, despite the theft of a small fluorescent sign in the shape of a man (named Tiny Tim) and the Flame Out Of The Year incident (congratulations, Peter Morisey).



# FALL BREAK AT WVACS



During Virginia Tech's Fall Break, also known as a Three Day Weekend, a large group of VT cavers headed on over to WVACS to finally get a taste of the Greenbrier caves so often mentioned at the meetings.

Numerous trips went out and numerous folks had their first WVACS experience. It was a wonderful time had by almost everyone!



# HALLOWEEN

Another wonderful Halloween transpired this past October. A fun theme of the evening was members of our club dressing up as other members. We had a tremendous costume contest which was concluded by a very intoxicated Jesus (with wine spilled down the front of his robes) leading the group in a “prayer” that was, in fact, Toto’s Africa. A few folks left the party after that. Happy Halloween!



# BATS AND BEDROCK EXTRAVAGANZA

At the end of 2016, a group of intrepid explorers headed to Wythe County for a week of surveying in the abundant, albeit small, caves in the area. The week was dubbed the Bats and Bedrock Extravaganza, purely so the acronym would be BABE. Tight squeezes were pushed, horses helped read maps, and Horace ended up in some dangerous situations. Thank you to Bill Grose for talking to landowners, getting cave locations, and being excited about the survey!



# BANQUET

Pre-Banquet was held at the Futrell residence, where merriment was had until late into the night. At Banquet itself, everyone was dressed to the nines and looking sharp - not a single pair of jorts was seen!

Congratulations to Richard Cobb for receiving the A. I. Cartwright Award and to Reilly Blackwell for receiving the BAT.

A nice half hour for mingling post-awards was had before everyone hit the dancefloor for the remainder of the night.

On Sunday, the Redders provided food and drink for a post-banquet brunch that turned into dinner - thank you!



## GROTTO GRAPEVINE

Earlier this year, a trainee was involved in a woeful mishap involving walloping Indiana Grays off of cave ceilings with baseball bats. This transpired due to a failed attempt at being in too many conversations at once and hearing the tail ends of two different topics. Our sources tell us that one conversation was about someone's grandson learning to play baseball while the other discussion was centered around how well bats fly. This led to the aforementioned trainee creating a sport they dubbed Inverted Tee Ball. When we received the invitation for a game, we didn't understand the concept or understand the "BYOB" that was included at the end of the invite. On the bright side, we had plenty of empties to throw at the trainee when he gave us the run-down of the rules.

At Old Timers Reunion, Chris Garguilo was found near the bonfire wearing a blue sequined dress proclaiming that dancing with rules was for squares while he did the Macarena backwards.

Feeling frustrated after his attempts to contact a CHUD (Cute, Hunky, Unforgettable Date) were unsuccessful due to lack of cell service underground, Jason Sargent invented the Bat Cave Connection hotline. You know, for when wireless phones fail but you still need to get in touch with that weird, pasty, semi-human creature you ate helmet pizza and a dead trainee with on a candlelit rock while wrapped in a trash bag. It's all about keeping the romance alive, ladies and gents.



For Spring Break, a handful of cavers went to TAG, where they were forced to rig numerous vertical traverses to get to the crawls they were planning on photographing. They spent each day hauling coils of ropes up and down mountains to get that perfect shot of someone crammed in a 1x2' crawlspace. While at Stephen's Gap, the next group arrived early - it was a bunch of Patagucci/Fratagonia backpackers toting brand new helmets. When the cavers complimented their clean helmets, the hiking bros told them that they had purchased the helmets purely because the permit said helmets were required. The jabronies dumped their packs and helmets under a tree and wandered into the lower entrance of the cave because when it comes to helmets, it's the thought that counts.

# GROTTO GRAPEVINE

At a WVACS work weekend, someone made the mistake - or was it - of playing Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On" and we all got to witness Nick Socky go into heat.

Ever intrigued by words, Jonathan Roberts: Local Guy With an English Degree, looked into the vernacular of cavers in an attempt to figure out why we all keep going underground even though we're fully aware sometimes it's really unpleasant. His findings were fascinating. We use words like, "sporting," and "grim," when we mean "It's the worst thing I've ever done, other than proposing to my fifth wife." It was determined that words used to describe the same passage change drastically when it comes to inviting folks on our trips vs how we write the trip report. For example, one might recall that



The Meat Grinder in New River Cave is pretty lame. Pre-trip one might call it "challenging" or "bleak" while post-trip descriptions are composed primarily of profanity. After conducting a series of tests and spending hours studying the ways cavers speak, he discovered that we're a bunch of liars.

Someone brought a box of erasable pens to sign-out, so you can finally remove someone from your trip without it being super obvious! The timing was perfect, since not a day earlier, Dan Crowder had locked the keys to the gearbox in the gearbox, leaving us unable to outfit trainees with the proper equipment. Make people think you cave safely, use an erasable pen! Thanks for helping us maintain our reputation, whoever purchased those.

For those who have been out of touch with our abroad friend (who, to clarify, is not a broad), Matthew Skowronski has found his calling as a full-time hippie by starting a healthy vegan chocolate shop at the yoga studio he works and lives at. Ever the punster, he has dubbed his business Yoga Matt Snacks. He is also working with a local Thai artist who does detailed resin castings and traditional cultural paintings, where he exchanges English lessons to learn how to make sculptures as well as silicone molds so he can make chocolates in "spiritual shapes like chakras, or flowers or whatever else yoga people can't get enough of."



Submitted by A.I. Cartwright



## A Brief Plug for the VSS

by Mike Futrell

The Virginia Speleological Survey (VSS) is a small non-profit organization that maintains records of the State's caves. While watching Andrew Lycas' presentation on Wythe County cave surveys, I thought, "This is how the VSS was envisioned to operate – a leader/facilitator and a bunch of participants."

The VSS does not have memberships, rather it has a small group of directors, usually about two dozen, who form the organization. These folks primarily fill the role of County Directors. The idea is that each county director would coordinate and promote exploration and survey in their respective counties. Generally the county director is someone who has been around a while and has a keen interest in organizing mapping projects in a particular county. We loosely think of these as 'county projects', though we occasionally have smaller regional projects. The Wilburn-Sugar Run Project is/was a good example. Slightly different is the BCCS, which is its own organization that sends a representative director and shares data.

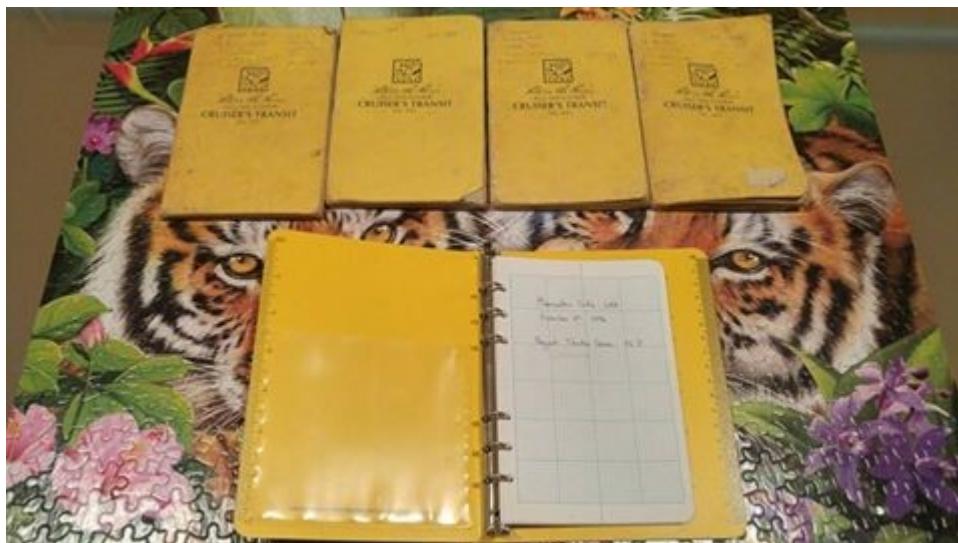
Some projects organize periodic survey events. For a time Nathan Farrar held the Page County survey one weekend a month. Ben Schwartz has been holding a two week camp and cave event in Wise County each summer for some time now. Ficco and Futrell seem to be in Tazewell every other weekend. However, for the most part, it's occasional weekends as organized by whomever has the time. This ranges from several trips a month to a trip or two a year.

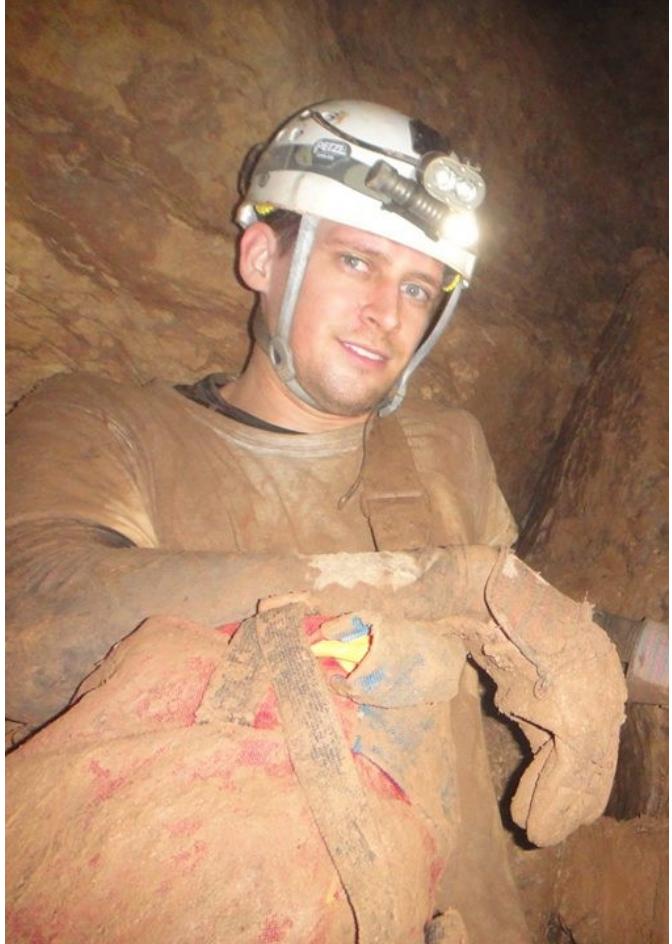
True, some counties have no director. Generally, this is because no one is currently focusing on the area. This doesn't mean there is nothing going on, just that it may be sporadic. For example, in the case of Roanoke County it's because the county is generally thought to be "finished" and there's probably no point in having a director for the county.

Back in the pre-digital days cave research meant perusing the paper archives for information subsequent to the Douglas and Holsinger books. These days most of the records are digital, though we still have a lot of paper files remaining to be scanned. Still the process for one wanting to start or join a project is to contact the county director for the area, or alternatively talk to one of the long time cave surveyors for guidance.

If you want a project, we'll help you find one (or two).

Here's a website that gives a little more overview: <http://www.virginiacaves.org/about-us/who-we-are>





# Re-Survey: A Celebration of Inadequacy

By Jonathan Roberts

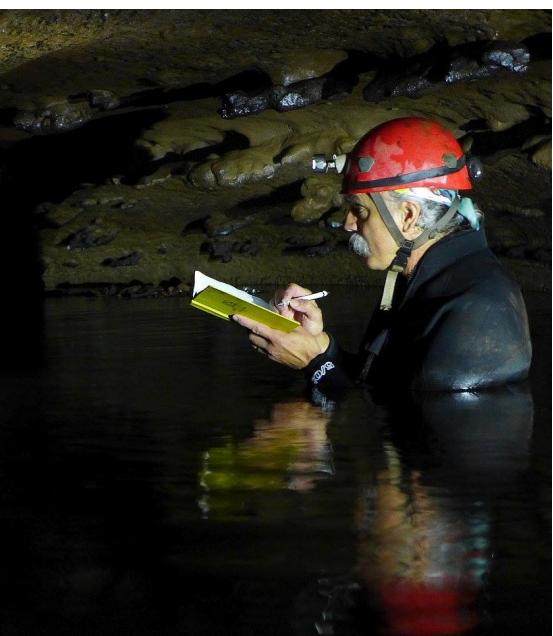


Many hobbies are glamorous. Rock climbers have the promise of beautiful views after a day of hard-fought pitches. Sky divers are guaranteed those few minutes of adrenaline-fueled bliss each and every time. Fishermen will, with enough patience, hook that elusive trout high up on a mountain stream.

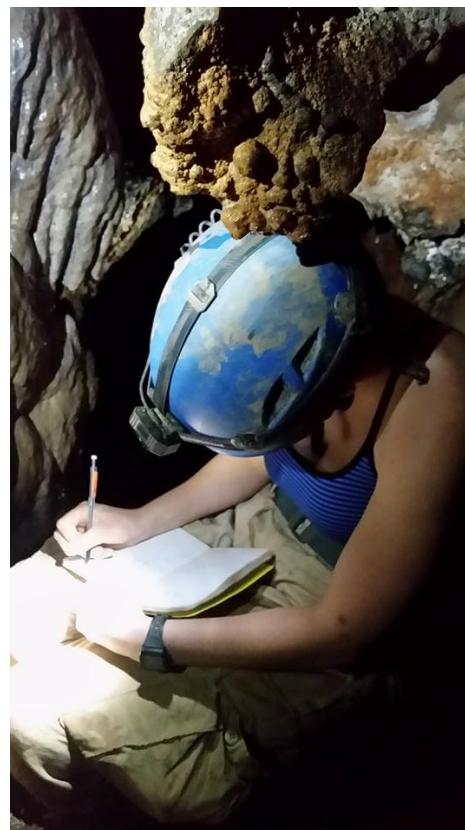
Cavers, of course, have the dream of virgin passage full of rare decorations and continued promise. These special moments may be marred by hours of grueling work to get to them but they *are out there*, the caver keeps telling him or herself.

Much of what was easily won by cavers has been mapped. The old salts will tell you just how plentiful the passage was, hearing names like Friars Hole or Windy Mouth in West Virginia and Peery Saltpeter or Perkins in Virginia. The names go on: Perkins. Slusser's Chapel. Maxwelton. Dry Cave.

Sprawling, easily found exploration is only half the story, though. This new generation has a grand beast to conquer never dreamed about in the days of hemp rope: the re-survey. This magical gem, born from the inadequacy of previous generations gives hope to cavers not sure why we are *still* sleeping in awful cabins and drinking Ol' Mil. The good fight is upon us. Our Great War has just begun.



Next time you leave out from a field station in the early morning, bleary-eyed and feeling the effects of adjunct lager from the night before, mention in passing to the grey haired folks milling about just which cave it is you're going to.



"You're doing that? AGAIN? We did that twenty years ago", they'll remark. And you'll smirk.

Fortunately for this new generation of cave explorers, low-hanging fruit never before seen in a light better than carbide is rarely the whole story. Re-survey projects often yield new passage, sometimes miles of it in larger systems. Thanks to our ancestors fortunate, and all-too-familiar laziness, a new generation has the chance to make their own stories.

Just as last year's cavers have their stories of pits dropping into virgin, bore hole passage, this new crop of explorers will have their own. In a few years we can regale the new lot of cavers about grim, barely passable stream passage and sketchy bolt climbs that led to the most amazing passage.

An amazing act borne from futility,  
we will always love the re-survey.  
Once our hoveled bodies are too  
weak to sleep on the ground and  
our generation has taken to  
purchasing campers too, a new  
crop will be drinking Beast while  
making plans to do it all once  
more.



# So You Want to be a Caver: a primer for trainees

Jason Sargent

This is intended to be a general guide for new cavers on planning, preparing, and gearing up for cave trips. If you're not sure what you need or where to find your next piece of gear, this should help you out. Every caver does it a little different, though, so feel free to adjust the suggestions below as you get a better feel for what you like and want to have with you in a cave. Ask other members about their gear. Cavers can usually be relied on to have strong opinions on gear, brands, pack lists, and many other things.

## Step 1: How do I go caving?

You've never been caving before or maybe you've been to a commercial cave and now you want to get underground. If you're in the Blacksburg area, the VPI Cave Club meets during the school year Fridays at 7pm in Smythe Hall room 146. Meetings are open to the public, so you can still go caving, even if you are not a VT student. If you are not fortunate enough to live in the Blacksburg area, try searching for Grottos (groups of cavers) in your area. The NSS (US National organization for cavers) has a great list of grottos by location at [http://www.nssio.org/Find\\_Grotto.cfm](http://www.nssio.org/Find_Grotto.cfm)



## Step 2: I found a cave trip. Now what?

You've managed to convince/bribe a group of experienced cavers willing to take you somewhere, great! Always ask someone familiar with the cave what to expect and/or bring. Conditions can vary greatly between caves. That said, here are some basics you should always take with you when preparing for a cave trip:

- Change of Clothes & a trash bag – When you come out of the cave, you will usually emerge looking like something between Pig-Pen from Peanuts and walking pile of mud. Having a clean-ish set of clothes to change into will make you feel more like a human and also get you a ride back to town. Forgetting to bring a change of

clothes may result in having to ride back to town wearing a trash bag (shame burrito). The clothes you plan to cave in should be long sleeve, rough, durable, and things you won't miss if they get damaged. Non-cotton material such as polyester/polypropylene (UnderArmor/thermal layers) is usually recommended, but ask the trip leader; sometimes a t-shirt and jeans can be fine.

