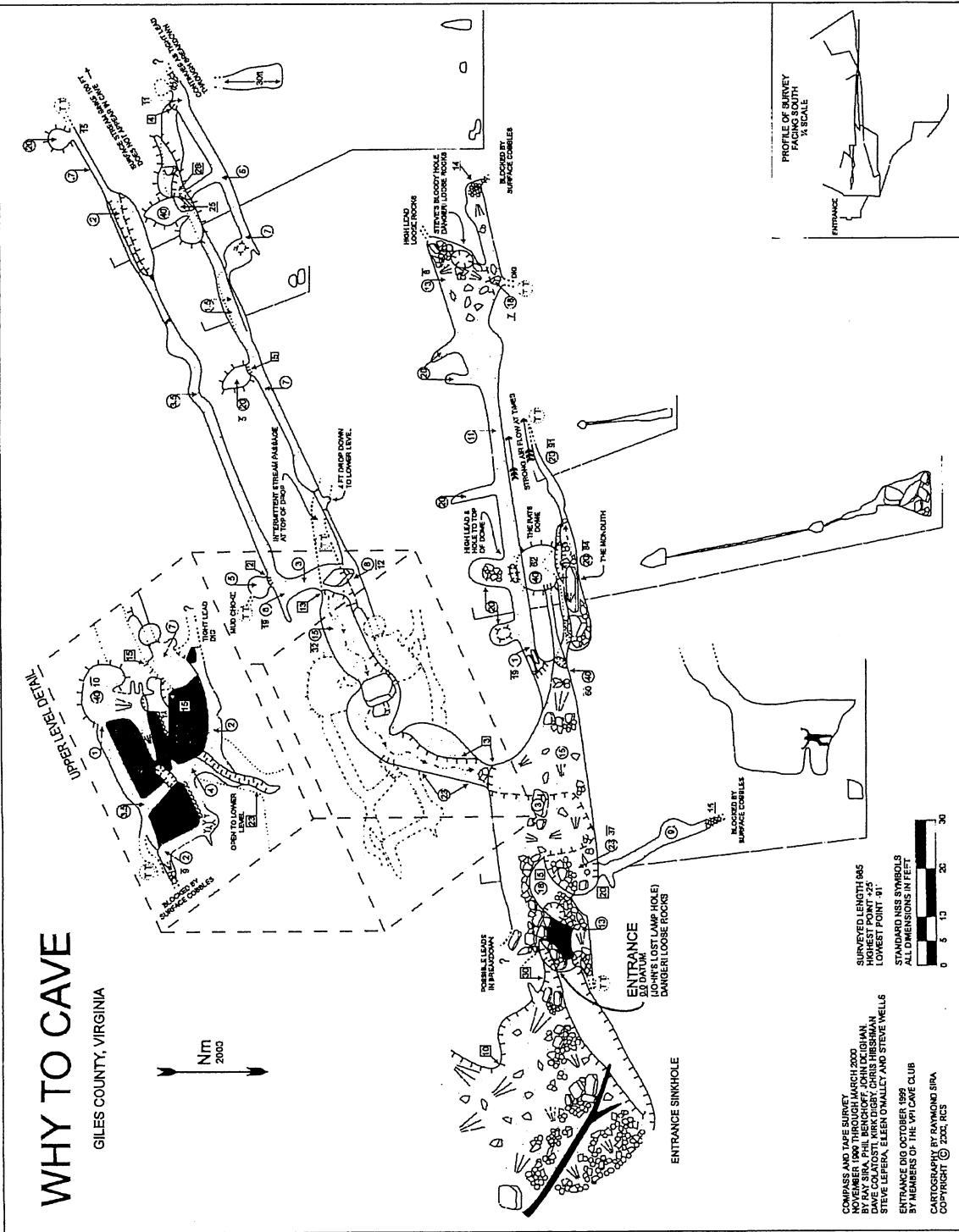


The Tech Troglobyte



The Tech Troglodyte

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

Spring Semester 2001 Officers:

President	Eric Stanley
Vice President	Chris Hibshman
Treasurer	Spotty D. Rapier
Secretary	Matt Stec



Volume XXXVIII, No. 3

Editor	Eileen O'Malley
Cover Map	Ray Sira

Contents

Editor's Note	2
To the Edge and Back: A Four Day Camp Trip in Jewel Cave	3
Club Quotables	8
A Beautiful Holiday Tradition: Easter Beer	9
Upcoming Events	12
Where's the Bastard?!	12
Grotto Grapevine	13
Elvis Grotto. Ban on Caving Discontinued	16
Chasing Sandy.....	17
What Do You Know About Saltpeter?.....	19
Blacksburg Caving Accidents, 2000 - 2001.....	23
Terror at -24 Feet.....	25
Attack of the One-eyed Cave Monster	27
Incident at DMC	31
From the Signout	33

Editor's Note



Thanks to all who contributed to this Trog in terms of articles and photos. We're still a bit lean on the artwork, but I have faith that you guys can do as good a job as the old farts. You now have all summer to get sketching for the next issue! Remember that I'm willing to take just about any contribution, even if this is the best you can do:



Photo by Andy Yeagle. Gee, thanks.

To the Edge and Back: A Four Day Camp Trip in Jewel Cave

by Carl Bern

DAY ONE

It was bitterly cold outside as Mike Wiles parked his car in the main lot of Jewel Cave National Monument. I had been hoping for one of those brilliantly clear winter days that are the norm in the western U.S., but instead it was gray. Ah well, I thought, it will just make seeing the sun that much sweeter when we come out of the cave. We grabbed our duffel bags and headed into the visitor center. Mike is the Cave Specialist at Jewel and has worked there for 22 years. He led the way through the visitor center at high speed even though none of the lights on the main level were turned on. Down in the basement we found three other cavers. Dan Austin, Stan Allison, and Kelly Mathis were dressing and readying their packs. Each of them looked thin and strong. These guys were not just cavers, they were Jewel cavers. Dozens, and in Mike's case hundreds, of trips into this immense cave had allowed them to tune their equipment and caving style for the maximum efficiency Jewel required. By comparison, my three previous trips in the cave seemed thin preparation for the rigors of a camp trip. When we compared pack weight I discovered that my camp pack weighed a bit more than everyone else's did. It was too late for me to try trimming weight, though; Mike was calling the elevator. I shouldered my pack. It was time to go in the cave.

The first camp trip was not undertaken in Jewel Cave until 1997. Mike is very serious about minimizing impacts on Jewel, and camping is always a significant impact on any cave. By 1997, however, the edge of exploration was quite remote from the elevator. The productivity of survey trips was becoming limited by the amount of time a team could work before having to start the journey out of the cave. Safety was also becoming an issue as even the strongest of explorers ran the risk of an accident brought on by fatigue. An underground camp was the solution to these problems. After significant reconnaissance, planning, and experimentation, a permanent

camp was established in the cave. Mike deemed it successful when the first trip to use this camp brought back 10,000 feet of survey.

Our trip started off slowly. Everyone had to get used to moving through the cave with the extra weight of a camp pack. Less than an hour of caving brought us to the area where the real work began, The Miseries. A great number of crawls and tight spots had already been mapped when the Miseries were discovered, so the name was not given lightly. They are a 1,100 foot section of crawlways on the trade route to the southeastern part of Jewel Cave. The Miseries are followed immediately by the 700 foot long Mini-Miseries. These are so named not for being shorter but because the ceiling drops even lower. Many people are not particularly impressed by the Miseries when they first pass through them. It is on the trip out, after hours of more caving, that they work their terrible magic. Our group was not overly concerned by the Miseries on this first day. We knew that we had three days to go before seeing them again.

Beyond the Miseries, Jewel opened up. Metrecal Cavern and The Mind Blower led us onward. There was an awkward constriction at The Stopper and then things got big again at the down-climb known as The Point of No Return. We stopped at the water cache near Sidetrack Tap and picked up another liter apiece. Then we hiked through the truly enormous Cloud Nine, a room that would seem more at home in Mexico or attached to Mammoth Cave. Eventually we came to the Two-Step and the Three-Step. Here, individual footprints rather than a trail led across a floor thick with gypsum formations. The low ceiling forced us to pass the camp packs carefully over this gypsum. The next enormous room we reached was Seventh Heaven. Beyond Seventh Heaven was the Land of Milk and Honey, the destination of my longest trip prior to this one. This is one of my favorite areas in Jewel. White calcite rafts the size of my palm and thinner than Pringles potato chips cover the floor. A

narrow trail winds through the rafts. Where some still remain on the trail they crush underfoot like a thin layer of crisp snow. In other places, honey-colored flowstone in pristine condition snakes over red mud and black manganese.

At a little after three in the afternoon we stopped and dropped our camp packs. We split into two teams and surveyed for a few hours before continuing to camp. I was impressed as my team found some clusters of gypsum needles. The longest was about twelve inches in length. Later, Mike called Dan and I to a low spot in a jumble of passages. There we saw a pile of gypsum filaments that blew my mind. It was a combination of cave cotton and gypsum beards that was at least four feet across at the base. The middle part of it connected to the ceiling about sixteen inches above. All of it was snow white and looked like the angel hair that one can buy at the store at Christmas-time. Dan and I circled the display with our disposable cameras knowing they would not do the scene justice. Mike told us that it was the largest pile of dense cave cotton he had seen in Jewel.

By the time we stopped surveying, the two teams had a combined total of 1500 feet for the day. We picked up the packs and continued the journey to camp. Much of the remaining route was pleasant, particularly the Volksmarch. Here the ceiling averages a comfortable ten feet in height and there is no breakdown to hop over.

**THERE WE SAW A PILE
OF GYPSUM FILAMENTS
THAT BLEW MY MIND.**

The floor is covered with little blocks of the manganese for which Jewel Cave is famous. In the Volksmarch these blocks are covered with a thin layer of red mud. Underfoot they crush like weak charcoal briquettes exposing the jet-black manganese, which stains everything it contacts. The manganese in the Volksmarch makes the conservation ethic of Jewel Cave explorers evident. Only a thin black ribbon of a trail stretches through the area; red virgin

floor is everywhere else.

At a little after 10:00 p.m. we made the climb up to our temporary home. As promised, camp was a big piece of breakdown. Sediments would have been softer, but Mike had decided that a camp placed on rock would impact the cave less. Tarps stretched over the block, which was flat but tilted. In one little area a shelf of rock supported three small alcohol stoves. A laminated sign above the stoves read, "Home Sweet Home." Stan and I made a trip up to the water collector. When we returned everyone was happy to hear that all of the five-gallon jugs at the collector were filled. There have been grim nights in camp when some failure of the collection system has forced the campers to reduce their water intake. We all picked out our sleeping spots and stripped off our grimy, sweaty clothes before stepping onto the tarps. The sleeping bags had been waiting for us in camp. Each one was loosely packed in two garbage bags. Desiccant packed with them helped to keep the mildew away. The silk sleeping bag liners we brought with us keep the bags as clean as possible so they can remain in camp for years to come. In a very short time water was boiling on the stoves and we were chowing down our freeze-dried dinners. It had been a long day and we all crashed out quickly after dinner.

DAY TWO

The watch alarms started beeping at 7:00 a.m. I had been tossing and turning for the last hour after the cold finally sank into my bones. We ate breakfast in the sleeping bags before packing them away. Then it was time to assemble the survey gear and put on our still-wet caving clothes. Everyone was comparing volume of urine output. No waste can be left in the cave and urine is the heaviest waste to pack out. Psychological factors aside, packing out urine weight is what limits the camp trips to four days. Even if one can limit production to a liter per day, the camp pack is noticeably heavier on the trip out of the cave. None of us were on track to exceed our carrying capacity this morning. I was tempted to chug down a liter of water because I was already feeling dehydrated. Instead I limited myself to some carefully measured sips.

We shouldered our packs and headed out of camp. As we traveled deeper into the cave, Kelly stumbled and banged his knee. It was a good knock and he decided that he did not want to go out to the edge of the cave as we originally intended. He and Mike made plans to survey somewhere closer to camp. All of us pushed on to the constriction known as The End. We stopped just beyond here. Stan took some samples of corrosion residue on the ceiling for a microbiologist's research project. After this, the two teams split up. Stan, Dan, and I went out to the very edge of known cave. There were several canyons here to explore. All of them headed into white space at the edge of the map. Each required a handline and we made good use of a 70 foot piece of webbing. At the first canyon I lucked out and got to be the first person down. The canyon was over 100 feet tall. I had been in virgin passage before, but never on this scale. My face started to ache and I realized that I had been grinning non-stop for some time. We named the area Cotton Canyon after the little

tufts of cave cotton that dotted the walls. After a couple hours we ran out of leads in Cotton Canyon and moved on to other areas. In the last canyon of the day we got to stretch the tape out to its full 100-foot length for one shot. My face started to ache again. By the end of the day our team of three had surveyed 960 feet.

It was after 10:00 p.m. when met up with Mike and Kelly in camp. Their day was not as productive and Kelly's knee was bothering him. Dinner tempered my own good mood. The

freeze-dried meal I had was the worst I had ever experienced. By sheer force of will I choked it down. After eating energy bars and Spam tortillas all day I had been looking forward to dinner. It was a huge disappointment to have it taste so bad.

DAY THREE

I was a little warmer when I woke up this morning. Piling some gear underneath the foot of my Therm-a-rest had elevated my feet. As a result they did not get so cold during the night.

As we prepared to leave camp, Stan and Dan decided to make a run to the water collector. Mike, Kelly, and I set out for the day's leads with the understanding that the other two would catch up. It was over an hour later, in a spot called the Rust Bucket, that Stan and Dan did catch up. That was when we discovered that there had been a misunderstanding back in camp. As a result, there was only one survey tape for two teams. A slightly sour mood developed. The whole point of being back here was to survey. With one tape only half as much survey could be

accomplished. It was decided that if the leads broke out into really big cave (by Jewel standards) we would cut the tape in half. Even that thought was not extremely appealing. This was a brand new tape that had been carried deep into the cave. It would have a long and useful life back here if we did not choose to brutalize it today.