- Helmet – Most grottos have a few spares to loan new cavers, so you don't have to go buy gear right away.
- Light – You should always have at least 3 sources of light. As with the helmets, most cavers have a few spares to loan for beginners, but it's always a good idea to bring spare batteries.
- Water – The amount depends on the length of your trip, but you should always plan to bring about a liter of water. Gatorade/soda bottles work fine.



- Snack – Trail mix, Snickers bar, Cliff bar, pre-cooked bacon. Bring something to keep your energy up.
- Pack – Something small and durable to carry all your stuff in. Draw string gym bags will usually get shredded within the first trip; ask if the trip leader or grotto has any spare bags.

Step 3: This is great! Where can I get my own gear?

At some point your new cave buddies are going to need their gear back, so now you get to start picking out your own gear. Yay! But where do you start? What should you buy first? Where do you find it? What do you look for? So many questions. Here are a few suggestions to get you started.

- First things first – Gear can get expensive. So if you're budgeting out what equipment to get when, Here's a good general order
- Helmet: Usually found for around \$40-\$60. You need a helmet for any trip you do, so it's a solid first step into your own set of cave gear.
- Lights: Along with the helmet, lights are something you're going to need on every trip and won't cost you too much to get started. Decent starter lights are around \$15-\$25
- Clothes: If you go on more than 1 or 2 trips, you're going to want some dedicated cave clothes. Very cheap, usually under \$20.
- Pack: Having your pack rip open and dump all your stuff out halfway through the cave is pretty awkward. If you're still using that free gym bag, you may want to think about upgrading to something a bit more durable. Decent bags can be found for around \$20.
- Vertical Gear (optional): If you're in an area where vertical caving trips are available, you can get started without having to spend too much on fancy rigs. A set of knots, a locking carabiner, figure 8, and 25'-30' of webbing for a seat harness will run around \$35.
- Take my Money! – I just got my student loan refund. Quick, where can I buy this stuff?
- Club Store – VPI has a club store for beginning vertical gear. Check if your grotto has something similar.
- Old cavers – The more experienced cavers tend to have large collections of gear. From time to time, they will sort through their horde and sell/give things away to new cavers.
- Army Surplus – packs and clothes. More expensive than Goodwill, but more durable
- Goodwill/YMCA/Thrift Store – Great for finding caving clothes and other interesting accessories
- Internets:

Gonzo Guano Gear - <http://www.gonzoguanogear.com>

Inner Mountain Outfitter - <http://www.innermountainoutfitters.com>

On Rope 1 - <http://www.onrope1.com>

Amazon – Figure it out.

Local outdoors shop – Great if you want to check gear out in person

Wal-Mart/Lowes/Other Box Stores – Good for cheap lights, snacks, gloves, Wellies



# My First Caving Experience with the VPI Cave Club to New River Cave

By: Nicholas Polidoro

The day was bright and sunny, with a cool fall breeze. We had just arrived at a “parking spot” just off the road about 100m from the mighty New River. The lack of anything that looked like a hole in the ground we could even feasibly get into worried me slightly; but I was assured otherwise. After getting changed, my friend and I followed the members who were leading the trip up the hill... along with the thirteen other newbies; little did I know this was a lot of people for a caving trip. By the time we got to the top, half of the newbies were winded and not even sure why they signed up for this trip in the first place. Nevertheless, the view was astounding and picture-perfect. After a short safety speech and information on the 10% rule, we were ready to enter the cave.

Lights on and helmets checked on the low hanging ceiling, we began our descent into the darkness. While I had been in cave's before, they were strictly commercial and really well lit up, so this was a very different and exciting experience for me. We came to the first room and all signed into the PVC pipe protected log book. Next we proceeded to turn off all of the lights and actually experience what it was like to be a local creature of the dark.



The trips plan was to make it to the forest room and back without getting too lost. Needless to say, only one managed to happen. The cave was surprisingly large and impressive with its extremely tall passageways. It almost felt surreal. Continuing our track, we suddenly took a sharp turn to a

new room that was elegantly named the BFR. Next, we ventured to the forest room but not without problem. Many of the newbies were scared of heights and not very comfortable with climbing techniques. So this took close to an hour to get everyone into the forest room, and another 20-30 minutes to get back out. This was by far the longest part of the trip with a lot of waiting around. At least we had the forest room to admire in the spare time. We then just followed the path we came in from (mostly) and left the cave with an impressive 100% return rate and no injuries.



Finally, after a few hours underground we came back out into the light. I felt like hermit emerging from a bunker after living underground for a few years where the sunlight hurt my eyes. Nevertheless, I was hooked on caving. After walking back down the trail and getting changed, we headed back to campus where I told all friends how fun and FREE it was to try. Ever since I've been caving at least a few times a month on both horizontal and vertical trips.

## How I Lost My Virginity in a Cave

A short story by: Skippy the Wonder Pig

I guess you could say I was rule follower in high school. Tended to keep to myself. I was on the wrestling team if that means anything to you. I was the only one from my high school that came to Virginia Tech so I was looking forward to a fresh start. Well, week one I got sucked into this thing called the Cave Club, and it was great. The people are super inclusive and fun and different. For instance, this one caver is so into vertical caving that he insists on using the vertical menu over the horizontal menu at IHOP because, "vertical is just superior in every

way, shape, and form." I quickly learned that the Cave Club is so much more than just caving. I also realized that I brought the average age of the club down. Way down. As a matter of fact, I am the *youngest* person in the club. As time went on, one of the older and rather aggressive members of the club started to talk to me about going to Links Cave together for a 'sport trip.' It sounded fun, I like sporty things. They may have thrown some other terms out there like

"techniques trip" and "trip for two" but I really needed to work on my technique because caving was still very new to me and of course it was going to be trip for two... no one else was coming. The week leading up to the trip I kept texting my fellow caver and telling them how excited I was for this 'trip for two.' I told them I was so excited that I wanted to bring my GoPro to film everything. I didn't really understand why they were so hesitant about me bringing it but eventually they said it would probably be a good idea so we can watch everything we do later. The day finally came to go caving. It all happened so fast. I mean it didn't seem too ridiculous that the best way to work on technique is to run through the cave naked. But then we got to the wedding room. When you don't know where you are or how to get out it's hard to get out. Probably due to the implication.



## Doing It Vertically

By Skylar Hopkins

On 4 February 2017, SHopkins went to Clover Hollow and lost her vertical innocence to a horde of eager virtue-eaters: JClifford, JM McGuire, ASkowronski, DConroy, EHahn, and RBlackwell. Trainees WBorin and ESteinberg watched and helped as necessary. What follows is a brief account of the sordid affair:

Upon embarking on their adventure, The Party found that the cave entrance was shockingly dry. No splashing in sight. But contrary to popular opinion, dry caving is nice. You should try it.

After their initial entrance and a bit of poking around in a tight place, The Party found that someone else had been screwing in the cave, and they had left an unsightly mess. Some awkward straddling ensued. JClifford watched and sometimes assisted while the shortest cavers did sketchy things. SHopkins liked that so much that she requested that he do it again later.

Soon after, the cave became a bit deeper – just deep enough that more protection was required. But The Party discovered that JM McGuire had left some of the extra protection at her house. D'oh! Fortunately, JDeighan appeared in spirit with a stiff and crusty surprise. The Party continued, feeling only slightly debased. But first, JClifford – who was taking up the rear, as he does – took an extra moment to show SHopkins and ESteinberg how to make safety and body friction sexy.

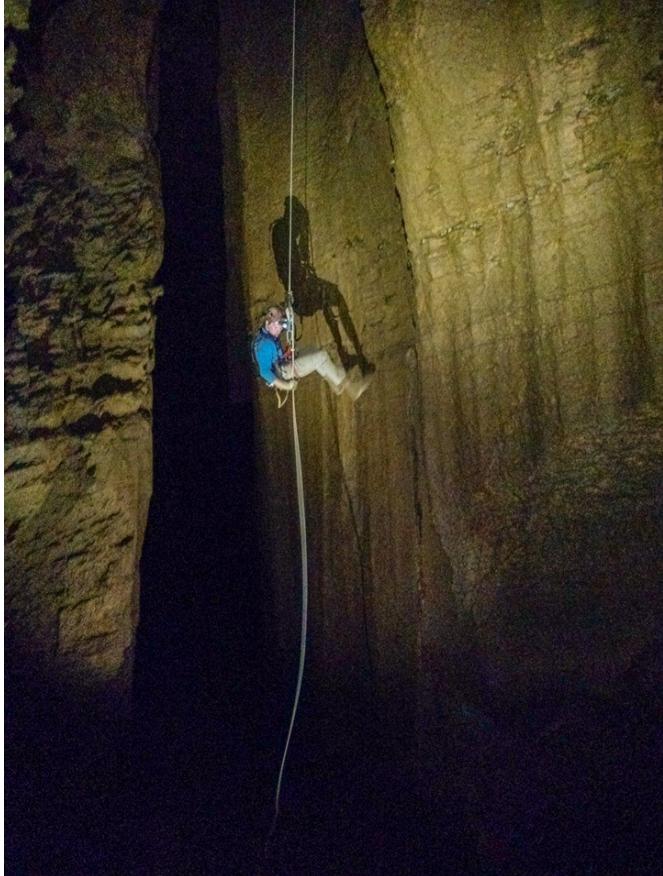
Before long, a very exciting game of “Two Girls, One Hole” began. DConroy and ASkowronski held hands while things got really deep. All voyeurs agreed that it was an intense and romantic moment. Before SHopkins and JM McGuire followed suit, JClifford checked SHopkins out. A lot. Especially her crotch. After she was declared suitable, SHopkins went deep amidst many cheers. She blushed furiously while photos were taken.



But caving isn't all about going deep. You need to go down *and* up. So WBorin and EHahn pleased the cave by going in and out many times, while JClifford and DConroy reminded the men to pace themselves. Spending yourself too soon is frowned upon.

RBlackwell offered to get up with SHopkins, promising to go slow because it was SHopkins' first time. Despite going slow, there was a somewhat worrisome moment where protection malfunctioned, but fortunately no embarrassing accidents resulted. Some extra rope weight fixed the problem, and SHopkins had the opportunity to experience extreme crotch friction. Mmm, burny.

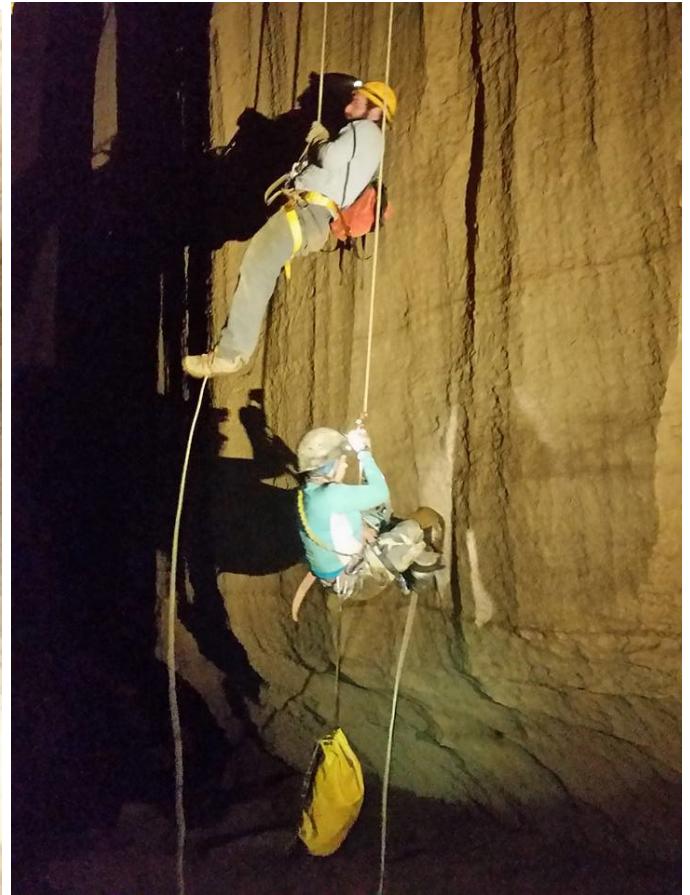
The rest of the affair was what you might expect, with just one important detail worth noting: ASkowronski told JClifford that she never



asks for it but always takes it when it's given. The two were seen sharing body heat thereafter, and there were educational lessons regarding which body regions are the warmest places to put your hands.

Overall, SHopkins found the whole experience to be quite pleasurable. Her partners were commendably gentle, so she was barely sore the next day. There was even romantic stargazing and burrito-devouring after a not-particularly-wet finish. SHopkins lived happily ever after.

The End.



## 50 Candles in the Wind

By: Nick Socky

Preface- Once, a group of cavers ventured into Butler Cave with the intention of rigging a 30 ft rope at The Good Way and starting the survey connection loop from the Christmas passage, through the Dynamite Section and into the Candle Room. Because of the number of people, and the cold, wet conditions experienced from the Pancake Crawl and the Froth and Slosh, the connection into the Candle room was not made. There have been only two other trips back to the Candle Room since this November 2015 trip, with the primary directive of setting and gathering dye-trace traps over the summer. The following trip report is a report of the follow up survey, and certainly will not be the last.



On November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016 the large loop in Butler cave connecting Neptune's Drop and the Good Way was finally completed, by a team tying into the Candle Room. Kelly McCarthy, Andrew Lycas, Nick Socky, and Amy Skowronski entered the cave around 11 A.M. ready for the fun of the pancake crawl and Froth and Slosh (part of the more "sporting" commute trip) BUT THESE PASSAGES WERE COMPLETELY DRY! Much different than the previous experiences going through this passage. We were able to survey from the talus slope and about 75% of the Candle Room in 23 stations and 500.0 Ft! It was a very solid 12 hour trip and there is still

a lot to survey in that area as well! And some potentially good bolt climbs! Thank you Mark Hodge and company for making the Froth and Slosh a little more roomie as well.

On February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Amy Skowronski, Kelly McCarthy, Jonny Prouty, Nick Socky, and Joe Calderone returned to the Candle Room to continue the survey of the area. Amy, Jonny, and Joe ventured off into the joint controlled stream canyon to the North area of the Candle Room, while Nick and Kelly finished off the main area of the Candle Room. Between both teams around 1500' of passage was surveyed, some of it new! More bolt climbing needs to be done in the area because the leads in the upper canyon look potentially very promising. We will not know until we climb. It was a 12.5 hour long trip.



## AND NOW A POEM!

Arise to the blinding light of day. The darkness calling already for much too long, for a late start has happened. The explorers scramble to evade the burning fire. Enter, they do around high noon.

A crowd it is at first, slowly thinned by the various needs of the cave. Some travel here. Others travel there. A small cluster of cavers already lurks in the depths. Four swiftly fly through the trunk. Deeper and deeper they go.

Hiking, wading, climbing, crawling, twisting, turning, frothing, sloshing.... But wait. Old man winter has yet to weep, the plumbing of the earth drier than normal. No longer cold being the foe, friction becomes the main antagonist.

Grunting, your pack moves a few inches forward. Cursing, you move a few inches forward, Oh blast this wretched hole. Curious, it is, the lack of wet and cold causes such a hindrance on ones movement. The compromise, though, is later appreciated.

Like a prairie dog, one by one, the four emerge from their little tunnel passage to the larger world beyond. The walls tower up into a large arching ceiling, guiding the eyes up and then forward into the newly appreciated comfort of space.

Refueling in a room, be it calories, caffeine, or both. Savage the cavers are, as they tear apart the MIO soaked beef-jerky. A dessert of cheese and chocolate to celebrate the journey thus far is also consumed. The harnesses must now be loosened to fit, for comfort in abseiling is of great desire.

Crystalline distractions. Fractured Walls. Mud. The cavers clamber atop a spine of flowstone, where a mud snake waits patiently for its next passenger. Slithering into the darkness below, shouts are made as they disappear into an hourglass of stone.

The flick of a pencil moving rapidly on the book. A laser pointing to a new destination. Flagging tape ripples slightly in the air guiding the cavers onward. Intricately transposing the tales of the cave between dimensions slows time to a crawl.

Misting droplets of condescended vapor swirl upward in four singular beams of light. A chill runs through the bevy as the sinister foe of hypo lurks in its fortitude of darkness and time. Layers of protective propylenic-mail are the only defense.

Far off, a particle of light is born. Then another, then another. A soft glow begins to fill the abyss, from muddy floor to dendritic debris covered ceiling. 50 Candles in the wind are lite. Warmth and light brings a balance to the darkness. The Candle Room is born.



# The Life and Times of A.I. Cartwright

By Richard Cobb – VPI 215

The first known biography of A.I. Cartwright begins “Aloysius Ignatz Cartwright was born at a very early age.” After that, accounts differ.

The VPI Cave Club Student Grotto of the NSS came into being in January 1943. A year later, in the first issue of the first newsletter, the Grotto Grapevine (January 21, 1944), we find an A.I. Cartwright listed at the top of the list of Staff, with the position of Chief Editor-In-Chief. He was to hold this position in the newsletter for the next several years. This first issue of “The Last Frontier for the Pioneer (Published Since 1944)” gave no further clues as to who A.I. Cartwright was. Presumably he had become well known in the first year of the Grotto in order to have such a listing of prominence, but that story is lost in the mists of time.