We continued to the leads. Today's trek took us down a long exposed downclimb known as Dark Descent and the frighteningly fun Weeble



On day three, Carl makes friends with a logomite.

Photo by Dan Austin.

Walk. Either one would be a bad place to fall. The Weeble Walk is a long canyon. It is narrow enough to stem across at something slightly less than full extension of the legs. It is wide enough though that a stumble would send a person forty feet to the floor without getting wedged on the way down. The walls bulge outward at a certain level providing reasonably good footholds. The neat thing about the Weeble Walk is that it is hundreds of feet long, giving one ample opportunity to develop the technique of moving fast. I bounced from one wall to another, foot to foot, as I cruised down the passage. All the time I was remembering what the TV commercial for plastic dolls had taught me so long ago. "Weebles wobble but they DON'T fall down."

Beyond the Weeble Walk we made our way into a network of nice walking passages. Each one seemed to contain some sort of gypsum formation. There were gypsum beards, gypsum flowers, cave cotton, and gypsum needles over a foot long. After three days of seeing these beautiful formations everywhere I was becoming jaded. Sure they were neat, but sometimes it was a pain in the ass to constantly avoid crushing something delicate.

At last we arrived at our lead. We surveyed some small tight passages, which led to a large room. Here Mike wanted to start a new survey designation. After many suggestions he used mine which was WK. It stood for Wounded Knee. Kelly had injured his knee the day before, Dan had banged his on today's trek, and Mike had been nursing one of his for over a month now. We set WK1 on a large cairn in the middle of the room.

We surveyed a little over 1100 feet of cave. It was not a bad day's work, but there was a mood of disappointment in the team. Nothing had gone really big, and no incredible leads were being left for the next trip. We all had been hoping to survey the cave to its 125th mile on this trip and we were about a thousand feet short of that goal.

It was decided to take a slightly different route back to camp. In a large room filled with breakdown there was some confusion about the way onward. Dan, Kelly, and I stayed put while

Mike and Stan scrambled around. It was here that three days of caving seemed to suddenly hit my body. I felt tired, and thinking about how deep in the cave we were just made me more tired. My eyes felt gritty and my mouth dry despite drinking most of the water I had carried from camp. I perked up when we got moving again. Conversation distracted me from my weariness and focusing on not falling brought out my second wind. Somehow the conversation turned to creation science. Mike quietly defended his views and Stan got really wound up in a good-natured way. It was after 10:00 p.m. when we got back to camp. Everyone's energy level was up and the mood was good. Dinner hit us hard though, and with a long day ahead we collapsed soon afterward.

DAY FOUR

It was the day of the long trek out of the cave. I awoke with a heavy feeling in my gut. It was all right to be nervous, but this felt like there was something seriously wrong with me. Then I started thinking about how dehydrated I had been for the last three days and realized I had to do something. I had some private time with one of the cave-burrito kits I had packed and then the world seemed like a much friendlier place.

We completed the now familiar tasks of cooking breakfast and packing away the sleeping bags. New desiccant went in with the bags. The tarps were swept clean and the debris packed away in a pack. After two days of lightweight caving, my camp pack seemed ridiculously heavy. We bid farewell to the camp and set out for the surface. The first part of the trip was not bad. The passages were large and the caving relatively easy. As we moved closer to the entrance, though, things seemed to get harder. Climbs became awkward and there seemed to be many hills to hike up.

By the time we got to the Miseries I was feeling pretty tired. We had a bite of food and a drink before starting in. Stan and Kelly were ahead of me and soon disappeared into the distance. Mike and Dan were behind me. Dan seemed to be flagging a little. I waited and helped get his pack through a particularly awkward spot. After that I started to keep my own pace,

thinking that I would just wait for them when things got big again. On I crawled, shoving my beastly pack ahead of me. I was in the zone, pain and weariness safely tucked away in the back of my mind. Suddenly I noticed that the floor beneath my face did not look heavily traveled. My pack obscured the view ahead and the ceiling was low enough that I could not quite turn my head. Hmm, I seem to be off trail; maybe this will connect back to the trail, though. I shoved the pack ahead and crawled along further. The pack wedged. I peered around it and see that the passage had ended. Crap. I managed to turn around and get the pack ahead of me again. *Oh well, I will just backtrack until I meet up with Dan and Mike. They will set me right. Wait a minute, though. I am in a side passage. They could pass my wrong turn before I get back!* I could be lost in this part of the cave where there is hardly a place to sit up straight! Crap! I hustled back the way I came, shoving the huge pack ahead of me so fast that my arms begin to ache. I see lights! "Hey Carl, you went

the wrong way," said Mike.

After that incident I stayed close to Mike and Dan. Dan seemed to becoming down with a cold and it was debilitating him fast. The rest of the trip out was slow. At last we arrived in the Target Room, near the elevators. In addition to our stash of Gatorade there was a damp poster and some envelopes waiting for us. Each envelope had one of our names written on the outside; Stan and Kelly had already picked up theirs. The cards and poster were to congratulate us on the 125th mile. We had not accomplished that, but we had passed the 200-kilometer mark. That was cause for celebration and the poster acknowledged that milestone, too. We wearily made our way to the elevators.

That night the four of us went out for pizza and beer. The next morning I set out for Denver before dawn. From behind the steering wheel of my car I watched the sun rise over the snow-swept Wyoming landscape. It was a very sweet sight indeed.

Club Quotables
submitted by your "friends"

RR to ZO: "That was fun, if a little messy."

SR to KE: "Would you quit banging on me and finish dinner?"

SK to MB: "We were just about to do it, but then you left early."

JMU B to CR: "She said she was dating a caver from here."

CR to B: "That would be me."

B to CR: "Hey, I took her to the senior prom!"

ME to AY: "I just wanted to screw Philip."

KE to ES: "Mark sure can cook."

JO to listserv: "It was a riot and also funny!"

EOM to KD: "Andy and I have a deal."

RS: "What kind of deal gets him off?"

BG to KD: "I think there's something in my pants."

SR to ES: "So, you like the sounds I make."

MA to club: "I've seen him in action underground."

SR to KE: "KG4MYY, this is KG4MYZ."

KE to SR: "KG4MYZ, this is KG4MYY."

EOM to SL: "They were eating something that made me think of you."

ME to PB: "We all got little things."

KS to CF: "I have self esteem... don't I?"

A Beautiful Holiday Tradition: Easter Beer

by Rachel Clarke

Eggs. Candy. Bunnies. These are some of the items we usually associate with Easter. But for one group of friends at Virginia Tech, the thought of Easter is tied to another word – beer.

Every year, the VPI Cave Club celebrates the holiday with its official Easter Beer party the day before Easter Sunday. This year, about 50 people gathered in Montgomery County, Virginia to celebrate the occasion.

"You don't have to stop being a kid when there's no Easter bunny," explained A.C. (anonymous caver), a club member. "You can still celebrate, in different ways. Think of what adults like – they like beer. So instead of hunting for candy, we hunt for beer."

Easter Beer began slowly, around noon on Saturday. People slowly trickled in, carrying twelve- or six-packs wrapped in tin foil. The point of the foil is to hide the brand of beer. The idea is simple – if you can see what kind it is, everyone will skip the cheap beer, and only hunt for the expensive kind.

On such a warm, sunny afternoon, the hiders had the time to contemplate where to secrete each beer, slowly wandering around the large yard, waiting for the perfect opportunity to put each one away with no one looking.

These hiders stealthily wove around the bonfire that burned sporadically inside a small ring of stones reserved for the purpose. At times there was no flame to be seen, only a small amount of smoke, while occasionally the fire would flare to several feet. In the heat of the day, the fire was mostly ignored, but around five o'clock the temperature began to cool and people started to huddle near the fire, soaking in its warmth.

Two Virginia Tech students, Eric Stanley and Brian Ekey, forded the wide, shallow creek bubbling throughout the back yard. "Oh God, it's cold!" yelled Stanley as his

bare feet hit the chilly water. Despite the cold, the two managed to successfully cross the stream, strewing several beers among the rocks scattered in the middle.

When each person was done camouflaging his or her foil-wrapped beer, he or she got to begin the hunt. The task sounds so easy... just look around and find some beers, right? But the club makes it a little more difficult than that. After each person finds a beer, they must finish it before they begin the next hunt. This rule makes Easter beer hunting much more difficult than Easter egg hunting, because by the time someone starts looking for their fourth or fifth beer, they have had enough to drink to make the task pretty daunting.

The club members could overcome this hardship by resting for some time between each venture. They relaxed in the lounge chairs that were scattered around the backyard, filling them most of the day. The chairs faced the makeshift stage so that those sitting could enjoy the music while sipping their beer.

At the side of the yard was the stage, with a



The wandering singer entertains. Photo by Nathan Sharp.

compilation of instruments that people sporadically played during the first two or three hours of the Easter Beer hunt. Around three, a

band began to play, entertaining the crowd on and off throughout the afternoon.

The band, *Las Cucarachas de la Muerte*, consists of several cave club members who play regularly at club events. Their play list, including such songs as "Paint it Black" and "I Wanna Be Sedated," had many members of the crowd up and on their feet, dancing away the afternoon.

The cave club is an unusual assortment of diverse people. While only students can be officers, members include students, faculty and staff of the University. But before they become members, trainees must pass a rigorous test and prove several skills, including rigging, climbing, and rappelling [sic] in caves, tying several different knots, spending many hours underground, and passing a lamp quiz.

Because faculty and staff can be members, they vary widely in age. Also, once you are a member, you are in for life, which adds to the wide variety of ages.

As a cave club, of course, the members and trainees go caving often. But as much as their activities are focused on caving, they are easily just as concentrated on a different activity - drinking - although the two are never mixed.

For many people, Easter Beer may be a hard concept to grasp. In southwest Virginia, Easter is commonly associated with a morning at church and a big, family dinner afterward.

"Easter Beer never really goes over well with really religious people," said A.C.. "They sort of go, 'What are you doing?' and that's how you know it's a really successful event."

A.C. explained that in the eyes of the club, Easter is no longer a sacred holiday. "You think Easter is a religious holiday, but it's really just

a holiday of American consumerism," he said. "Today's holidays are brought to you by consumers."

Easter Beer is not a recent innovation. It has been a staple of the club since at least the early 1980's, said Craig Ferguson, another member. "I've been coming since 1983," he said.

Ferguson said the first couple of Easter Beers he attended were in downtown Blacksburg, at a member's house. "Then it moved out here around 1988, or so."

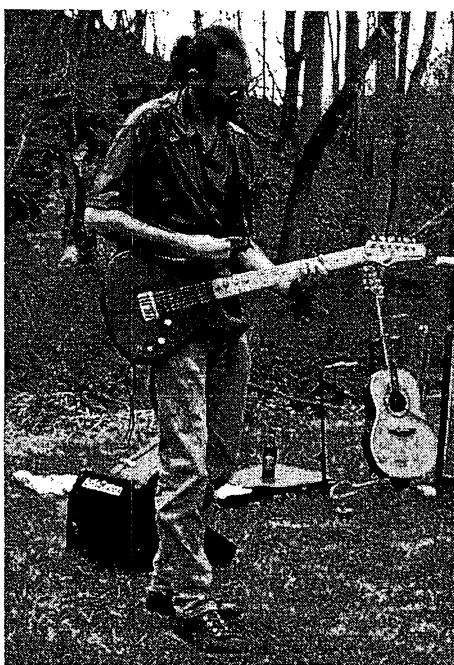
"Here" is the Bat Ranch, the nickname of a large, white farmhouse located on several acres. When Easter Beer was first held here, the property belonged to Jim Washington, another member. Now the Bat Ranch has passed into the hands of Mike Newsome, who has graciously hosted the event for more than 10 years.

Before the transition, said Ferguson, there was one major difference about Easter Beer. "It was always in town, always on a Sunday," he said. "It changed to Saturday, I can imagine why - probably just so people could party more and still make it to work on Monday."

Easter Beer only lasts for one day. But as several participants pointed out, the event can have effects that last much, much longer.

"When we moved here in '93, I moved in with Mike Newsome and lived here. The whole yard was overgrown, and as we reclaimed the place, we found dozens of Easter Beers," said club member Ray Sira.

A.C. said he thought the danger of leftover beer added to the fun of the day. "See the neat thing about Easter Beer is, about three to four years from now, they will be finding beers leftover from this Easter Beer. Every year, someone finds a beer from the year before, and goes



Play that funky music, white boy.
Photo by Nathan Sharp.

bleh," he said.

Although Easter Beer is based on the enjoyment of adults, that doesn't preclude kids from joining in on the fun. Several club members brought their children to the hunt. Their parents went around the back yard early in the day, hiding brightly colored plastic eggs filled with candy in some obvious and some not-so-obvious places.

Naomi Orndorff, 5, ran around excitedly, waiting for her chance to hunt for candy. "How about, the kids hide the beer, and the grown ups hide the eggs!" she exclaimed. This suggestion, however, was vetoed by some of the adults involved.

Naomi confided later that she was comfortable with the Easter Beer hunt because, as she said, "I'm allowed to drink beer."

"Oh really?" I replied.

"Oh yes," the five year old answered. "But only one kind."

"And what kind is that?"

"Root beer!" she exclaimed, grinning widely.

While the children ran about underfoot, grabbing plastic eggs as desperately as if they were cups of water in the Sahara, the band played in the background.

After their exhausting egg hunt, the children relaxed by playing in the large outdoor metal hot tub that presides over half the backyard. All of the kids and some of the adults splashed and relaxed in the water, which was cool because the heat pump was not connected:

The beer hunt, while undeniably unique, did not lack every resemblance to a traditional Easter gathering. Club member Eileen O'Malley injected the spirit of the Easter bunny into the hunt by forming little bunny ears on the top of each bottle of Tequila she hid.

As well, Molly Newsome [sic] hid her beers with a special Easter surprise. When each one was unwrapped, hidden beneath the tin foil was a thin purple strip of paper bearing the message "This beer comes with a Cadbury Creme Egg, see Molly."