We get our first written clues in the third issue of the Grapevine (February 18, 1944) with a *Who Done It?* article, and also a sketch of what A.I. might look like.

THIS COULDN'T BE CARTWRIGHT COULD IT? -- HEY COULDN'T IT BE?



## Who Done It?

When you're flat upon your back,  
Crawling thru some devilish crack,  
And your canteen pulls out and jerks,  
Who done it?  
Every caver knows!

When you're chimneying  
<illegible> -knees and elbows-  
Going up where – only God knows,  
If you slip and fall below,  
Just an hundred feet or so,  
Who done it?  
Every caver knows-  
It's Cartwright! A.I.!!

—R.N.S.

Apparently A.I. is still a bit of a mystery. He takes a darker turn in the fourth issue (March 3, 1944), in a poem titled *Caving Saving*, by R.N. Southworth. It is a moralistic and cautionary tale of the caver, “I. Knowhow”, who has a habit of getting ahead of the rest of his group and exploring leads on his own. Which leads him to an unfortunate end:

*Clover Hollow has side passes galore, Some of them with quite a thin floor,  
I. Knowhow started to explore. He broke through, now he is no more!  
A broken neck was the repartee Cartwright gave to this smarty.*

The character of A.I. continues to evolve, and in the 5<sup>th</sup> issue of the Grapevine (March 17, 1944) we find Chapter 1 of his biography (Chapter 2 was either never written, or was in one of several issues that are missing from the records). This biography, written by E.F. Moore, begins with the line at the beginning of this article, in which we learn, for the first time, what the initials A.I. stand for.

In this accounting, Cartwright was “one of the Neanderthal men (who were the original speleos)”. He began his caving career 500 years ago in a large cave in Italy. After staying in this cave for many years, and “exploring millions of miles of passages”, when he was several thousand miles from the entrance, he was surprised to see daylight. It turns out he had arrived at the entrance to Clover Hollow Cave. Thus, in February 1491, emerging from Clover Hollow, A.I. was the first to discover America, beating Columbus by a year. But, because he never went back to Europe and announced his discovery, he never received credit.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> issue (September 1, 1944), we find a much more credible version by R. C. Caldwell. At least some parts are best left verbatim:

*This mythical character was adopted as an active member into our club almost two years ago, from a picture showing Bob Hope. Perhaps some of us can still remember this movie, in which one of the characters “Just wasn't there”. Cartwright is often erroneously referred to as Yehudi's first cousin; to my knowledge he is absolutely no relation to Yehudi [1].*

*There were so many happening<sic> that could not be attributed to any of the other members of the club that it was found necessary to get some one who wasn't to blame these things on. The loss of food, falling rocks, rain storms, hot-seats – all these and innumerable more incidents were accredited to Cartwright's long list of accomplishments. The adoption of this beloved character into the club can be attributed to one Crouch[2], who has long since departed from our midst. The idea spread rapidly and Cartwright was readily accepted as a member by everyone. Later he was given the name Aloysius Ignats by R.N. Southworth, ex-poet laurete of this paper....*

*As time went on Cartwright became more and more infamous, causing flat tires, light gremlins, tight squeezes, etc; as new members came into the club, his real identity was kept a secret. He often signed Pledgee's cards and did other things that flesh-n-blood members did. He became Chief-Editor-in-Chief of our paper at the first staff meeting and has retained that position ever since.*

The full article is a bit longer, with some mention of his earlier “supposed” feat of discovering America and other information, but the above is the key part. [Author note: I have searched for the Bob Hope movie mentioned, but have found nothing. Apparently it was not very memorable, even by 1944.]

Also in this issue of the Grapevine there is a special announcement that A.I. Cartwright had registered for a physics class at VPI, and was doing pretty well, but was ultimately dropped from class because of too many absences. “That's a real cave man for you – when he can't even stay above ground long enough to attend classes”.

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[1] Yehudi was a character from 1930s Bob Hope Radio shows: <https://www.waywordradio.org/yehudi-did-it/>

[2] No other mention in the club records provides any information on who, or what, 'Crouch' was

A.I. remains the Chief-Editor-in-Chief of the Grapevine through the Spring 1947 issues. There is no record of any Grapevines being published again until 1951, by which time it had become a slightly more serious publication, focused more on new exploration, techniques, speleology and cave biology. A.I. fades into history, at least in the written record. In fact, there is over a 20 year span when A.I. Cartwright seems to have completely vanished from the written record. For many of those years records are sparse, with no newsletters or other publications, so it is possible he was not completely forgotten. But I have not been able to find a single mention of him in the surviving records.

### The Tech Troglodyte

Today everyone knows the 'hairy ape' on the cover of most Tech Troglodytes is A.I. Cartwright. ***That has not always been so.*** After carefully reviewing the records, I am convinced that there is a minimum 6 year period where the club mascot was simply known as *The Troglodyte*, or 'hairy ape'.

The mascot first appeared on the cover of the first issue of *The Troglodyte*, published in February 1962. It is a familiar image that has appeared on, or in, nearly every issue since. Other than appearing on the masthead next to the title *The Tech Troglodyte*, there is no mention of who or what the mascot is. In the second issue (April 1962) a credit is given to John Danner for being the creator of "the troglodyte" image.

That the mascot is not yet known as A.I. Cartwright is reinforced by a couple of Letters to the Editor. In the Fall 1963 issue, past Grotto president Jim Quinlan writes:

*"I like most of the content of the Tech Troglodyte, but I deplore the use of the hairy ape as an emblem or mast-head. Am I alone in my adverse criticism of the beast?"*

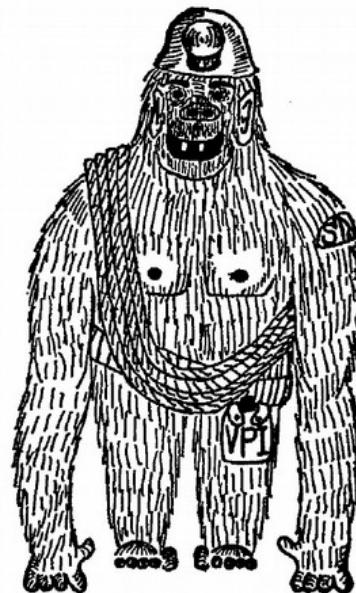
In the next issue (Fall 1964) Herb Klein (Class of '59 and former Cave Club member) writes that

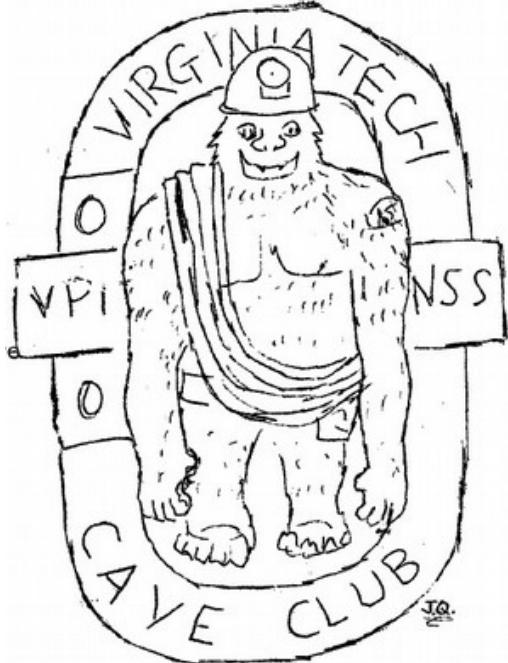
*"I disagree with Jim Quinlan's objection to cover. Most of us looked like that after a long caving trip in those days."*

In the meeting minutes for October 30, 1964 a report from the Patch Committee included passing around a sketch of a proposed design, which is described in the minutes: "It consisted mainly of The Troglodyte or "Hairy Ape" superimposed on a carabiner." And in a report from the Membership Committee the previous week regarding membership cards, a motion was made to "have an imprint of the Troglodyte, the 'Hairy Ape'".

The Spring 1965 issue of the *Troglodyte* announces that VPI "finally has a patch".

"The design is a full-length likeness of John Veitch inside a carabiner. John is wearing a hard hat and light, has a rope over his shoulder, a canteen at his side, and his hands dragging the ground. His looks are Oriental, but this is understandable, since the patches were ordered from Japan. With six different colors, VPI can truthfully boast a 'colorful' patch."





This obviously describes the patch that we still use today. But, again, no mention is made of it being A.I. Cartwright. There seems to be no other mention of the 'model' John Veitch in any existing records, so that may remain another mystery.

The first ever Cave Club Banquet was held in March 1966. The event is described in the Summer 1966 issue of the *Troglodyte*. In the write-up by Anne Whittemore, she mentions that "The Hall was decorated to give a cave atmosphere, complete with the Cave Club's own mascot, The Troglodyte."

At the recent Banquet, in a conversation with Bob Simonds, he recalls making The Troglodyte (a nearly life size model) for that first banquet, and he confirmed that at that time it was only known as 'the hairy ape'.

## 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Perhaps The Troglodyte would have remained forever unnamed, (and A.I. Cartwright a forgotten bit of fading history) except for one event. 1968 was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the VPI Student Grotto, and the Silver Anniversary Edition of *The Troglodyte* (Winter 1968[3]) was devoted to that history. And A.I. Cartwright came roaring back to life, bigger than ever.

The editors had spent significant time poring through the early editions of *The Grapevine* and other history, and apparently been taken with the idea of the A.I. Cartwright character of the early editions. Thus the Editor's Column for the anniversary edition was written by the 'Guest Editor' A. I. Cartwright. A.I. is also mentioned in *A True Historie of the club article by Mike Frieders and Bob Barlow*. And there is a reprint of R.C. Caldwell's article from the September 1944 issue of *The Grapevine*.

At that point there is still no apparent connection between A.I. Cartwright and The Troglodyte, but one can imagine that connection would come easily and naturally. However, such things happen first amongst the members, and only somewhat later, after they have become established lore, is a passing mention possibly made in a publication such as this.

In the following edition of *The Troglodyte* (Spring 68) there is a Clover Hollow Trip Report. While it does not mention A.I. Cartwright, it has the first mention of the Clover Hollow Library I have found in the written record.

However, in the Spring 1969 article about Banquet, there is this paragraph:

*"On a more serious note, the A.I. Cartwright Honorarium, given in recognition of continuing interest in, support of, and fellowship with the VPI Cave Club" was given to John R. Holsinger, Jack Stellmack and Don Cournoyer."*

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[3] When the *Troglodyte* was published on a Quarterly basis, the 'Winter' edition was for the Quarter January thru March. Thus the order for a typical scholastic year would be F67/W68/S68

So, in the year between A.I. first appearing in the Anniversary Edition and the Banquet a year later, Cartwright has become enough of a fixture in Cave Club lore that the Club's new and most prestigious award is named after him. However, we still cannot infer whether or not A.I. has yet become synonymous with The Troglodyte. In fact, there is no definitive statement in the records that the two characters have become one until the Spring 1973 Trog. However it becomes obvious from that entry that it had been accepted as common knowledge for some time at that point.

In the meantime, A.I. Cartwright continues to be a presence in The Troglodyte. In the Fall 1969 issue, under the heading "Questions Addressed to Our Founder", we have that A.I. has become an advice columnist, answering intimate questions specific to cavers. The Fall 1970 issue includes a reprint of the first A.I. biography (where he discovers America before Columbus).

Then in Winter 1971 we find A.I. Cartwright is the author of the article on Banquet 1971. One of the awards is a Guano Cluster to "Robyn Wick, for doing a really fine job at constructing a remarkable likeness of old A.I. himself." While there is no description of what this likeness looked like, it is not too big a stretch of the imagination that it is the "hairy ape", which has become, at this point, synonymous with A.I. However, while that is the most likely interpretation, it is not solid evidence.

In the Spring 1971 issue, Mailbag reports on some mischief involving A.I.:

*"A couple of years ago we got a questionnaire from the local congressman who was up for re-election. So, several of us got together, pooled our resources, answered questions concerning opinions on the Draft, Vietnam, and political affiliations, made it totally absurd, signed it A.I. Cartwright and sent it in. Well, a couple of weeks later, we got a response telling us where A.I. stood in political terms. I think we put extremes on the left and right ends of his poll."*

In the Fall 1971 issue A.I. is the author of an article titled The Slide, reporting on caver adventures involving a broken water main at the end of the '71 NSS Convention.



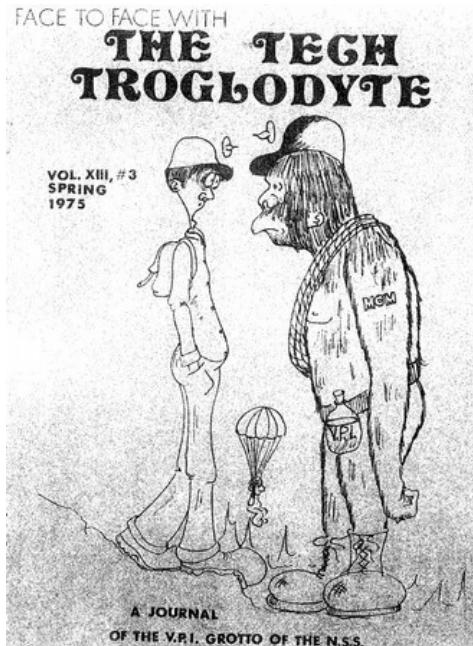
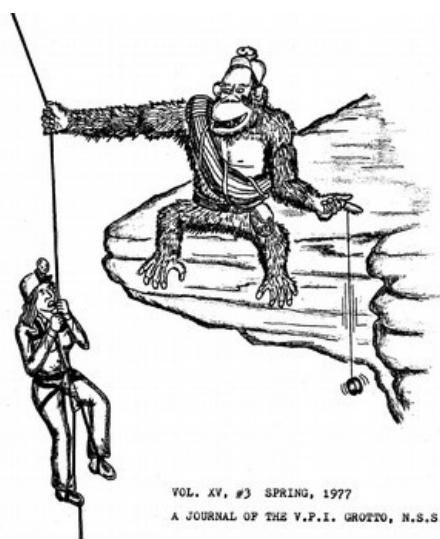
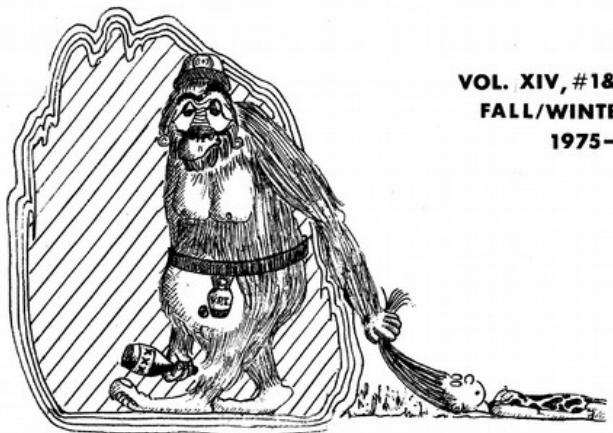
In the Fall 1972 issue he writes a letter to the editor, urging the club to do more caving (in addition to parties) because he was getting lonely in Clover Hollow. It must have had some success, as he is also the author of a trip report (with Grotto members) for New River cave (the first indication that perhaps he knows more caves than just Clover Hollow). Finally, in this same issue, is a report in the Grapevine column about a frat having stolen the "life size likeness of A.I. Cartwright", and of the successful

recovery raid by Steve Hall and Don Davison. Based on Trog articles, it would appear that there were two likenesses of A.I.; the one made by Bob Simonds for the 1966 Banquet, and the one made by Robyn Wick for the 1971 Banquet. It is not clear which one was stolen by the frat. However, this is another good inference that A.I. and The Troglodyte have become one and the same.

This matter is put to rest definitively in the Spring 1973 issue, where Don Davison publishes the lyrics to a song he wrote, The Troglodyte. Introducing the lyrics, he writes:

*"The inspiration for this song is A.I. Cartwright, the V.P.I. Grotto mascot, who appears on our patch."*

A.I. Cartwright came "back to life" with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cave Club, and has become such a core part of the Club's lore and legends that it is hard to imagine it was ever not so. As we now approach the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Club, A.I. Cartwright has been featured on numerous Troglodyte covers and artwork, and has become an enduring symbol of our extended family/organization.



# Screwing around in the UK

Daniel Crowder

It was a dark and stormy night as we made our way slowly across the English channel and back into the English speaking world. I was particularly excited for that stage of travel as we had been about nine weeks in Spanish, French and Catalan speaking regions. Due to the relatively taciturn nature of my wife Ellen I was largely in charge of the communication aspects of the trip, this is generally true in the English speaking world as well but I digress. We disembarked from the ferry to the welcoming car of our dear friend Tarn Stroud. Some of you may remember her as the person who taught us the games of the body traverse and the pass the webbing around two people standing on a frying pan. She took us back to her apartment in Dorchester and we visited for a couple of days going to Corfe Castle, the Cerne Abbas Giant and other places of intrigue before setting off on a road trip to Wales. The drive out to Wales involved going through the port at Bristol and into Newport. As we crossed the bridge Tarn switched the radio to a Welsh station and much to my chagrin I realized we were going back into a place where I would be lost at sea linguistically. These people spell bus stop Bws Stop for God's sake. Needless to say the cave we were doing the next day was called Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (ask me how to pronounce it at the Pub sometime).