Not withstanding some fun candy surprises, this Easter Beer was fairly tame, compared with some in the past, said several members. Club member Mike Futrell gave an example. "The '86 Easter Beer was cool," he said. "One of the guys from the club had a dead VW Beetle, so we cut it up with a blowtorch. That was the event of the Easter Beer."

"And I have slides!" he added.

O'Malley agreed that there were more antics in past years. "One of the funniest things I've ever seen at Easter Beer was about four or five years ago," she said. "Craig Ferguson pulled up and there was a bunch of people sitting on the porch - he gets out of his truck and pulls out a metal detector."

"It was just really, really funny," O'Malley said. "Everybody started laughing - I think he just did it for the shock value."

Regardless of what happens at the next Easter Beer, you can be sure of one thing - there will be no shortage of shock value.

Upcoming Events

Mark these important dates on your calendar!

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| May 27 | Float Trip |
| July 20-22 | Doug Perkins and Lynn Richardson host Son of Picnic in Bland County |
| August 3-5 | Russ and Sandy Peterson host their annual summer party in Seaford, VA |
| Aug. 30-Sept. 3 | OTR in Dailey, West Virginia |
| | SIVTAC reunion at the Tygart campground |

Where's the Bastard?!

Can you find the Bastard in this photo?



Photo by Andy Yeagle.

Grotto Grapevine

by A.I. Cartwright

CLUB ADDITIONS

Maria Grace Conner arrived on the scene in late February to the tune of 7 lbs, 13 oz, and 19.5 inches long. She had a rough first few weeks, but is eating much better and putting on weight. Now Anne Marie and Steve have their hands full with the baby and a very active Sylvia!

Birch Ambrose recently celebrated his first birthday with a small party at the Bat Ranch. He is now almost as tall as Molly and has more energy to boot! Birch has been very dutiful in his attendance of club parties, and he especially likes the laser light show set up by his dad.

BANQUET

This year's Banquet brought many cavers out of the woodwork to listen to Wil "The Bastard" Orndorff discuss his Skydusky Hollow project. The frantic ridge walking, surveying, and dye tracing began in an effort to help the local residents fight the proposed AEP power line. Though Wil's information didn't stop the approval of the route, it has opened the door to many new surveying adventures.

For his efforts, Wil was awarded the A.I. Cartwright award, the club's most honored recognition. The rest of the slackers received guano clusters and jokes at their expense.

EASTER BEER

This year's Easter Beer festivities at the Bat Ranch included some fine musical entertainment. *Las Cucarachas de la Muerte* opened the show for a set and then turned the stage into an open mic event. A very ragtag band made up of Wil and Zenah Orndorff, John McKenna, and Travis Coad performed under the name Sweaty Sphincter Sweat. (Sounds like something SCOTS wishes they had thought of first.) Dave Colatosti took over from them and did a one-man show until he was overtaken by the Sweats for a jam.

The celebration coincided with the JMU cavers' Spring Fling, which added a new assortment of characters, including Carl Droms, to the scene.

Two of them even participated in the open mic with acoustic guitar and singing. Despite rumors that they think VPI cavers are arrogant assholes, the JMU cavers seemed to enjoy their weekend. John Deighan ran a vertical session and led a trip on Saturday afternoon, and more JMU folks went caving with VPI on Sunday. Some even participated in the Easter Beer hunt; next year we'll see if they've adopted the tradition.



He may be a bastard, but he can sing! Photo by Nathan Sharp.

Amanda Stiles made a guest appearance at the party. She's still job and/or school hunting from her parents' home in NOVA. Says Amanda, "I keep trying to get as far away from cavers as possible, and then I end up coming back!"

PICNIC

This year saw the demise and subsequent toss of seven kegs! The great weather on Saturday was a contributing factor.

Strangely, some people took the sunny weather as a sign to go underground. Newberry's was a popular trip cave, and a few folks made it into Buddy Penley's. There was a surprising addition to the caving crew this year - see Katherine Ferguson's article for details.

Bob Simonds and Kathy Lamb casually mentioned to the group that they'd just been



Spotty Dog, the conquering hero, defends against the evil rose bush.
Photo by Craig Ferguson.

married earlier that week. They pointed to the toilet paper strewn pickup as evidence. Kathy claims, "We'd been thinking about it for a long time. Then we just got up one morning and decided it was a good day to get married."

This picnic had what seemed like a much larger crew of dogs running around. (Guard your dog from Rascal Pirie.) The only thing more noticeable was the number of kids! Hugh Beard and Karen Little brought Keelie to meet the others. Also in attendance: "Little Elvis" Elizabeth Ferguson, Megan Bruce, T.J. and Naomi Orndorff with friend Senna, Sylvia and Maria Conner.

As usual, the multiflora rose bushes didn't stand a chance. Various pickups, jeeps, and cruisers were on hand to prevent them from overtaking the field.

WEDDING BELLS WILL RING

Bob and Kathy aren't the only ones willing to take the plunge. This summer will bring together in Kristin Posson and her fiancee Dan, Dave Colatosti and Patricia Feely, and Carl Bern and Amy Johnson. So how many baby showers will we be planning next April?

NEW OFFICERS AND STUFF

The club voted in the new officers at the end of the semester. Mike Cole is President, Spotty D. Rapier remains Treasurer (will he beat LePera's tenure record?), Kevin Rock is Vice President, and Andy Yeagle is Secretary.

Andy initially faced some stiff competition from Philip Balister, who gave a moving speech (something about funneling club money into the Elvis Grotto.). Andy's speech, however, was so eloquent as to turn the tide in his favor. He said simply, "Please don't let me lose to Philip."

The club acquired one new member this semester. Chip Mullins was voted in mere days ago. Rumors abound that he was only voted in to keep Samantha Lambert hanging around the club.

I SMELL BACON....

Hams of the club have converted another two suckers into the ham radio lifestyle. Scott Rapier and Karen Everhardt are the club's most recent hams. Despite their new interest, they insist that they won't become obsessive geeks like Philip Balister. (They'd have a long way to go to catch up.) Since getting his ham license Mark Eisenbies claims he's not going to be a geek about it, but you can catch him on the radio any random time of the day.

SAVE US

The number of EMTs in the club is increasing (good, because this group needs saving). Alison Williams and Matt Burnett wrap up their training this week. Alison has been running calls with the Rescue Squad, while Matt prefers to "save his strength" for when he's needed underground.



You're a superstar, that's what you are. Photo by Andy Yeagle.

TRAVELIN'

Steve Wells and Joe Thompson are still running around chasing jobs as overpriced janitors at nuclear power plants. The money may be good, but Wells claims the "sitting around all day" lifestyle isn't so great for his figure. So much for that construction worker bod!

Pam Mohr just returned from a month-long trip through Portugal. She plans to spend a mere two weeks at home before spending two months driving across country. Her extensive traveling isn't bizarre – it's her willingness to spend two months stuck in a car with Kirk Digby that has everyone baffled.

Steve, Anti-Steve, and Joe Thompson head to California this summer to rappel and climb El Capitan (a mere 3000 feet). The jury is still out on whether Wells can convince his evil half to

climb it on knots with him. (His initial comment? "Yeah, right.")

Paris was the destination in January of the Winter Weekend Abroad crew consisting of Jerry and Joan Redder, Joan Johnson and Ko Takamizawa, and a few other folks who this author has failed to recall. That's okay, because thanks to the great wine there's probably a lot that they themselves don't recall about the trip! The vacation was fast and furious, but the group did manage to sneak some museum culture in around the wine and cheese fetes.

ROPE RUNNING (OR WALKING, FOR SOME)

Don't forget to come out to the Yellow House on Wednesday evenings this summer for rope running. It's a great chance for new folks to set up their gear, test out other gear, and chase the Orndorff girls around the yard.



Elvis Grotto. Ban on Caving Discontinued: Co-chairs Underground at Picnic

by Katherine Ferguson

BLAND CO. - The caving world was shocked Saturday when two high-ranking members of the acclaimed Elvis Grotto. arrived at Picnic muddy and tired. Co-chairmen Jeff Jablonski and Paul Hess admitted to vertical caving.

The pair had descended into Newberry's and rappelled Triple Wells. They did a few laps around one section before making a critical left turn. The ascent to exit the cave was done on a reported thirteen year-old frog system.

This, in light of recent Elvis Grotto. activity as VPI Cave Club Officers and Committee Chairs, is clearly disturbing.

Kristen Posson, who did not attend Picnic, was obviously concerned. After viewing pictures of her beloved Elvis Grotto. co-chairs in muddy cave clothes, she remarked sadly, "I certainly hope that was just for the EG pin-up calendar, and not because [they] actually went caving. You know, caving is dangerous."

Respectable Elvis Grotto. co-chairs Ko Takamizawa and Craig Ferguson tried earnestly

to maintain appearances by drinking beer and hanging out.

Philip Balister, Ed Fortney, and Scott Rapier also participated in the Elvis Grotto.-approved, aboveground activities of biking, hiking, and bush pulling.

Mark Eisenbies, VPI Safety Committee Chair and long-time Elvis Grotto. co-chair, did not seem concerned about this episode. When asked to comment on this surprising event, he simply replied, "Whatever. Are you coming to the race on Sunday?"

Picnic has had a negative impact on Elvis Grotto. before. In 1999, Elvis Grotto. member and longtime trainee Eileen O'Malley broke down under pressure and obtained her VPI Membership. She was voted in at Picnic.

Hess stated, "The face of Elvis Grotto. is constantly evolving." Does this mean that Elvis Grotto. will be unable to maintain their non-caving agenda? We will have to wait and see.



EG Co-chairs Jeff and Paul prepare for a vertical caving trip despite reports that caving is dangerous. Photo by Craig Ferguson.

Chasing Sandy

by Chip Mullins

Every spring, young cavers or just those trying to relive their youth come together at the WVACS field station outside of Lewisburg, West Virginia. Here grottos such as WVU, VPI, and some as far away as Pennsylvania arrive to share stories of caving and create new ones. This tradition of gathering atop a hill in West Virginia was started a few years ago by a VPI caver, Sandy Knapp. The location is prime for caving with so many caves located within a short distance, and the lack of neighbors leaves the nightlife only to the extent of ones imagination. Yet the real reason people come is to cave in places that they might not usually go and see the beautiful caves located in the region.

This year the VPI grotto decided to cave all together (with the exception of Chris Garguilo who is never able to cave at these events). The cave was decided upon by the leader – none other than Sandy Knapp. There was some discussion about how to enter the cave, as Organ Cave has multiple entrances. We ruled out entering at the commercial entrance and scaring the tourist since one must inform the owners ahead of time. Also, there was a rodeo going on at the commercial entrance that would have offered some amusement but in the end been a distraction and hassle. Finally the Lipps entrance was decided upon and the caravan departed. One stop was made upon this trip to gather the needed supplies of junk food and soft drinks. Yet for some the trip to the cave was not entirely fun as the twisty turning road can turn ones hung over stomach upside down and empty breakfast quite quickly. In no time we were parked along the road and preparing to enter the cave.

The group trotted slowly across the field crossing the gates and playing with the electric fence surrounding the cave. Only cavers would find it amusing to grab an electric fence and see how long they can hold on. Everyone made his or her way down into the sinkhole and the trip began. Our fearless leader pushed forth as the trainees lagged behind trying to negotiate the passage that was quite wet at times. After

fighting to reach what we thought was the passage we hoped to reach, we found that as often happens in caving we took a wrong turn. As the rest of the group turned around and rested, some of us went to look for where we had gone wrong. Somehow I was talked into going ahead with Sandy. I chased behind as this woman moved rapidly through the passage. As Kirk Digby said, she was so graceful that she didn't make a sound as she swiftly maneuvered through the passage as I stomped noisily behind. Then we began a long low crawl where I came out to find her waiting for me as I sat in a pool of sweat – only to find that we had looped back to where we began and the group was beginning to pass on its way back to the wrong turn. Eventually everyone made it back and we discovered that the right we made should have been a left. Now the trip was actually about to begin (or is where it should have begun).

Some people were already half spent, but we agreed to tread forth. Over and under low ceilings we pushed on. Crawling on our bellies and then only to be able to have enough room to be on our hands and knees, the group began to grow even more tired. The allure of prized cave passage was drawing us further and deeper into the cave. Yet still the surroundings just became more of a maze and resembled every other cave I have seen. A few members of the group began to question if it was really worth the effort to continue as they tired more. It was near unanimous among those tiring that they would turn back. Each person on the returning group pulled together to find their way through the maze of passage and eventually reach the surface.

The dim light of the now setting sun pulled us closer and then bathed us in its warmth. We walked from the sinkhole across the field as each of the cavers relieved themselves in the manner that best suited their ailment, while some of us just laughed and made comments as cavers do in such situations. We returned to the WVACS field station to relax, eat some grub,

shower, and enjoy beverages. Our only thought was of the VPI cavers still in Organ on their quest to find bigger and better passage before they must return to make their signout time.

The beverages began to take effect and our thoughts of seeing more of the cave faded away as the night went on. The remainder of the group arrived with stories of grand formations

and huge passage, but only after losing their way yet another time. These stories soon faded away as songs around the fire embraced us all. More memories of YTR will come and go, but only one will stand in my mind forever. As Mike Cole so eloquently put it, "DON'T SPILL THE WINE!"

CALVIN AND HOBBES BY BILL WATTERSON



What Do You Know About Saltpeter?

by Chris Hibshman

What is saltpeter? Why did people go to extreme lengths to get it? Why did saltpeter mining result in those large mounds of dirt in Tawney's, which are evident 140 years later? If you are looking for answers to these questions, you should continue reading.

My duties as Vice President of the VPI Cave Club include leading training trips, often to Tawney's Cave. Tawney's Cave has a rich history, dating back to the Civil War when saltpeter was "mined" from the cave to manufacture gunpowder. To impress the new and naive trainees, I would spout out everything I knew about saltpeter (two or three facts, plus several lines of bull sh# @). After a few minutes (okay, maybe it was less than a minute) of preaching, it became clear to me that I had no clue what I was talking about. Worse was when one of the more intelligent trainees picked up on my ignorance, usually by asking a smart-assed question that I had difficulty answering.