The caves in this part of Wales were a bit colder than ours here in western Virginia. The particular cave we visited on that day made up for this by being wet. We started at the Cwm Dwr entrance high up in the sheep paddock and exited the cave by another improbably named entrance further down the hill. On our way in we hit some nice phreatic passage that was mostly dry and not too crawly. We generally trended down in fairly big passage until we hit a phreatic section of the cave with a large amount of running water. Getting into this passage required a nasty down climb which involved Ellen losing a foothold and kerplunking into the creek. It is safe to assume that from this point forward Ellen was of a generally grouchy disposition. I would like to take an aside and say that the furry suits that the Brits use are really nice for wet passage though.

Ever thought you needed a wetsuit but then thought that it would be too much for what you were doing? Well the furry suit is an adult onesie with neoprene cuffs. It is made out of fleece and doesn't retain water. Think Peppy's waffle suit but less dumb because it isn't on Peppy.

In our glorious furry suits we made our way down the roaring stream passage. I stopped to wait for and check on grumpy Ellen at one point which turned out to be a grave mistake. As I started caving again I noticed a that I had lost the group. The next thing I noticed was that I was under water. I thought to myself, "self this is really annoying." After surfacing I asked the British Cavers about this but all they had to say was "oh did you find one of the midget traps then?" The rest of the stream passage was spent gracefully diving into these traps to try and hit the other side before going underwater fully. Never let them tell you that Her Majesty's subjects don't strictly adhere to rule five.



After caving along in this manner for some time we climbed back up to the phreatic stuff. Ellen was ready to go having already eaten her requisite Cadbury bar and after a small amount of deliberation at a crossroads we were free to go to the pub. It should be noted that I had a harder time ordering a Guinness from a Welsh publican than a French one, C'est la vie.

After a few days of going to places like Bletchley Park and Nelson's HMS Victory we made our way to the city of Wells. This is the smallest city in England much like Wells has the smallest yada yada yada... This is also where the movie Hot Fuzz was filmed which made us all quite happy to run around and act like we were having a shoot out. It should be noted that none of us got too close to the church though.



Having made asses of ourselves thoroughly in the community of Wells we made our way to the Shepton Mallet Caving Club Hut. There are about five cave clubs in the area of Shepton Mallet by my approximation and all of them have field stations. This seems like a monstrous waste of resources to me but I do have to say that the SMCC has a corner on the market in my mind since they are quite convenient to the Hunter's Pub. The SMCC also boasts having the Rude Nora light manufacturers among their membership so borrowing a helmet there is almost a religious experience.

Speaking of religious experiences we also went to a cave the next day called Upper Flood that had a gate that looked like the hatch on a tank. This is important later, I believe the literary folks call it foreshadowing, Captain Ed calls it annoying (speaking of Captain Ed we found a great dramatic representation of him when we were in Chile I'll include it here for your viewing pleasure).

We caved down some small stream passage for about a mile and hung a left, I remember it being a left but it also could have been an up, it's caving people. We ran across some booties that seemed to have been placed there by gnomes for our use. Donning the booties and cleaning ourselves off we made our way into a room of pure white calcite formation. I'm talking the whole room people, seriously this room was whiter than all the Skowronski's put together, THAT'S WHITE. The trip back out was uneventful but Ellen was much happier because she had extra snack food this time. Unfortunately everyone on the trip exited the cave before me. I was saddened by this because I wanted to pop out the door and yell "TANK COMMANDER!" I, therefore, decided to wait until everyone had exited and shut the hatch behind me. After waiting five seconds I fulfilled my dream only to see a rather startled family of four with two small children standing directly in front of me. Tarn explained that I was from the New World and that we did get off on doing loud stupid stuff. They seemed mollified by this explanation and moved off through the field.



After this caving trip we went back to the field station, got changed and went to the Hunters. I ordered the giant bowl of melted cheese dish which was fabulous and we played shovehaypenny which is like shuffleboard but smaller and more drunk.

A week and a half after all this went down I drunkenly crawled into Philip Balister's camper at Picnic. He yelled "who the fuck is in my camper?" at which point I began to beat him with a dirty sock. It's good to be home.

# Met Grotto Dig

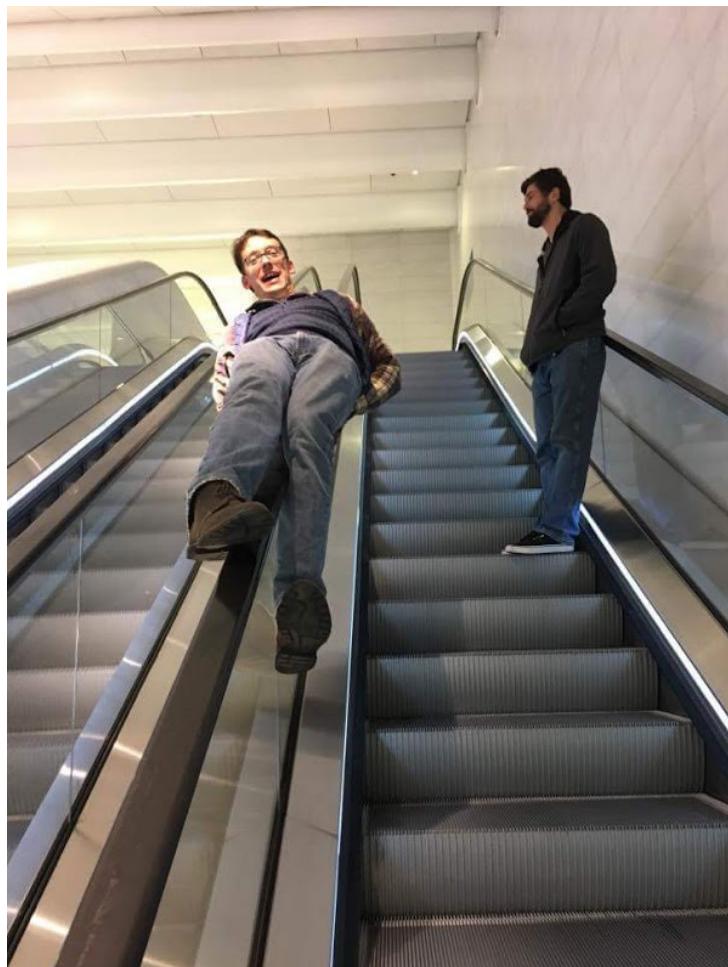
By Andrew Lycas

Saturday November 5, 2016

A group of 12 cavers, including three VPI cavers, Jeramie Clifford, Jason Sargent, and Andrew Lycas arrived at one of many entrances to a long NY cave system at 10:30 pm. The original intention was to do a couple hour through trip through a portion of this cave, however there was trouble at the entrance.

As with many trips, it was difficult to first find the entrance. With the hole found, the group cleared away debris, and found this entrance was blocked and was not the route our trip leader had thought it was. After a few more minutes of searching, the proper entrance was found, but the proper digging tools were not brought to clear the debris in front of this entrance. It was decided to instead do a out and back trip from the other entrance we were previously going to exit.

Once arriving at the new entrance, the cavers discovered that our entrance into the system from here was going to be much easier than expected. In the past, cavers had been required to do a 200 ft crawl to clear out the larger walking entrance from the back, but this time the group discovered that a few pieces of wood had to be moved out of the way to open up the walking entrance. The group entered the cave which starts out with a room roughly 15x15' large with a small entrance hole in the top that more experienced cavers were talking about rappeling down from in the past.



From this room the cavers needed to do a short 10' climb down into the bore hole. The passage itself was 6'x 8', with a fairly smooth dirt/rock floor. Where we dropped in, there were two leads, and the leader of the trip said we were going in the downhill direction. With that guidance the team walked down the bore.

The passage itself was fairly non descriptive. There were markings of explorers past, some as late as the 1840s! Since the cave itself is fairly close to the surface, probably only 20-30' of overburden, there was more plant life in this cave than I am normally used to. We walked about half a mile until the passage stops very abruptly. The old timers on the trip reminisced that you could at one time keep going down this passage, but it has since filled in and you can no longer get through. It was at this point we helped out with a small

digging project and chipped at the filled in passage with a hammer. This area could probably benefit from more advanced digging techniques, but there are plenty of concerns voiced about doing anything too drastic.

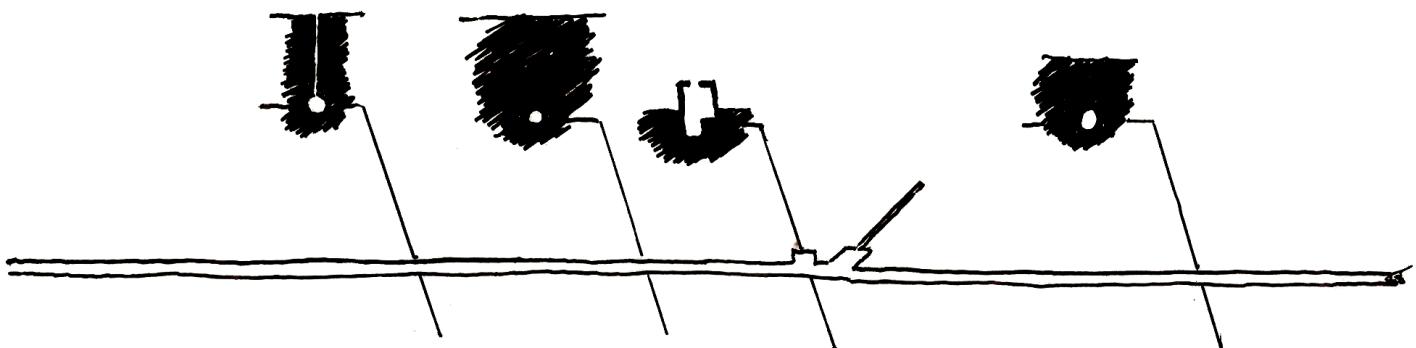
At this point, we turned around and started the trek back. Once back at the entrance, the group was very split up, and with everybody still having plenty of energy, those in front decided to keep going down the passage in the other direction. This passage was the same as the rest of the cave, except with more bats. Jason and Jeramie counted over 100 bats which included big brown, little brown, northern long eared, tri-colored, and eastern small footed. Unfortunately not all those on the trip understood that loud noises wake up bats, so there were a few flying around us during our trek.

This section of cave was less decorated with old signatures, and had signs of more recent cavers. Thankfully there were no major displays of modern graffiti, just old infrastructure from the original project. We did come across another entrance, up a 20' vertical chimney. After some discussion, we determined that we would leave it as a voice connection to the surface, as nobody was comfortable climbing the probably too tight shaft. We turned around after about an hour of walking. There is still plenty of cave to see, but it was apparent that some on the trip had had enough.

Once back at the entrance, we collected as a group and made the climb back out. We covered the entrance, as to not advertise where it was, and headed back to the cars. All the while discussing how we have to come back and check out how far into the cave we could have gone, had it not been for us turning around. There was also discussion of other local caves in the area that were worth checking out.

Like any good trip, we all went to the local diner to swap stories before everybody parted their separate ways. Thankfully, we were able to stay at a local caver's apartment for the night, and then bright and early the next day headed back to Blacksburg.

Below is a map of the cave.



## On Links and Trainees (first time caving!!)

By Reilly Blackwell



Links cave is located at the Bat Ranch, and is a fun little trip. It contains the most technical sections of any cave in our immediate area, including several passages canyoning without much visible floor. Links is popular for techniques trips, the most educational of all trips, due to its dryness and the fact that a capable caver can make it through in under half an hour. As I spoke to more and more cavers, I found that many people's first cave was either Links or New River, which has led me to the conclusion that there are two types of people. I fall into the former category—I went to Links as my first cave, in August 2016. I only almost-died 5 or so times and have been caving ever since, inspired to continue by the rewarding feeling of making it through challenge after challenge.

Links has some fun parts, some parts that get fun once you know how to do them, and some parts that

I'm pretty sure will never be fun. The Hobbyhorse, where you must straddle a rock with a lot of exposure and scoot over it, is the last sort; my memories of navigating it are mostly blanked out by terror, but I'm kind of a wimp about heights. The Nasty, a demanding canyoning passage, is technically difficult, but very satisfying to complete. The Bucket Climb is a popular Elementary Climbing sign-off spot, which I got through very ungracefully by using a human as the "bucket."

There is, of course, the spot where an unfortunate visitor had to be blasted out after getting stuck. This provides a good teaching moment as well, as the image of me surrounded by exploding rock and heckling cavers provided me with plentiful motivation to never get badly stuck in a cave.

Although the trip was difficult, since I was in bad shape, very scared of heights, wearing a very slippery jacket, and had nonfunctional hands, it prepared me for all the caves I've been in since. I was told that in the realm of horizontal caving, "If you can do Links you can do anything," and that rule has held true, giving me the confidence to tackle other caves without fear. This impression is echoed by Skippy the Wonder Pig (Will Borin), who also went to Links on his first day caving. He has said that it similarly made him feel like he could do any other cave he wished. TPO agrees that it is a

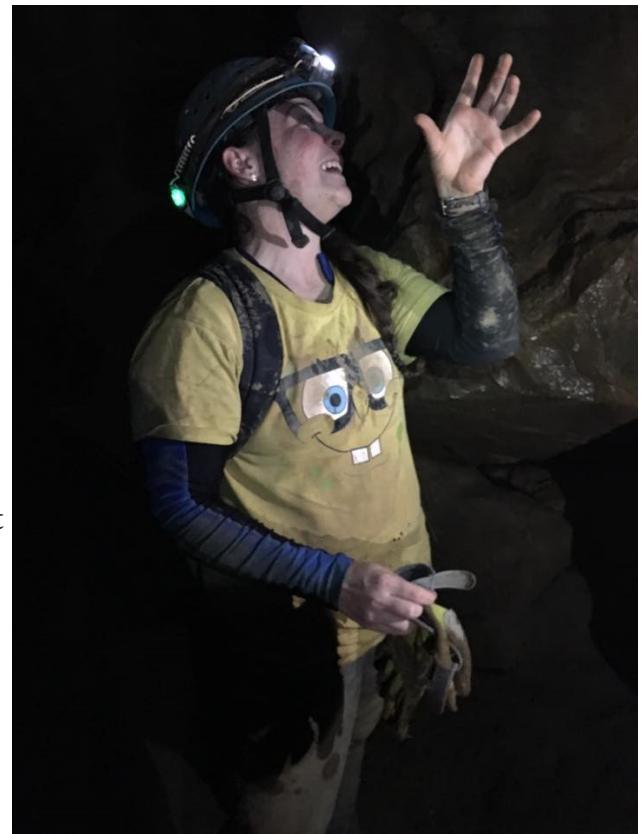


good teaching cave, “if people have good upper body strength,” and has taken several people in Links as a first-time trip.

Rock climbers, who are used to being in heightsy situations, may still have a hard time—the techniques necessary to successfully navigate Links are very different from those rock climbers use on a wall. Haden Bricker, a climber, describes her first time in Links as “terrifying” but feels that it prepared her for all her subsequent caves, once she learned how to use her feet differently. Booker’s first-time trip of climbers had a similar reaction, being described as “not the biggest fans of not being able to use their hands and feet... like when climbing.” In summary, climbers should become acquainted with rule number five and will subsequently do fine.

Not everyone agrees with these choices: “I have no fucking idea why some of our members feel Links is suitable for first-time cavers” (El Presidente, 2016).

Chris Garguilo “usually avoids it,” because on past trips, the canyon has turned first-timers off from caving altogether. David DeBarnardis has experienced this as well and therefore agrees with CGarguilo. Jenn McGuire has had people get stuck in Links on their first cave trips (and has been stuck in there herself, thanks to our glorious leader!), but continues to take first-time trainees there, as she feels it is a good teaching cave. Didi Orndorff went on Links her first time caving and enjoyed it very much, but one of the members of her trip got freaked out in a canyon and had to turn back, and has not been caving since. As you can see, Links seems to filter out a certain kind of person—and maybe it is too effective a filter! So the question is, is Links a good first cave? In the words of P Money/Honeybuns/Cash Moneyhun/\*assorted raspberry noises\*, “For certain legendary individuals.” For people in general, you can’t know until you’ve gone!



# Caving as a Climber

Rowen Berman

Before I joined the Cave Club I climbed for eight years, and also worked at a climbing gym for two. This meant I was a fairly decent climber and that I had spent a lot of time with other climbers. Though, I haven't been caving for nearly as long, there is definitely a few notable differences between the two sports.

First off, the cave club has probably been the most welcoming and disgustingly friendly group of people that I have ever met. You guys are definitely quirky, but everyone in the VPI cave club has been super nice and always ready to answer a few questions from a clueless freshman.

Second, there's also not as much an air of competition; everyone can take their time and do what they're comfortable with, and you can take your time in learning new techniques. When you're starting to cave you aren't pushed to learn vertical techniques.

The activity itself is really different. The first time I went into a cave I was scared shitless even though I can handle heights, and I can handle closed spaces. However, it is a completely different experience underground, with a dim club-headlamp and a handful of people I had never met before. I thought that caving would basically be like underground bouldering, which it is to some extent, but there is so much more to caving than scrabbling over rocks, to get from point A to point B. There are formations sprouting out of the ground and bright orange salamanders in pools of water. Rock climbing brings you to beautiful and exciting places, but caves are like a whole other world.