For these situations, I had two responses. Sometimes I would bull sh# @ a reply, piling on the guano up to my neck. Other times I would carefully change the subject. Either way, I felt humbled by the experience. Combine that with being a chemical engineering graduate student and you'll see why I decided to research the subject and write an article so future members will not have to endure similar humility. (It is important to note that I rarely expressed my ignorance about the subject.)

WHAT IS SALTPEETER?

The common name "saltpeter" usually refers to potassium nitrate (KNO_3). However, it may also include calcium, sodium, and ammonium nitrates. The archaic spelling "saltpetre" is a synonym for niter or nitrate. What is the difference between the various nitrates? Many years of field testing revealed that the potassium saltpeter is preferred because it produces a better explosive than the inferior sodium and calcium nitrates. (Incidentally, nitrates are common to most commercial

fertilizers. Combined with diesel fuel, this can also make a powerful explosive, like the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.)

Once saltpeter is purified, it can be mixed with charcoal and sulfur to produce gunpowder, which is an extremely important commodity, especially when you are trying to win a war. The composition of gunpowder varies, depending upon the application and manufacturer. Gunpowder consisting of 75% saltpeter, 15% charcoal, and 10% sulfur seems adequate to propel most projectiles effectively. The origin of this mixture is obscure, but the Chinese were using it over 3000 years ago. (Another side note: The reaction for the burning of gunpowder is very complex and may include dozens of simultaneous reactions. The most probable starting mechanism is the nitrate oxidizing the charcoal.)

There are many places where potassium nitrate can be obtained. It can be mined in its native state in a select few locations worldwide, but these places are limited and the purity is not very good. Other places include organic waste piles and animal manure, specifically cattle, sheep, pig, chicken, and human excrements. In fact, in Europe during the 1500's, it was not uncommon for people accumulate their excrement (and the excrement of their livestock) into a large pile, allow it to sit unabated for at least a year, and then extract the saltpeter. Another common place to find potassium nitrate is in the soil of caves, including those of southwest Virginia.

SALTPEETER CAVES

The soil in caves was the source heavily exploited during the Civil War, and also during the Revolutionary War. An article by David Hubbard in the 1995 NSS Convention Handbook lists 88 saltpeter caves in Virginia, including several local to the Blacksburg area (see Table 1).

Physical evidence of saltpeter mining in these caves is limited to etchings of names in the cave walls, old timbers or vats, and mounds of dirt

from the leaching process. More subtle evidence is the old sediment marks on walls, mattock marks, torch marks, and soot marks. Most of the physical evidence that these caves were once saltpeter caves has since deteriorated or been destroyed, but an oral and sometimes written history remains.

A recent visit to Tawney's Cave revealed several pieces of evidence about the saltpeter mining. In the Saltpeter Room (this proved to be a good starting point) you should notice several large mounds of dirt, which was the soil after the saltpeter had been extracted. Old sediment marks are found along most of the walls in this room. Further down the passage near the stream are dozens of names etched into the wall. Several of these date back to the Civil War and are still present. Here are a few to look for:

"John W. Surface – Feb9th 1862"

"W.L. Surface – 4 February [sic] 1862"

"Wm.L. Surface – Fabuary [sic] 7th 1861 – Bought this cave in the year 1860"

(And now it is time for a lesson in chemical engineering... so pay attention!)

THE LEACHING PROCESS

During the Civil War, Major George W. Rains was assigned by the Confederacy to oversee the production of saltpeter. In 1861, he wrote an article on the subject and distributed pamphlets called "Note on Making Saltpetre from the Earth of the Caves," which is where most of this information is obtained. Now, Major Rains is somewhat of a newfound hero of mine, because he was a great chemical engineer. The best part is that he probably had no idea what a chemical engineer was at the time. He optimized the process and even included an economic analysis of how much money a team of three people could make in a week.

Cave dirt contains large amounts of potassium nitrate, along with calcium and sodium nitrates and many other impurities. Fortunately, potassium nitrate is very soluble in water, whereas most of the impurities are not. This is the basis for extracting or leaching the saltpeter from the soil.

Table 1: Listing of Local Saltpeter Caves

Giles County	Bluff City Saltpeter Cave No.1 Bluff City Saltpeter Cave No.2 Canoe Cave Curve Saltpeter Cave Daisy Williams Cave No. 1 Klotz Cave New River Cave Saltpeter Cave Straleys Cave (Straleys No. 3) Straleys No. 2 Tawney's Cave
Bland County	Buddy Penley Cave Hamilton Cave Repass Saltpeter (Bland Saltpeter) Cave
Montgomery County	Adams Cave

Basically, there are four steps to "making" saltpeter from cave dirt. The first is to leach the KNO_3 out of the soil and into water. Since all nitrates are very soluble in water, this is quite simple. Potassium nitrate is not the only substance dissolved in the water. Hydrogen nitrate and hydrogen nitrite is also present. To increase the amount of KNO_3 in solution, potash lye (potassium hydroxide, KOH) is added to the react with the hydrogen nitrate and hydrogen nitrite to produce KNO_3 . The third step is boiling the saturated KNO_3 solution to evaporate excess water and produce a supersaturated solution. Finally, cooling the supersaturated solution results in nearly pure KNO_3 crystals. (Solubility of KNO_3 in 100g H_2O : 246g at 100°C; 32g at 20°C). These four steps are analogous to making rock candy from dirty granulated sugar.

The following is a simple description of how the leaching process may be set up at a local cave. To start out, four large barrels with at least one head (end cap) are needed. Drill a half-inch hole in head of each barrel and plug it up with a cork. Set the barrels on some timbers, with access to the plugged hole at the bottom. Place some twigs and sticks in the bottom of the barrel and cover with about 6 inches of straw. Fill the barrel to the top with cave dirt and then add as much water as possible. The twigs and straw act as a filter to allow the water to drain from the barrel without clogging the hole. The potassium nitrate will dissolve in the water, while most of the impurities stay in the soil.

After a day, the first barrel is drained and that water is placed into the top of the second barrel. More water is added to the first barrel. The next day, this process is repeated. Major Rains recommended that each barrel has three washings, and then the old soil is replaced with fresh soil. The saltpeter-rich water is placed into a fourth barrel. Some strong lye made from wood ashes is added to react with the hydrogen

nitrate and hydrogen nitrite to form potassium nitrate.

The water is boiled in a kettle to evaporate the water and increase the concentration of the solution. When "a drop taken up by the end of a stick becomes hard or solid when let fall upon cold metal or upon a plate," the liquor is poured into a trough to cool. Nearly pure (~5% impurities) potassium nitrate crystals will form and should be dried in the sun.

If done properly, twelve barrels of cave dirt will produce about 100 pounds of saltpeter on average. Of course, this depends on how much saltpeter is in the cave dirt. Three men can easily process twelve barrels of soil in six days using the process illustrated in Figure 1. In 1861, the Confederacy was paying 35 cents per pound of saltpeter. This would result in \$35 per week for three men, which was a respectable income. By 1864, the price increased to \$1.50 per pound, or \$150 per week for three men.