Another difference is the technique and the gear. In climbing you basically use either brute strength or good footwork to move yourself forward. You have tiny pointy shoes for finding little crannies in the rock face to stand on. So far in caving, my technique has been to shuffle and shove my body into positions so that I don't fall into that really scary dark hole, all the while wearing rain boots from Walmart. This is not even mentioning canyoning, sliding around in mud, and wading through streams. Caving also uses a different harness, different knots, and when they say they're climbing, they're usually climbing rope instead of a rock face. By climbing rope it also means that they're using ascenders or knots, and not climbing rope like in high school gym.

Finally, with all differences aside, I love both sports. They're challenging and push the limits of what you can do, and sometimes what you're willing to do. You also have to be cautious and have fun.



# A Shakesbeerian Poem

By Nick Socky

To drink, or not to drink. That is the question. For if thou consumed thine blessed liquid, alas. I cannot cave.

And not to cave is to die! To live, to die, to cave....how simple, yet complex, this existential conundrum is.

Hurtling us towards our own demise, upon this bedding plane of our own addictions. To live, to cave, to drink. Forever, caught in this cycle in which one day we will hopefully find that borehole of our dreams

floating down that subterranean river of beer,

Drifting softly into an unknowing bliss of peace and freedom, at long last detached from the wretched surface world of sobriety and sunlight. To cave. To drink. There is no question.



## On Discoveries

By Deirdre Conroy

The following describes just one gut-wrenching, sphincter clenching story of old:

Exploration around the mouth of an in-cave 404ft pit. This explorer—who may or may not be a long-time NSS librarian—on *this* particular day is alone. He is traversing the lip of this enormous pit—100' in diameter—with nothing but a carbide lamp, a sketchbook, and a compass, to map the possible booty hiding on the other side of the pit's expanse. He is scooting his way along this ledge, that is about 7 inches across, and positioned immediately beside the lip of this large pit. The entirety of his feet and his lower legs hang off this ledge, into the black yawning below. The ledge is beginning to grow thinner—7 inches squeezes to 6. His back is pressed against the wall behind him. He is not looking down at this point. He is beginning to notice the octave of the three waterfalls roaring into this pit. One is 200ft tall, one is 150ft tall, and one is 300ft tall. If you have never heard the sound of not one but *three* waterfalls cascading down 150ft+ onto hard rock below, within a confined space, essentially a room, let me tell you—it is not only impossible to hear another human talking when they are only a couple feet from you, but it is difficult to hear oneself think. The noise is immense. The noise crawls through your eardrums into your skull where it rattles your brain so much as to muck up your thinking. Handling the anxiety of poising oneself on 6 inches of muddy, sloping ledge over a drop of 40 stories—so tall that if you fell, you would be able to emit a full scream, take a breath, and then emit another full scream—amid the intense sound of this place is something beyond the comprehension of many. To make matters more exciting, this particular human was working his way along a 6 inch wide ledge when his light gave out. As carbide lamps are rather complex to re-light, and as he was out of carbide to relight said light with, this particular human was in a bit of a hard spot. One might say he was even "between a rock and a hard place"—although that 'other' hard place was at the end of a 400ft fall. This particular human pulled out a flint, and struck his carbide lamp, again and again. In the moments of sparking between strikes, he took advantage of the light, and scooted himself back to safety, downslope, along this ledge, along this pit edge. It is rumored to have taken 17+ strikes to get himself back onto the safety of the chock-stone bridge that acts as the 'safe zone' above this particular pit. Or so, at least the stories say.

My interest in this particular story is the damn courage that this person showed to do this kind of exploration, alone, along this pit edge, as this pit is really something otherworldly. This past spring break, I went to TAG. On the Friday of our trip, March 10, myself, Ryan Maurer, Eric Hahn, Emily Dillon, and David Crawford began our trip into Fern Cave. A special mentor of ours had told us that morning that it would be a life-changing experience. He was right. Fern was unbelievable. The seemingly-

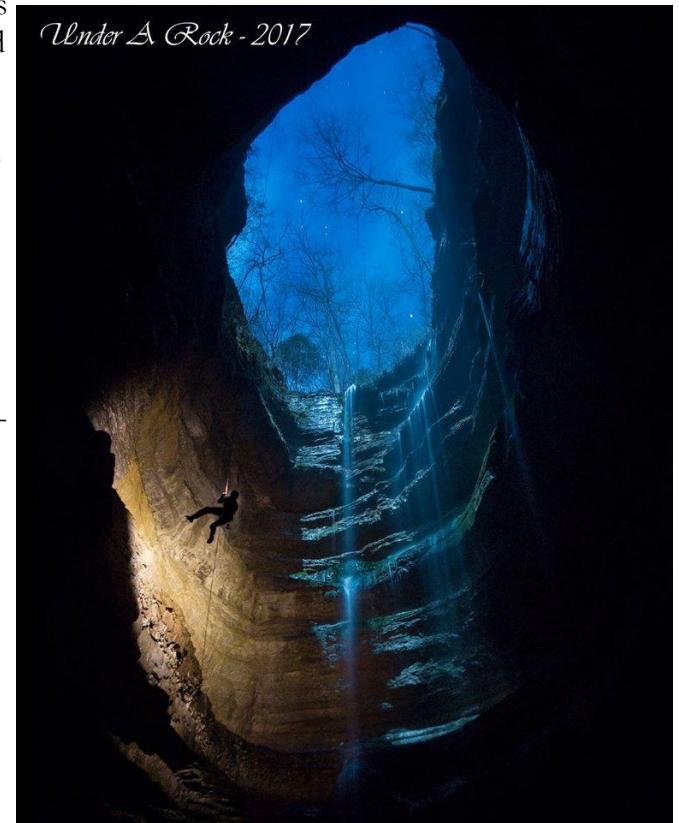
normal stream passage before the beginning of the ledge traverse gives no hints as to the expanse of air that hides below. When I first clipped in to that line and peeked over the edge into Surprise, I felt as if balanced on the thin, decorative upper ledges of a cathedral, only trafficked by the crows and window-washers. Emily and I rappelled down first into the hurricane that existed at the bottom of the waterfalls, robust with spring rains. The winds, mist spray, and deafening sound of that water made the pit deck feel like an entire-



ly different world from the quiet (only relatively) of the bridge from which we rigged. We were soaked within minutes, but too amazed to care. We quickly tandem ascended to rave about the pit to the rest of our team waiting above, and to stress that it may not be wise to wait down there in the water and the winds. On the ascent, the waterfall on the far side of the room was much easier to get a view of. It has been measured at ~400ft tall, stretching from a silvery cord at the top to a wavering wall of whitewater in the 100ft before it slams onto the pit floor below. As for the pit itself—I had never been within something that *enormous* before—pitch in all directions, rope reaching into black above me. For those nebulous middle 200ft where both the enormous breakdown pile and the rigging ledge are both out of sight, only Emily’s headlamp, maybe 40ft below me, was my connection to tangibility. I shouted down to Emily when we got to the pigtail—the marker that we were only 150ft from the top—only to realize that the words were swallowed by the incredible sound. I know I walked away from that trip feeling pretty exuberant, with my understanding of speleology and the potential of cave exploration forever changed. We left feeling—like the giants before us—pretty ‘fired up’.

You may now be wondering why the hell you should care about TAG, or about this cave, or about this crazy Deirdre girl at all. I’m not the point. This cave, in this particular part of the world, is the place where many SRT techniques really got their first push into being. It is near this cave that the now deepest pits in the country were discovered, where incredible formations were found, and where many historical moments of American caving occurred. Another interesting tidbit about this cave was that at the time of Surprise’s discovery, it was the deepest pit in America, 437’ deep at the older rig-point. Here’s another thing—it was found by Bill Torode, who was 17 years old when he first stumbled upon it. Granted, he did not stumble, because the roar of the waterfalls flowing into that thing roar from 100’ upstream. But his discovery was an accident. He was eating his sandwich at the cave entrance—a waterfall with two holes leading into black beneath it—when he felt he should catch up with his trip, and ran into the entrance closest to him. He did not see their lights, so he hurried onward, worried he was really far behind. Continues, continues, until a yawning black opens up in front of him. He throws one rock, doesn’t hear a thing. He throws another rock, gives up on hearing it land, and finally hears it smash the deck of the pit six seconds later, when he had already committed to leaving the cave. What commenced after that was disbelief, and a number of weeks of exploration and contemplation over *how* to reach the bottom, until finally, Bill Cuddington made the first descent of the thing. If you still think, “what’s the point of this story?” remind yourself that this was a seventeen year old who found the then-deepest pit in the country. It goes to show how little we know about speleology, how much more there is to discover, and how anyone can become the next Big Explorer—you don’t have to be some hot shot. If that isn’t reason enough to get your wellies and your helmet and head underground, I don’t know what is.

I also want to note that I collected these stories either from the mouth of Dave Hughes himself, or from his book, *Vertical Bill*, which contains many great stories about Virginia, as well as TAG, caves. If you have not met him, heard of him, or read his stuff as of yet, I highly recommend it. He’s been quite a mentor to me so far in the time that I’ve known him.



## Prusik or Helical?

By Andrew Schoenewolf

Ascending on knots has been a rite of passage for many beginner cavers just starting out their vertical exploits. Climbing knots all allow the user to climb using the same basic principle: they provide friction when loaded from the bottom and can be advanced upwards when not loaded, known as a friction hitch. A system of three such knots is typically used to ascend in a 'frog' style motion, alternating between loading and advancing the foot loop knots and top knot respectively.

There are several different knots that can be used safely ascend rope, but few are as popular or widely used and the prusik and the helical. The prusik is one of the earliest known ascending knots, developed by Karl Prusik, an Austrian mountaineer, in 1931. The helical is a more modern knot that requires a little more skill to tie. Both knots have their advantages and disadvantages.

The prusik is perhaps one of the simplest friction hitches to tie. It requires only the use of any adequate fixed loop knot, such as the bowline, and a few wraps around the climbing rope. Because of its simplicity, it is often the first knot used to teach beginners to climb with knots. The prusik requires at least two turns, but can also be used with three for additional friction, each turn results in two 'wraps' or loops around the main line.

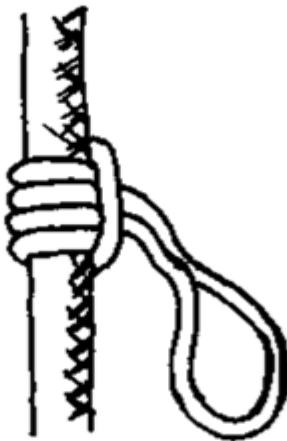
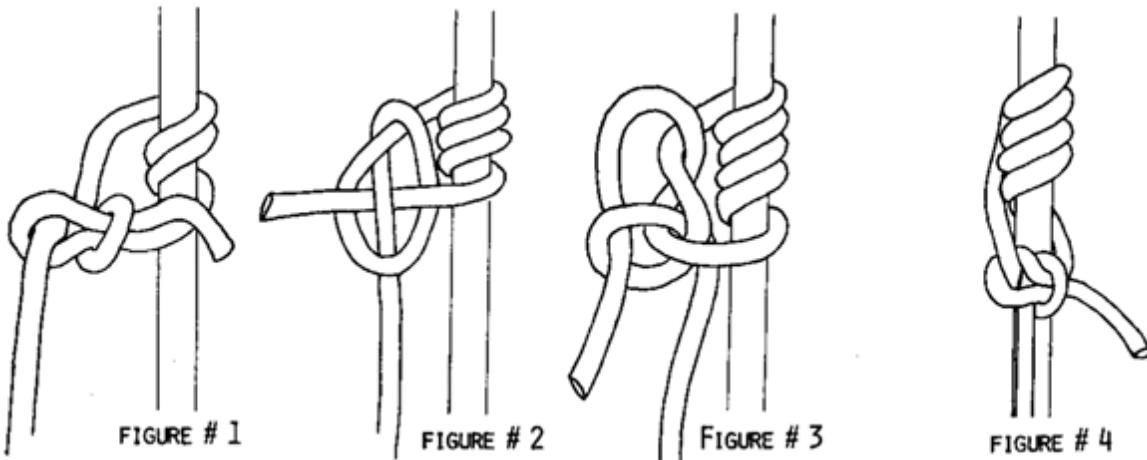


Figure: Simple Prusik knot (Nylon Highway, 22:9)

The helical knot is considered a slightly more advanced knot and not always recommended to beginners because of this (Nylon Highway, 22:9). The knot is tied by wrapping cordage around the main line and securing it with a tie-off knot, typically a bowline.



"Figure #1 shows the original helical knot developed by Clarence Cook and Tony Marchin. Figure #2 shows another tie-off the [Bob] Thrun points out can be adjusted to take in or take out the appropriate slack. Figure #3 Indicates the probably the most popular of all tie-offs. While figure #4 shows what the knot looks like when it is loaded." (Nylon Highway, 17:19) The number of loops can be varied from 4 to 10 for more or less friction. (NSS Intermediate SRT Training Course, 6) The helical has more room for variability than the prusik which makes it more to use but also more versatile and customizable for the user. The number of wraps and the tightness of the wraps can be adjusted for more or less friction and easier sliding of the knots on the rope.

The main advantage of the prusik knot is its ease and speed of construction, and simplicity; there is no need to adjust the size of the loops or slack in the knot due to its design. The knot can be tensioned in both directions while maintaining friction. However, this simplicity can be a drawback. The knot is not adjustable and the size or tightness of the loops cannot be adjusted. Because of this, the knot can be difficult to move up the rope as after it tightens from loading. This can lead to slower climbing times and more effort required to advance the knots. With the helical knot, the slack in the loops is adjustable so the user can adjust to their preferred tightness. For new climbers, this can cause difficulties because they do not have the experience or knowledge of exactly how tight or loose to make their knots for maximum climbing efficiency. The increased complexity can also lead to mistakes in tying the knots and longer times to tie in and ascend. Helical knots loosen easier than prusiks and can be raised with pressure from the thumb and forefinger. However, they have the added disadvantage of not being able to withstand top loaded pressure. (Nylon Highway, 17:20)

Overall, both knots allow ascension in the hands of a properly trained individual. The prusik is simple and easy to tie but has the disadvantage of less variability and can become difficult to advance after loading. The helical is more difficult to tie but offers more control over friction and is easy to advance after loading. The prusik has fewer ways to fail when tying and using it on-rope, while the helical requires a little more skill in its tying and operation. I would follow Bill Cuddington's advice to teach all trainees to climb with prusiks first before moving to the helical knot for these reasons.

## **Surveying Hill Top Cave**

Jenn McGuire

Just two days after Christmas this past year, cave club members and trainees drove down to Wythe County to make the Great Surveying Push of Winter 2016, in the style of Filthy Young Women. My car arrived at Bill Grose's house only half an hour after we were supposed to - right on caver time. Teams assembled themselves, and I, with fresh new sketching skills, joined Jonathan Roberts and Kristy McCord in choosing Hill Top cave for exploration, with the promise of vertical caving. Tyrone Phillips caught wind of the possibility of rappelling into a cave and rounded out our survey team. And so began our journey to Hill Top.... after a good long wait while everyone else sorted themselves out. Much coffee was consumed, many topographical maps were examined, and confusion was had. At long last, our journey began, as we caravanned along the county roads to the nearby caves. Well, we were last in the route, it turned out, so we meandered along until we finally made it to our turn off. And so we parked and began the hike through the fields and brambles to our cave.



Suiting up for cave exploration!

Bill led us to the cave entrance, and we began the rigging into an unknown pit. Excitement built as we put our vertical gear on for the rappel. Tyrone got ready to rappel in first, and took the end of the survey tape we had brought. He disappeared into the mouth of the cave and our ability to communicate clearly ends abruptly, but we saw the tape feed out... and out... and out! At nearly 100 feet the tape stops, and we are forced to assume

Tyrone is at the bottom of the largest pit in Wythe County! Our excitement was palpable, and Bill is over the moon. As we heard a muffled off rope, Kristy got on rope and was soon rappelling down into Hill Top Cave. Soon, Jonathan followed Kristy down after determining the rappel was clear. Finally, after waiting for the the first three, my turn arrived! I promised Bill a detailed report when we arrive back at his place, and I began the descent.



The author rappelling into Hill Top Cave - photo courtesy of Bill Grose

At the bottom of the visible extent of the pit, there is a hole into the cave that chokes and makes communication past that point difficult. I reached the mouth and expected to begin a free hanging rappel...

... and entered a roughly 45 degree mud slope of a cave. Tyrone and the tape were at the bottom of the mud slope that is Hill Top Cave, which measured a measly 82 feet from the mouth that I had passed. Thus, the greatest disappointment of Wythe County was found.



The mud slope

## Karma's a Bitch! – A Tawney's story

Nick LaPointe

Yesterday I had my first trip to Tawney's cave. We had Deighan as our fearless leader, which really meant he let us follow whoever picked a direction and told us we were going the wrong way before disappearing in another hole. Either that or he's going to show us the hardest route through the section he's leading just to see if we're naive enough to follow.

Deighan showed us all the interesting parts of the cave and even tried to take us up a classic Deighan climb to try and find a spot that looks down into the moon room. Three of us started to follow him up a canyon near the echo chamber only to discover; it's friggin' sketchy. That, and we don't actually know how to get to the overlook hole. After a good bit of goofing off in this canyon, we decide we should join the rest of the group back at the bottom of the climb and move on with the trip.

After spending a couple of hours in the cave, finding the sinkhole entrance, the entrance to grim Tawney's, looking at some cave art and hanging out in the moon room for a while, we started heading out of the cave. As we were leaving, I was following Reilly across a traverse to avoid the water hazard below us. We were bringing up the rear as everyone else headed a bit farther to the toilet bowl. It was this traverse that taught me a very important lesson.

Uncharacteristically, Reilly was struggling to get across the traverse without backtracking. Meanwhile I'm making fun of her while waiting for her to choose a better path and get across the traverse. She was less than pleased, as was Tawney's. As soon as I get across the traverse behind Reilly, I begin to walk, but alas Tawney's decides I don't deserve sure footing. As I fall backwards I flail to stop myself from tumbling into the stream to no avail. I tumble backwards into the stream making a nice splash and putting on a spectacular show for Reilly to watch while she laughs at me. As my boots quickly fill with water I realize I just received instant karma, but Tawney's isn't quite done with me yet.

I'm now drenched to just below my shoulders with a sprained wrist crawling out of a stream laughing at myself with Reilly watching from dry ground. I try standing up and walking again once I'm back on dry(ish) ground. I'm soaked and now I have no grip on the sloped mud that only gets slicker as I move across it. I basically end up rolling myself across the next short section of mud because I'm too well lubed up to travel in any sort of efficient manner. After struggling through what should've been an easy walk, I make it to my first real challenge now that I've hurt my wrist; the toilet bowl climb.

After a few minutes waiting for the others to get up the toilet bowl, it's my turn. It's not a particularly difficult climb but I don't want to hurt my wrist any more than I already had. So now I get to learn the art of climbing and canyoning using only one hand. Luckily almost all of the rest of the cave could be managed with one hand, a well-placed elbow and artful flop and wiggle combo. Either that or I could walk through some water instead of climbing over it, a much more appealing option when you're already wet.

We finally get out of the cave with everyone dry except for maybe a few inches above their shoes and me dripping and making some lovely fart like sounds with every step I take as we walk back down the slick trail to the road. Still trying to avoid using my wrist, I grab a tree and decide walking is no longer worth it and I'll just slide down the trail instead. I was already a mess anyway so who really cares as long as I didn't get a stick up my butt on the ride.

All in all, it was a fun first trip to Tawney's which had some really neat spots in it. But, the moral of the story is always use 3 points of contact, and much more importantly, don't make fun of Reilly in Tawney's cuz karma's a bitch!



## Mexico Songs from Samantha McCarter

### Tope on the Road (Wheels on the Bus – Raffi)

The wheels on the vibe go,  
THUMP THUMP THUMP  
THUMP THUMP THUMP  
THUMP THUMP THUMP  
The wheels on the vibe go  
THUMP THUMP THUMP  
All through the tope

The tope on the road go  
Fuck your shit  
Ting Ting THUMP  
Fuck your shit  
The tope on the road go  
Fuck your shit  
All through Xilitla

### Mango (Escape – Rupert Holmes)

If you like pineapple tacos,  
Onion and cilantro.  
If you can be creative,  
And your name is Mango.  
It's not bad being vegan,  
Eating Avocado.  
You can eat so much cheaper,  
In Mexico.

### Reilly (Anything You Can Do – Annie Get Your Gun)

Anything you can eat, I can't have!  
I can't eat any of the things that you can!  
How bout corn?  
Fuck yourself  
Or Gluten?  
Fuck yourself  
Vegetables?  
Fuck yourself, give me mеееat

### Cepillo! (500 miles – The Proclaimers)

When I hike up. Yeah I know I gotta breath,  
I gotta breath to make it up there to the pit.  
It's Cepillo. I can't see the fucking floor,  
That probably means that it would kill me if I fall.  
It's my first time. On a rack, and on a rack,  
It's not zippered but that doesn't mean that it

works.

Jason's singing. I'm not moving, I'm not moving,  
Fuck I'm moving and there's only down from  
here.  
But I did not survive vet school,  
To go die falling down a rope.  
It's only four-fucking-hundred feet,  
Maybe I'll die before I hit the floor.

Cepillo! It's a hairbrush!  
And I fall and I stop and I fall and I stop again!  
Six bars now! I'm moving faster!  
And I fall and I stop and I fall and I stop again.

### Small Town Perro (Don't Stop Believing – Journey)

Just a small town perro,  
Living in a lonely pueblo,  
Crossing the street going anywhere.  
Looking for a little snack,  
But here comes the Poniac,  
Maybe he'll look both ways in the afterlife.

A perro up on the techo,  
Barking loud to scare the gringos,  
He wants to run away to rut,  
But there's danger from all of the cane trucks.

Caballos! Streetside! Gatos en el restaurante.  
Vacas! Walking on roads in the mountains.  
Pollos! Crowing! At 5am in Aquismon.  
I wish the dogs would all go get spayed!

Grazing garbage to get their fill,  
Begging tourists, bending wills.  
Defending territory at pyramids,  
Getting into fights.

Some will win. Some will lose.  
Survival of the fittest rules.  
Darwin's law reigns supreme tonight,  
They roam on and on and on and on.

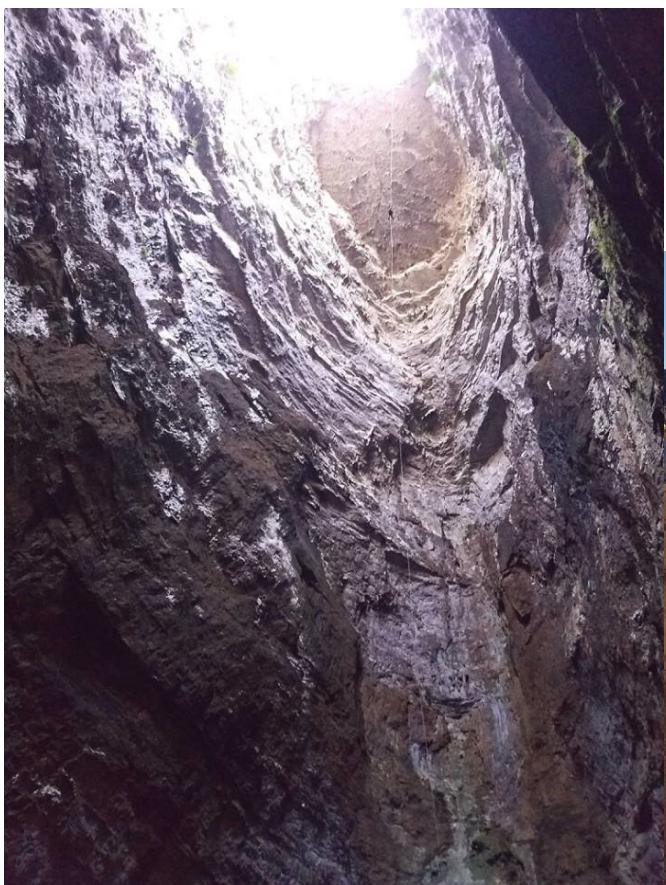
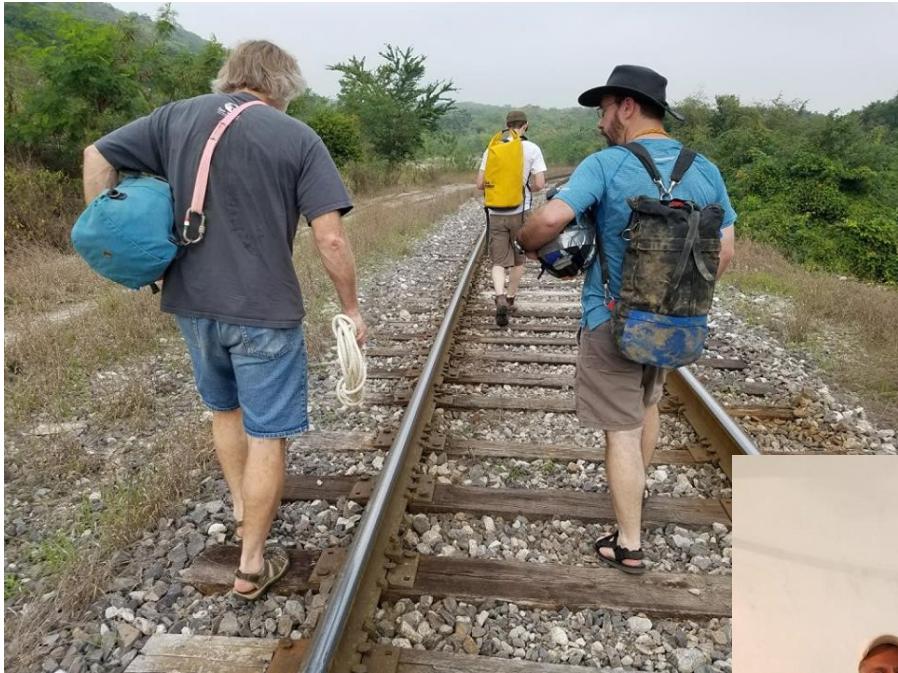
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Vacas! Walking on roads in the mountains.  
Pollos! Crowing! At 5am in Aquismon.  
I wish the dogs would all go get spayed!

Look out perro!

Here come the crazy gringos!  
Turn back while you still can!

Don't stop believing,  
Animals have feelings!  
They just want to eat and have sex!  
Look out perro!  
Here come the crazy gringos!  
Turn back while you still can!





La Ruta 85 (Hotel California – Eagles)

On a bright mountain highway,  
Cool wind in my hair.  
Warm smells of exhaust and banos,  
Rising up through the air.  
Up ahead round the corner,  
I saw breaking lights.  
My head grew hot and our engine dead,  
I saw no accident.

Semis blocking the roadway,  
I heard people exclaim.  
Zimapan was done with gas gouging,  
Or plans for the day were a mess.  
Rested at the restaurant,  
With some great bistec.  
Waiting to go to Tulantongo,  
Our Idaho friend did say:

Welcome to la ruta 85,  
Such a lovely place,  
Such a deserted waste.  
The road is closed on la ruta 85,  
We are stuck here,  
So grab a cold beer.

Hiking up in the hillside,  
Thorny bushes of pain.  
Beautiful sunsets up on top,  
But we're in the moving lane.  
Sad decisions to skip the  
Hot spring plan.  
Pachuca is our destination,  
Until we're stopped again.

So I called up the Jefe,  
Deighan looked so sublime.  
He said, "We can only go forward from here now  
And we'll have to spend the night".  
At 2am we drove south and away,  
Optimism reigns for a couple miles,  
Till Ixmilquian.

Welcome to la ruta 85,  
Such a fed-up place,  
Such a solemn pace.  
They closing all roads out on ruta 85,  
Get out alive,

Or stuck till sunrise.

Driving into the city,  
Every exit is blocked.  
We go to follow the locals around,  
But every failure's a shock.  
Stuck back on a side road,  
Post-apocalyptic vibes.  
Mango teams up with Deighan now,  
To get the hell out of dodge.

Last road though the backway, we were  
Making a break for 30.  
Driving through Grand Canyon parks,  
And topes of triple three.  
Driving fast for the toll roads,  
So close we can see.  
But the trucks are there waiting for us,  
So we can never leave.

We Didn't Drink the Water (We Didn't Start the Fire – Billy Joel)

We didn't drink the water!  
We still got the shits,  
But we didn't drink the water!

Tommy & Sope (Folsom Prison Blues – Johnny Cash)

Tommy and Sope,  
Walking down the street,  
It's best not to cross them,  
Or they'll break you at your knee.

He's alpha horse primero- president guy.  
He's gotta be the greatest, or he'll make sure you die.

He's making his own path,  
Or he'll knock you off yours,  
Skin you off on walls,  
A sadist to the core.

He's alpha horse primero- president guy.  
He's gotta be the greatest, or he'll make sure you die.

[\*Sope was a horse Tommy rode, who aggressively needed to be first, and had no qualms about using whatever he needed to get there. So... basically Tommy in horse form.]

# Dreaming of Cave Adventures in Myanmar

by Mike Futrell

We have wanted to go on a cave expedition to Myanmar for years. Maybe it just sounded exotic, a mysterious country that has been closed to the world for years. Maybe it was the large areas of limestone unseen by western cavers. Maybe we just had too many empty survey books.

We had caved a lot in China, but also in Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia. South-east Asia is such a wonderful part of the world. What better way to see a country than spend as much time as possible underground?

Of course, some things are easier said than done. We had visited Myanmar with a Lonely Planet book back in 2002 as the country was just opening up to tourists. Mounting an expedition was another thing entirely and we forgot the idea as we developed a keen interest in the caves of China. Fast forward to 2016. A British and European team each had been running an expedition to Myanmar for about 7 years and have formed an organization to facilitate international collaboration amongst cavers with an interest in the country – Myanmar Cave Documentation Project, <http://www.myanmarcaves.com>

We are friends with several participants in these projects and have been discussing an interest for a number of years. And we might be able to find the time and money for such a trip. Fortunately we were able to attend EuroSpeleo'16 in August and sit down with many of these folks to discuss possibilities.

Now that the dream was becoming a reality we had some serious planning to do. Were we up on all our shots? Do they have malaria there? Do we need any new cave or travel gear? Thus we set to reading previous expedition reports and reading up on the country. Our British friend, Pete, applied for official permits and made arrangements for in-country travel, guide/translator, and accommodations.

One thing left. Where are these caves we want to explore? Where exactly do we want to go? Like all places there's no list of undiscovered caves. Furthermore, there's not much in the way of available geologic mapping. Yet we need to be able to point at a spot on a map and say take us here. But first we have to create the map! Google Earth to the rescue!

We all spent a LOT of time flying around in Google Earth looking for potential cave areas, disappearing streams, big springs, and sinkhole pocked plateaus. Here it really helps to recognize geomorphology of karst terranes. I generated 1:50,000 topo maps with SRTM and ASTER surface models and pulled together a number of GIS data sources. We now had maps and places to go.

Next up, find someone to feed the cats, buy a plane ticket, tell work we may never come back; and we're off. To be continued.....



Photo: Mike and Andrea in Ye Htwat Gu (Water Spring Cave); photo by Fleur Loveridge

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**And now for something completely different, a recipe!**



*Alabama Slammer*

as given by Joe Calderone

2 parts Southern Comfort

1 part amaretto

1 part sloe gin

1 part grenadine

1 part orange juice

5 parts babe

Fill a cocktail shaker halfway with ice, add ingredients, shake well. Strain the mixture into a small glass. Lift your drink to the cave gods and rejoice.

## L- Survey Bolt Climbing: Windy Mouth Gets Real

By: Nick Socky

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017 Kelly McCarthy, Joe Calderon and myself (Nick Socky), started the 2nd phase of bolt climbing in Windy Mouth. As some folks, might know, Tommy Polson and Jon Lillstolen have been working on the E survey bolt climb which has resulted in roughly a 1000 ft. of passage that is still going! Well, there are also two more known domes in the cave. Off the main survey, going to the waterfall room, is a left-hand turn (right at BD-21) which takes you to a not so pleasant looking canyon, with water in it. Well as you can guess, this lead is the next two dome bolt climbs are.

Kelly, Joe, and I got up a little earlier than usual to some blistering cold temperatures of 15 degrees outside. We wanted to get a head start on the day because we were hauling a lot of gear fairly deep into the cave. We got to the parking area, and had a crisp jaunt up down the river and up onto the cliff side- it was so cold out, that we didn't have any fear of having the high route give out on us, and send us to our doom in the cold Greenbrier, and we got to the cave entrance right around 9:20 A.M. -this might be the earliest arrival time? Not sure what time Tommy has gotten to the cave before.

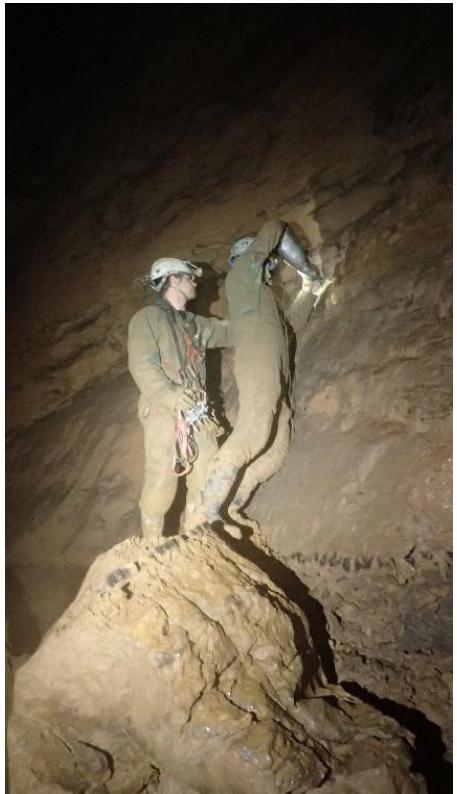


Anyways, we began our trek into the cave. Because of all the rope, vertical gear, bolting gear, and personal gear, and lack of a 4th person (Sherpa) we luggered a 4th pack between the three of us. It wasn't too bad going in the main passage, but we were certainly moving a bit slower than usual. Typically, a strong group of surveyors can get to the waterfall room in roughly an hour, it took us about 1.5 hours to get to our turn off- which is about 7 min away from the waterfall room.

And then the fun began... the only beta I had of this passage was from looking at the old data LRUDs at each station and from those numbers it didn't look that bad. For the most part, the passage was an average of 2 feet across and 10 ft. tall; classic stream canyon passage. It would have been nice to see the cross sections... Of that 2 ft., tall L/R, you could for the most part only fit in about 1 to 2 ft. of the 10 ft. up down, and to make it even more fun, the largest section was typically about 3 to 5 feet above the water, so you didn't have to worry about getting wet except for a few times, but if you dropped your pack, good luck getting to it!

So, it was a tight contortion belly crawl where you have to hold your pack up in front of you or prop it up/wedge it, so you can move forward. This would be fine if it were just a survey trip with a small pack, but we were hauling bolting gear. Lastly, to add to the fun, we had to route find our way vertically through the canyon. Sometimes, it got too tight down low and we had to find a way to climb up higher to get around the pinch and then it forced us back down (got to tight up high) straight into pools of water, sometimes knee-deep. I know I am really selling this!!





And so, after about a two hours of this exceeding sporting cave, it just opens up suddenly into a large room 30 ft. by 30 ft. room with 40 ft. dome, at the top of the dome you can see the contact ceiling and going passage as well. Even better bonus is this area is very dry and comfortable. Catch- about 15 ft. off the ground you hit a layer of crappy rock for about 7 ft. We will cross that bridge when we get there. But this was the first dome. If you keep following the passage forward (only just about 100 to 200 more feet of not too horrible crawling), you come to the 2nd 20-foot dome!

This dome was ideal for our first bolt climbing experience (yes this was our first time every doing this by ourselves). We had good rock for the first 10 feet and it was at a near vertical slope (75 to 80 degrees?) and out of the waterfall. there was a 5-ft. section of bad rock, but it was nearly at the same level as the lead so we could set up a traverse line over to where the water was coming from if we could just find some good rock where the crappy layer was.

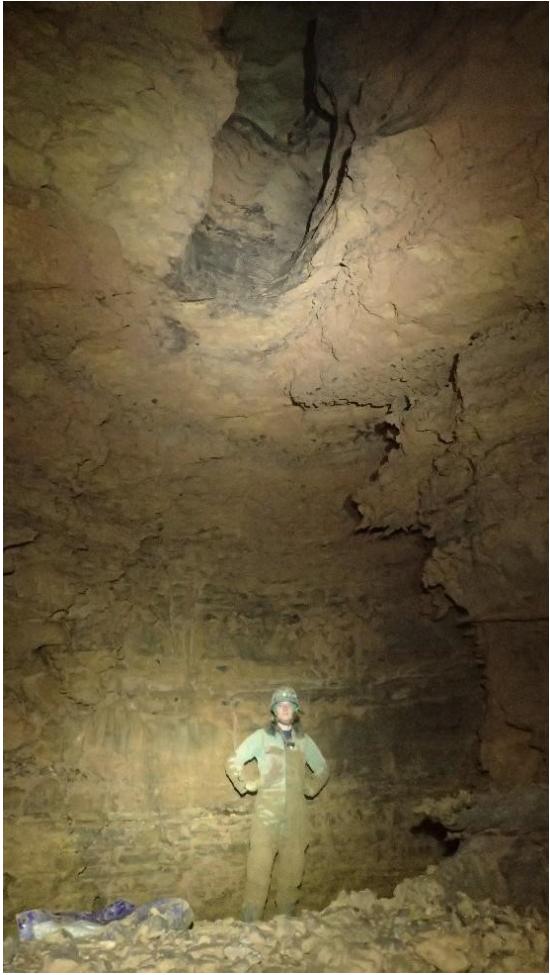
Anyways, we laid out all our gear drank some water, and went to re-

fill and then use my iodine tablets so we had more water... SHIT. I had forgotten my tablets on the surface and knew exactly where I had put them. Luckily, we still had plenty of water for the three of us, but we were not long going to be able to do a 16-hour trip. Slightly dismayed but still motivated, we got to work bolting. Kelly set the first bolt, and I set the 2nd one. I then came down, and Joe proceeded to work his way up setting the next two. As Joe was working and I was belaying, Kelly was surveying the room- the LA survey: all 50' feet of splay shots wooh!



Joe was working on trying to set a bolt in the crappy layer of rock and had trouble finding a good spot for to but it. After finding a little bit of good rock, Joe broke a bolt from over tightening it (we were learning), and then he started to get tired so it was my turn back up. I set another bolt and got a bit higher up and went to set another. As Joe had found out that the rock was really crappy, so did I. The 2nd bolt I set, was put in crappy rock and was wiggling around making me wildly uncomfortable, and annoyed- it was supposed to be a stainless-steel anchor before I set the traverse line up. So, I dug and tapped around some more until I found some good rock, and set the bolt. Even though that one didn't break, it still made me nervous because of the rock and relative location to the bad bolt, but it would have to do. Next was digging deep, clinching hard, and climbing out over the ledge to get up to the waterfall and the traverse.

It should be noted that Kelly had finished surveying the room, and had whipped out a candle and trash bag and was quite content with watching me spider man out across the rock face. My first try attempt I spooked myself a bit because I started to slip, so I backed up and tried to get a better look. Then I saw a small crack



in the wall, that if I could straddle out and get my foot into, I would be in the home stretch. I am not going to lie, rock climbing over the past few months helped out. There was also a spot where I was able to do a comfortable fist jam, and swing myself out. Then at the point, I asked for some slack and inched my way over into virgin borehole in windy mouth! By virgin borehole, I mean I was standing in a 10-ft. tall, 10 ft. wide passage, with a shelf to the left of me. I set up a stainless-steel bolt in (after more trouble finding) good rock, and made a traverse line back to the main line. This also used the rest of my 2nd drill battery up. Joe then took me off belay and I went down passage for about 30 ft. to a turn that went left and then it started to get tight and canyon like again. It could be short lived, it could go on for 1000' feet to another dome, or it could get to tight! Guess we will have to find out next time.

I came back to the traverse line and to the main bolt, fixed the traverse line, and then rappelled down. Joe then went up and partially cleaned the route. We all decided to pack up, and move the bolting gear that we planned on leaving in the cave back to the 1st dome for next time. This was a good decision because we were able to cave out of the fun 1000 feet of canyon crawling with 3 packs instead of 4, and this time it only took 1.5 hours instead of 2! It was also downhill which was nice. All in all, we exited the cave, sore and bruised but not too cold, to a full moon right around 10 pm, giving us a solid 12.5-hour trip.

Next time we go back, first thing is to set a better permanent rig at the top of the 20 feet dome. It works but, if that passage goes, it needs a second bolt for a true y-hang rig once that's done, Kelly plans on leading a team to start surveying that passage, while Joe and I go back to the 40-foot dome and start working on that. As for the actual L survey - once Tommy Polson gets back from Mexico I want to take a look at the old survey notes to see how detailed (if at all) they are. If we deem them worthy - screw it, we will use the old data and not resurvey that section of the cave. Below I have spliced in the Old Hixson Survey data of the L survey to show you were its going, where the domes are, and what I think they might do. It's rare that I write this detailed of a trip report, but we all had a great time this weekend and its always exciting to find new passage in a cave, even if you have to fight for every bit of it.



Picture 1, left to right (Nick, Kelly, Joe), Ready to hike to the cave!

Picture 2, Joe with the packs before we start the L survey

Picture 3, Joe moving through 1000 ft of passage to get to the domes.

Picture 4, Kelly Setting the 1<sup>st</sup> bolt and Joe watching

Picture 5, Nick Bolt Climbing UP

Picture 6, Joe Covered in Mud

Picture 7, Kelly at the bottom of the 40 ft dome.

Picture 8, Joe Bolting and or Clearning the route, looking down lead



## Cave Avoidance for Fun or Profit

Dave Hughes, NSS-14550

Several years ago, the famous Scottish mountaineer, Tom Patey spared the climbing world a lot of unnecessary labor by explaining how to appear to be a great climber without actually climbing. Fortunately, caving has certain similarities to climbing—akin, some say, to indoor mountaineering. As a result, Patey's clever theme is easily adapted to the pale, anemic troglodyte.

It is well known, of course, that there are considerable fringe benefits to being a legitimately great caver—money; muscle cars; fast women. But, no reasoned individual fails to recognize that caving is also a whole bunch of hard work.

Worse, even a cursory glance underground drills home the heart-throttling reality that caves are dark and scary places. The fact is, a man could get his bum kicked down there.

To this end, we hereby present a selection of tools, techniques, and methods that should allow the practitioner to masquerade as a speleological hero without actually having to venture underground.

### The “Too Much Like Hard Work” Ploy

The is the Virginia caver's favorite gambit when he finds himself butting heads with some Southern hard-men at a SERA Cave Carnival. Many TAG caves are admittedly a little remote in comparison to, for instance, Luray Caverns. But, I have heard this sort of generalization directed at the Huntsville area where one can scarcely leave the main road without falling into a pit. No, this simply will not do! Far better is to use:

### The “Off Form” Ploy

This one is as old as the limestone itself but still is widely employed. Few cavers will ever admit to being “on form.” Surely, everyone would feel uneasy if they did.

Fortunately, a caver who was “on form” during the morning can be feeling “off form” by early afternoon. If an interval of 48 hours or so has elapsed between descents, he may talk of being “out of condition.” If the layoff has been a week or longer, he may justifiably consider himself to be “out of training.”

### The “Bum Lamp” Ploy

Often, it is best to blame an inanimate object for one's troubles. Such a participant will flood his ancient carbide lamp at the Waiting Room above Surprise Pit and, then, let the others in the group share his consternation when the only remaining dry felt is “accidentally” dropped into the abyss.

Unfortunately, some cavers carry such a myriad of spare parts that it is possible to be saddled with a veritable equipment vendor while feigning such a predicament. To defeat such eventualities, it is best to rely on an exotic illumination device permanently riveted to one's helmet. Any single failure will then ensure the safety of non-participation. Suggested examples include a fluorescent lamp controlled by a Septium VIII microprocessor, a bunch of fireflies in a phosphorescent tube or, perhaps, a pair of moose antlers painted Day-Glo.

### The “Wrong Gear” Ploy

The key to this ploy is to always leave for the “push” trip with completely inappropriate equipment. “I'm an experienced sump diver” is a fairly safe assertion at Big Bone Cave, where it is unlikely that you will be called upon to demonstrate your skills.

Such a character will show up for a downstream assault on Ellison's wearing a pair of tennis shoes and a T-shirt. “Good heavens! The water didn't seem so high on our last push. I'd love to join you guys, but I demolished my wetsuit in Croatia.”

Or, for an afternoon's tour of Hooper's Well he will unveil a 9-bar Super Rack. "Not much good for these rabbit holes, I guess, but it sure was mighty handy at 'drinas."

Any off-the-cuff comment of this nature generally goes over very well with the hordes of novices present. You'll be so mobbed signing autographs and recommending carabiners it'll be abundantly clear that you are far too important to waste the day underground.

#### The "Phony Cavern" Ploy

The cornerstone of this gambit has been laid by the uprising of the militant netherworld conservationists. Their official policy advocates being purposely vague regarding the whereabouts of caves. Indeed, major publications frequently locate caverns only to the nearest county.

With such parameters firmly in mind, merely select a county, pick a Regional Correspondent, and away you go.

*For Immediate Release.*

*Bulletin!*

*A major new system has been unearthed in Jackson County, Alabama by none other than the Colossal Speleo Mega-Man.*

*"Exploring for days in the labyrinth of passageways, we were finally stopped by a seemingly bottomless abyss. The 800-foot rope that we always carry 'just in case' proved inadequate for the task and we eventually exited the cavern without incident," reported one member of the team.*

*Dauntless, the Mega-Man returned the following weekend to solo the drop (later estimated at 1095 feet) and, upon returning topside, permanently sealed the entrance with some well-placed Tovex.*

*"This is no place for the novice," he explained while coiling the longest section of PMI that this reporter has ever seen.*

*We can only hope that further information will be forthcoming in the months ahead.*

Such information is, in fact, never "forthcoming", but is easily explained away by invoking the ubiquitous "Anti-Publication" ploy.

#### The "Pseudo-Scientist" Ploy

The essence of this ploy is to cultivate an aura of intellectual respectability. Once the mystique is formed it is hard to go wrong. Encumbered with a myriad of collection bottles and verbose nomenclature, such a genius is hardly an appropriate companion for a sporting trip to the dreaded netherworld.

I once accompanied such a lad on a supposed "push trip" to the New Section of a well-known cave. While I refettled a temperamental headlamp before venturing underground, my companion sulked just inside the drip-line minutely examining the underside of an insect with his reading glass.

"Bugs are my business," he finally admitted after much probing. "And, everyone knows that such multilingual, polygamous, isolated tripods are never found beyond the entrance region. You guys go ahead and push on downstream. I'll linger here a few hours longer and, perhaps, join you on the way out."

#### The "Responsible Family Man" Ploy

This gambit is nearly infallible because it exploits the very foundations of our existence.

“Don’t seem to get underground much nowadays,” they mutter despondently. “Can’t take the same risks anymore; unfair on the kids.”

So saying, they leap into their hemi-powered SUVs and become urban charioteers, mowing down crash barriers and terrorizing the walking populace.

“Sorry you had to wait up for me, dear,” they apologize after shrieking home in a cloud of dust. “Just stopped in for a quick one with the boys and got a bit carried away.”

Some aging cavers, no longer able to cut the mustard in the netherworld, have been known to contemplate matrimony as the only honorable way out.

### The “Speleo-Politician” Ploy

This technique relies on the premise that the character in question is, in fact, too busy determining the *Future Direction* of caving to be frittering away time in self-serving exploration.

“All this talk of B.O.G.’s, C.O.G.’s and Ph.D.’s bores me to tears,” he explains. “Oh, how I long for the easier days of Sump II in Gouffre Berger. But, some of us seasoned veterans have to make the sacrifice and I am only too glad to do it. You wetsuited youngsters continue your playful ways and I’ll see to it that the caverns remain open for *all of us*.”

### The “Quasi-Veteran” Ploy

Historians have recorded that Bill Torode only begins to function properly when he is hundreds of feet below the surface of the Earth in a jagged crawlway. This adds up to a pretty considerable handicap when you consider how much of his life must be spent topside. It is all part of the mystique which surrounds *The Men* who are expected to *Go Deep*.

To utilize this ploy to its fullest, it is advantageous, but not strictly necessary, to have an NSS number below 7500. Nevertheless, a certain vocabulary of “buzz words” needs to be cultivated. For example:

Swildon’s VI  
Gouffre Berger  
the rappel spool  
Lew Bicking and I  
the PSM  
that crazy Mike Boon  
Proventina  
Vertical Bill  
minus 2000 meters  
freefall  
totally unjustifiable rigging  
deep  
quite deep  
very deep  
a hare-brained escapade

### The “Landowner Relations” Ploy

Axiomatic to this ploy is that no landowner, regardless of outward friendliness, really wants anyone fooling around under his property. If everyone remembered this simple fact, we would all be spared a lot of needless caving. Acting like a rich city slicker, four-wheeling around on his front porch, or shooting a couple of cows usually does the trick.

At the next grotto meeting it is all very easy to explain. “We arrived in good shape and intent on diving the final sump. However, the red-necked hick that owns the place was in a crummy mood, so we visited with him only briefly and then left to maintain good landowner relations.”

### The “Speleological Opportunist” Ploy

Perfecting this trick facilitates killing two birds with one rock. Start by inviting the most beautiful woman in your office on her first cave exploring trip. Experience demonstrates that she will show up in fishnets, heels, and a leather skirt.

As luck would have it, a short distance underground this costume proves inappropriate for tough caving. Befuddled, the lass anxiously asks to return to the sunshine outdoors. At this juncture, simply jump to the breech with a well-rehearsed one-liner. Something like, “You know baby, there *is* a way out of here.”

### The “Rescue Squad” Ploy

The technique of being appended to the local cave rescue team opens up a wealth of scenarios. Clearly, for one who is perpetually “on call” it would be the height of irresponsibility to risk going underground at any time. Doing so might distance you from the telephone and, hence, confound a time-sensitive rescue call out.

What if a rescue was officially initiated? Who can attend a cave rescue wearing dirty or worn out speleo garb?

Best to stay home, stay safe, and wait for the emergency alert. If worse comes to worst, you can always volunteer in the First Aid tent.

Besides, whenever a real disaster actually happens, rescue groupies generally come out of the woodwork and serve up some pretty good sandwiches.

### The “Entrance Photographer” Ploy

A prerequisite for the application of this ploy is a good collection of entrance shots. Such a portfolio may then be used during an endless series of grotto presentations where everyone will assume that you actually “bottomed” the cave pictured.

“This, folks, shows the main entrance to Fern,” one explains. “Such tranquil surroundings barely hint at the terrors which lie within.”

Then, advancing to the next image: “Now, we peruse the top of Cemetery Pit, which is clearly very different from Golondrinas, as seen on the following slide.”

And, upon showing the New Entrance to Ellison’s: “Behind this unassuming crack lies the deepest freefall pit in the United States. We found a descent of the shaft to be a bit tricky and it is likely that a rope would have been useful.”

Many variations of the above ploys are possible. Indeed, it is sometimes necessary to synthesize additional gambits for particularly dicey situations. Perhaps, the “Support Team” ploy or the “Solo Man” ploy will eventually find their way into our repertoire. It is hoped, however, that the above list summarizes an adequately comprehensive series of tricks to maintain an elevated ego for even the most ardent loafer. If not, perhaps it would be easier to simply go caving.



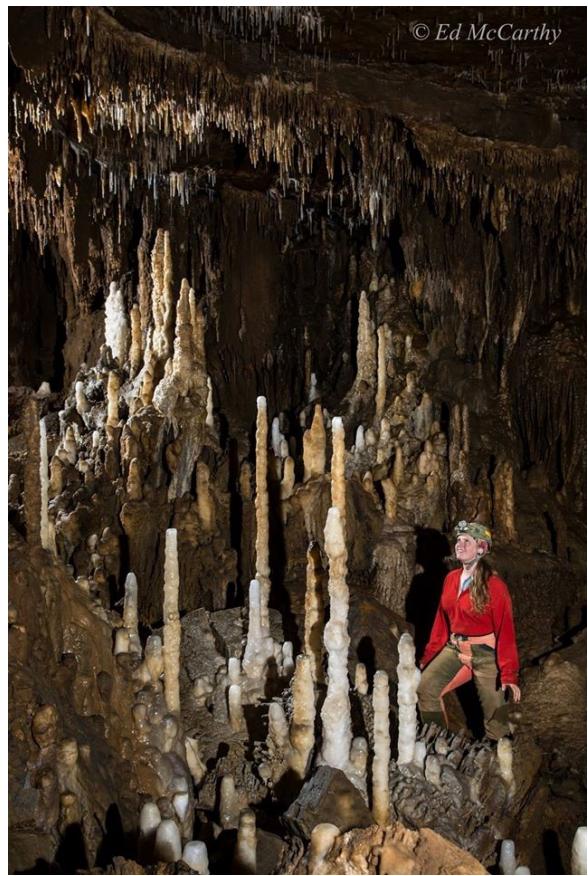
## Weekend at Perkins

By Amy Skowronski

Friday-Saturday, March 17-18, 2017  
Perkins Cave, Washington County, VA

Janet Manning

(In alphabetical order) Eric Cueva, Bill Grose, Jason Lachniet, Janet Manning, Amy Skowronski, Caleb Taylor, and Zach Taylor entered the cave on Friday evening around 5:30pm. After everyone was signed into the log-book near the gated entrance, the first team (composed of Jason Lachniet, Janet Manning, Caleb and Zach Taylor) took the high route, with the plan of meeting the second team (composed of Eric Cueva, Bill Grose, and Amy Skowronski) in the canyons below the Tight Place in the Dirty Old Men section of the cave, where both teams would survey. The second team was only half an hour behind the first, despite traveling through the scenic Forest Trail, First and Second Discovery, and the various crawls. Both teams got to enjoy a small portion of the cave featuring unavoidable, exceptionally stab-prone popcorn - splendid!



Ed McCarthy

Both teams tied into station DOM 7; Team 1 went to the right and Team 2 went to the left. Our (Team 2) survey led us through a canyon with a handful of nice formations and brought us to a junction. As we worked on the lead to the right, Bill waxed poetic about reading instruments from poorly placed stations and as he wrote 'DOM 14' on a piece of flagging tape and tied it around a rock said, "Man, the guy setting stations really doesn't know what he's doing." before chortling heartily at his own joke. We killed the right-hand lead and headed back to the junction.

We decided that the down climb at the end of the left-hand lead couldn't be free-climbed and carried on down the canyon passage. Surveying was going quite smoothly, front sights and back sights were matching, and Bill gave us some great tips about how to accurately get measurements from a station placed on a wall: "Be a flounder!" Thanks, Bill. We found a nice little loop, but part of it would require



Janet Manning

Spiderman-esque skills, which no one on the team had. The smallest person (myself) was lowered via webbing to the bottom where I found that although I couldn't get down without assistance, I was able to climb out in one particular spot using a Didn't Feel Sketchy But Looked Haphazard To Everyone Else On The Team dynamic move. Since the passage died and the other folks on the team weren't too keen (for good reason), I was passed the instruments and solo-surveyed the last part of the passage: a gloopy, watery crawlway. It was fairly bleak. On the bright side, Bill and Eric were still vaguely audible and could be heard laughing.

As 11pm rolled around, we started making our way back. Jason met us at the junction we surveyed and went down the left-hand lead that we had determined to be unclimbable where, as is standard, he climbed to the bottom and had no difficulty getting back out. After reconvening at DOM 7, the teams changed a bit because I wanted to give the Tight Place a try but we didn't want to send Eric and Bill out with just two people. Zach, Caleb, Jason, and myself exited the cave about 30 minutes before Eric, Bill, and Janet. The trip was ~7 hours.

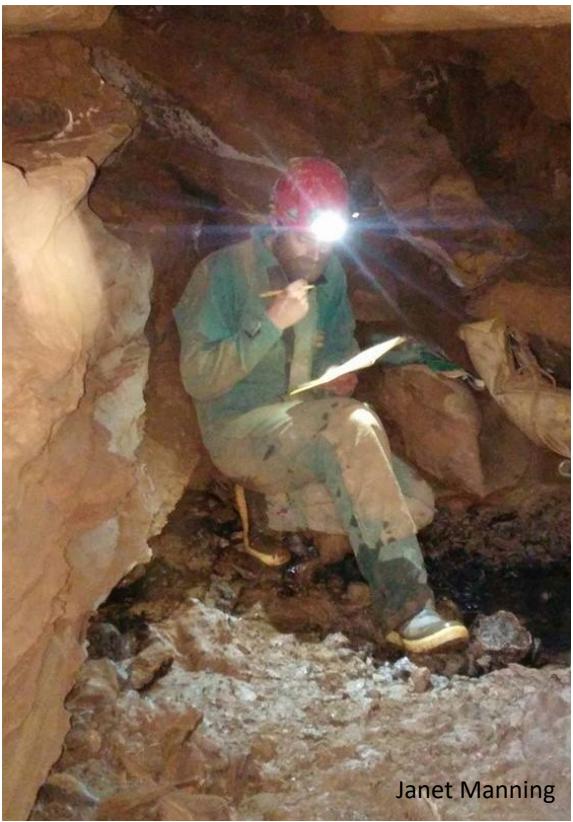
There was a slight drizzle outside which made for very peaceful sleeping.

The annual Appalachian Cave Conservancy meeting took place the following day (Saturday, for those of you following along at home) in the field station near Perkins Cave - as is caver tradition, the meeting started a little late but there was good food and hot coffee! The first team (consisting of Steve Ahn, Michael Johnson, and Carlin Kartchner) entered the cave about halfway through the meeting. After the meeting, the second team (comprised of Jason Lachniet, Janet Manning, and Amy Skowronski) made their way into the cave. The commute to our survey was fun and interesting; we moved at a reasonable pace since I was trying to learn the route and Jason pointed out recognizable features and leads as we went.

We caught up with the first team after the 800 Foot Crawl - at first I thought the name must be an exaggeration but as Jason said, "Well, 'four hundred foot crawl, twenty foot walk, three hundred and eighty foot crawl' just doesn't have the same ring to it." We found Carlin sketching in a belly crawl while Steve



Janet Manning



Janet Manning

and Michael wedged themselves in a very small space that could be considered a crawl but I would describe as "abysmal." We wished them good luck, traveled to a walking canyon passage where we ate food, and dove back into the crawl to survey. We continued the EFC (Eight-hundred Foot Crawl) survey, used the same designation, and had some fun suggesting alternate names - for example, Easy Fun Cave (and others including some choice language that you, dear reader, can imagine yourself).

Almost immediately, we ran into some trouble. I know my StenLight has a magnetic switch, but had no idea the auxiliary light I was using also had magnetic components (whoops), so we had some difficulty getting accurate readings for a couple shots until we determined that I'm a dingleberry. Luckily, Janet is a razor-sharp instrument reader so we were quick to figure out the issue. We encountered another issue later in the day, when I decided

that I wanted to see some formations with proper clarity and just deal with the hassle of reading instruments with glasses. After a couple shots we realized that my frames are, in fact, magnetic. Alas, they were returned to the Pelican Case.

We closed a loop and met back up with the first team (who had surveyed the walking canyons where we'd had lunch) in a room with some great fossils in the ceiling. Objective #1: Close That Loop -- ACHIEVED! Janet took some pictures of the shells and crinoids before we headed down a promising lead. The passage started as a stoop-walk but it opened up the further we went and soon we were standing on a large rock wedged sturdily in the middle of a 30-35' tall canyon. The walls were littered with helictites, making travel (and survey) a very delicate, careful process. We had some difficulty on one particular shot and were getting readings that were consistently four to five degrees off from one another, even after we tried switching places and switching instruments. Very weird. After extensive deliberation, we decided that the cave had a black hole in it and the magnetic field surrounding it was definitely the cause of our instrument issues. But in all seriousness, it was really bizarre.

We got to a part of the canyon that Janet and I were uncomfortable with since neither of us had the required leg length for the move needed to pass around a rock. Jason made it look easy but when it was our turn to go, we



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found our femurs to be a bit too short. Rather than risk it and plummet to the bottom, we voted to climb down - rather than across - the canyon. This proved to be a most fortuitous choice. After one particularly grueling high angle shot, we found ourselves in a decorated, sparkling area with lots of wind and audible water. Objective #2: Locate a water source -- ACHIEVED! We surveyed to the water, rejoiced, and packed our bags.

Very pleased with our discovery, we retraced our steps to Carlin, Steve, and Michael who wanted to wrap up the room they were surveying before turning around. In the interest of avoiding inevitable bottlenecks on the exit, we decided to head out and wait for them on the surface (where there was hot food and cold beer). Exit fever was running high and we scrambled through the 800 Foot Crawl in about fifteen minutes and flew down the 50' rappel - it's so much nicer to rappel than free-climb when you're tired - to the stream. We opted for the stream exit since it takes less time and it cools you off as you go. It was about 1am when we left the cave, making it an 11 hour trip. Upon exiting the cave, we found it was sleet; good thing we went through the stream on the way out! The lack of trees in the field made for rather breezy changing, but those dry clothes felt all the warmer. Camp stoves were fired up, (very) cold beers were cracked, and we chatted until the first team exited the cave - about an hour after us - before hitting the hay.



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# QUOTABLE QUOTES

ABooker: There's any number of places to buy beer across the street. ...if that number is two.

TCleckner: We have rules and bylaws; which might be the reason why I haven't beaten Calvin to death.

CLong: I think you being 5'6" is what's keeping you from beating me.

PBalister: You already got yelled at for being loud?! Cheers!

ASkowronski: I'm going to try to hold my shit together tonight.

NSocky: Why would you do that at OTR?!

JRoberts: Remember, peer pressure builds character.

ALycas: Peer pressure sprayer!

JRoberts to NSocky: It's amazing they let you shoot stuff into space.

ABooker: That map looks super old.

ASkowronski: You just take it underground once and it'll look old.

ABooker: That explains a lot of people here.

TCleckner: Oh, none of that sounded like a compliment? My bad.

JWashington: Gary Rouse got pulled over for erratic driving, which was amazing because that was the best he had been driving all day because he was afraid of getting pulled over.

JMcGuire: Well, I was covered in liquor and getting sticky...

TPhannareth: Pace yourself but at a slower pace!

JSargent: I got the picture!

JClifford: Oh, I'm not doing it for the picture.

KMcCarthy: I can't switch between three alcohols. It's like eating ice cream, then steak, then pie.

JRoberts: I'm familiar with dinner; go on.

NSocky \*puts down wine bottle\*: WOW! I've found my drunk!  
JSargent: I'm all the way over here.

DCrowder, moving a large rock we blasted off the wall: I'm going to have to man-handle this.

EStanley: I say that every morning. ...And then I look in the mirror and remember that I'm an average white man... *with a huge cock*.

NSocky: *This is stoop walking.*

ASkowronski: Face down, ass up.

JSargent: That's the way we like to cave.

KMcCarthy: Well, it depends on what seasoning you put on the cardboard.

JSargent: I take back what I said earlier. Kelly, you're a mess.

EEdling: Sometimes it's fun to be the reason why we can't have nice things.

JMcGuire's signature for "member in good standing" is  
PBalister

TCleckner: Is he in good standing?

EHahn: No, he's drunk already.

SKnapp: You can make fun of Philip on almost every account... And I do!

CGarguilo, about the pub: Getting carded here is like getting carded at my own fridge.

SPetri: You wanna get in the ambulance? Five dollar cover.

DCrowder: I hate that place, they don't have fried chicken.

ASkowrosnki: That's a furniture store.

DCrowder: I KNOW.

DConroy: It's the Gucci-est pear!

EHahn, about the Belly Flop: This is gonna suck balls.

DConroy: Good thing I don't have balls!

\*30 seconds later\*

DConroy: OH SHIT BALLS.

JSargent: See what happens when you stop supervising?

MNewsome: Uh huh. Fun with tractor.

DSykes: Normally you're telling ME this, but don't hurt yourself.

CGarguilo: My eye doctor was pretty hot. I think. I already had my contacts out.

NSocky: I'm pretty sure Jesus was crucified, not hung.

ALycas: Oh, no, Jesus was hung.

BKoerschner: I still have my card – two fisted drinker, class one.

PMoneyhun: That should be a selling point for this car – can fit four adults comfortably in the back seat.

ALycas: Comfortably?

PMoneyhun: I'm cozy.

NSocky, to EHahn: I'd use those nipples to bolt climb.

JClifford: I didn't take off my damp underwear in exchange for dry ones because I would've had to take 'em off in like eight degree weather.

SPetri: It was a rash decision.

MJunod: I hate my generation.

ALycas: So does Balister.

MNewsome, holding out a rusty can of something: Speaking of aged foods.

JRoberts: Ew, what the fuck?

MNewsome, excitedly: We don't know!

JDelafield: Yeah, you do tandem ascents up these.

ASkowronski: The first person—

EEdling: Leads!

ASkowronski: God dammit.

PMoneyhun: Do I still have my wallet? ...yes.

ASkowronski: Clutch.

ALycas: No, wallet.

S Hopkins: When I first joined the Cave Club people were always saying, "You don't want to use that rope, it's Deighan Rope," so I thought, "Note to self – don't buy Deighan rope." I thought it was just a super shitty brand of rope.

EFortney: I could suck it in my mouth and spit it on you.

SRapier: Churro, I would like to be a churro. Churro. Churro. Churrrooooo!

WOrndorff: I'll fucking stay. Because I'm indestructible. At the end of the world all there will be is matter and Wil. Oh it's Mother's Day... Mother fuckah's day.

ASkowronski: We'll burn that bridge when we get to it.

PMoneyhun: I don't know if that's an advisable course of action.

EEdling: Nothing like waking up to a blow job. ...I guess I should sleep with my mouth closed.

PBalister: Fortney and I held a pre-banquet in a two bedroom apartment in Draper's Meadow.

EFortney: One of my top five hangovers.

PWinter: It's called Man-Splaining Cave, you wouldn't know anything about it.

AFutrell: We had six people, a driver, a translator, and all of our luggage in one vehicle at the same time.

SRapier: Was it a semi?

EStanley: There's no good way to take a photo of something in the ER, what do you say? "I want to put this in a lecture," meaning I want to show all my friends on my phone.

EHahn: Good thing you guys know the route.

ALycas: Ehhh...

ASkowronski: I wouldn't go as far as to say that.

ALycas: Once we're there, I'll know where we're at.

EHahn: GOOD THING YOU GUYS KNOW THE ROUTE!

JRoberts: What's the biggest fan we have?

ALycas: Scott seems to like you guys.

DCrowder: Oh, someone put stuff in my pockets! Oooohhh, this is *your* jacket.

AFutrell: And here we went on another death hike. Our guides were fabulous!

JDeighan, driving into oncoming traffic: I'm in the wrong lane. One sec. I'm ... still in the wrong lane.

RBlackwell: Make sure all your dangly bits are wrapped up for maximum safety. Knot the dangly bits, don't dangle the naughty bits.

AThomas: I'm impressed your box has held up this long.

TCleckner: I would pay \$7-8 to light fireworks over the Gulf nude; that seems like a reasonable price of entry.

TCleckner: Jason (Sargent) is the kind of girl who takes the free drink and walks away.

RBlackwell: Feel free to join in, we're discussing the collective bladder tininess of Rougarou as a group. And driving incompetence.

JDeighan: Maybe the two are related.

RBlackwell: It's possible. Tommy would probably know something about that.

TCleckner: Nope. I can hold it 'til my back teeth start to float.

DCrowder: I'm glad I got my falsetto back, I lost it for a few years when I stage-dived an Italian guy on a couch... That's the last thing I remember from that night.

BEkey: ...And then they walk in with that plastic bullshit My First Tournequet by Fisher Price and I couldn't believe it! So I had to go to my truck and get mine.

AThomas, as PBalister: When I was a trainee, we'd drink all night then shit on rope... It's a man's God-give right to shit on rope.

Glavine: She's shoot-y and punch-y. Good thing she's not stab-y or I'd have a lot more holes.

RBlackwell: What I would like is for all of you, collectively, to get out of my ass.

JDeighan: Now say that in Spanish!