The quality of gunpowder depends upon the purity of saltpeter, so it was refined even further at a plant in Nashville, Tennessee, before being sent to the soldiers on the front lines. This consisted of additional filtering and recrystallization processes, similar to those described above.

REFERENCES

- Buchanan, B. J. Gunpowder: *The History of an International Technology*. Bath University Press, 1996.
- Price, W.H.C. *Artificial Production of Nitre*. Montgomery, 1862.
- Rains, Major George W. *Notes on Making Saltpetre from the Earth of the Caves*. Steam Power Press, 1861.
- Robin, O. *Report of O. Robin: Where Saltpetre could be Procured*. New Orleans, 1861.
- Urbanski, T. *Chemistry and Technology of Explosives*. Pergamon Press, 1986.

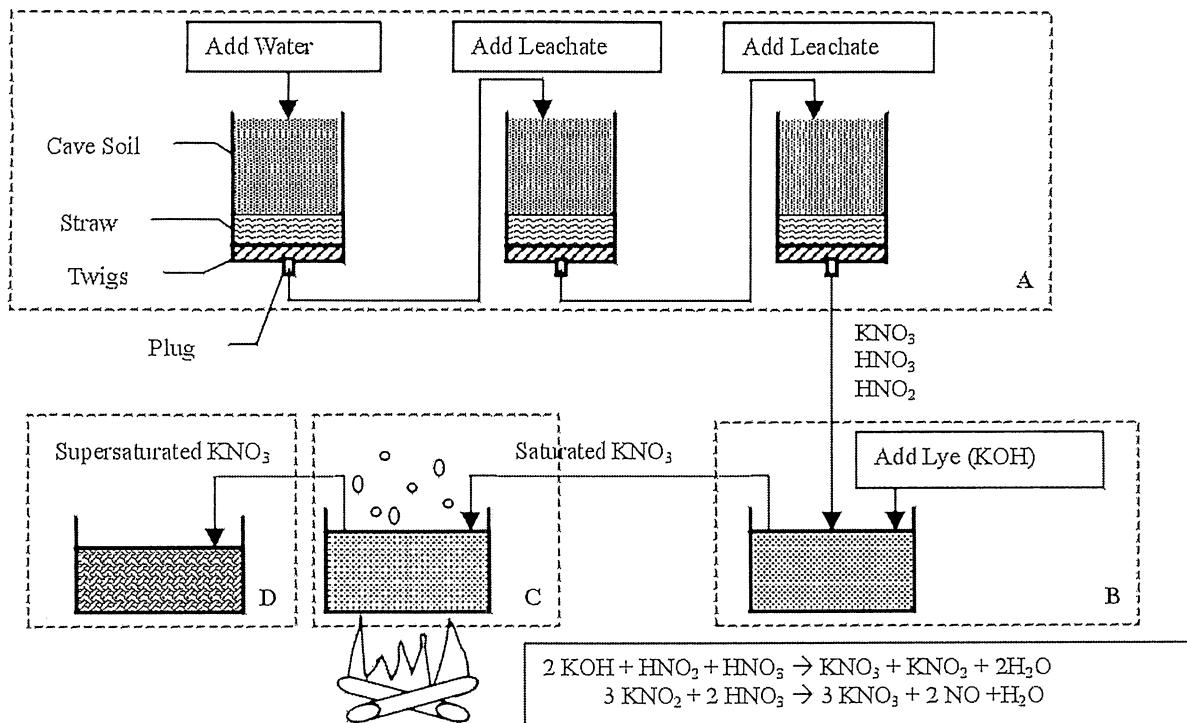


Figure 1: Schematic of a typical salt peter process during the Civil War. A) Dissolving the salt peter in water. B) Adding lye to produce more KNO_3 . C) Removing water to produce a supersaturated solution. D) Cooling the solution to produce nearly pure crystals.

The Tech Troglodyte



**Blacksburg Caving Accidents
2000 - 2001**

VPI Cave Club
Accident/Incident Report Form

Date of Accident/Incident: _____

Day of Week: _____

Time: _____

Cave: _____

Called in by: _____

Reported by: _____

Name(s) of Person(s) Involved	Age	Sex	Experience	Affiliation*

*VPI is not a valid entry.

Describe the accident as completely as possible below, using as few bad words as possible. Send the information to the *Tech Trogolyte* editor. Please use the checkboxes below as a guide for information to be included.

We rescued:

- a toad
- a calf
- a trainee
- a baby snake
- a dog
- a math professor's student

The rescue was:

- fun
- a stimulating and rewarding experience
- boring
- all Wil's fault

Describe the accident here:

Terror at -24 Feet

by Matt Burnett

It was a bright and warm September day – perfect caving weather. Actually, I don't know what it was like outside but the cave was a nice cool 54° with just the right amount of humidity – perfect cave weather. It was near the beginning of the Fall 2000 semester when John Deighan and I decided to take Valerio Viti, Scott Edmond, Cathy Cogswell, Cory Brozina, Nikolas Asaro, Elliot “I-need-an-easier-to-spell-last-name” Darchicourt and Rob McClinton to Smokehole. This was a first cave trip for some of the trainees while others like, oh say, Cathy had been a few times before.

The trip in was pretty uneventful – lots of looking at the formations and explaining various aspects of caves and caving. Everyone seemed to be having a good time. Some of the trainees were picking up on basic skills very fast which was quite good to see. We had reached the Big Room in a decent time and, as trips often do, we took a long break at that point.

After everyone had enough of resting and looking around the room, some people set out to turn one of the “hills” in the big room into a mudslide (start ominous music now). Most people on the trip took part in the mudslide except for me – I tend to follow the laws of physics and my body was at rest damn it. Right about the time we were going to leave, Cathy took one last slide down the slope and just started rolling around at the bottom grabbing her ankle in obvious pain. Of course this meant I had to move. Damn trainees.

No one had heard a snap and her ankle did not look to have any obvious signs of injury, but when you compared it to the other ankle it was obvious that it was starting to swell. At that point we gave Cathy the option of trying to get out with help or to be carried out. She chose to try and get out with some help.

John took four of the trainees with him to get some more experienced cavers underground to swap out with the trainees. Unfortunately this would be quite the task since it was the

weekend of OTR and most cavers were out of town.

Elliot, Nik, Scott (?) and I stayed to start Cathy moving towards the entrance. Initially we tried a few feeble attempts at wrapping the ankle, but that quickly ended in disaster. I had some over-the-counter pain medication in my pack that I thought would spoil otherwise, so I gave a pill to Cathy and we started the brute-force method of carrying her out. Let me tell you, V-shaped rooms suck when you have to carry a person.

**SHE GOT HER BUTT WET
BUT SHE WAS DRIER
THAN IF WE MADE HER
DO IT HERSELF.**

We eventually decided that the best method for transporting her was to have a person on both sides of her supporting her and two people on either side to provide support and balance to those doing the carrying.

It was slow moving across the Big Room, but about the time the floor started evening out the pain medication started to kick in and Cathy suggested we let her crawl on her hands and knees for a while. Apparently the pain medication had dulled the pain enough that she could stand minor movement in her ankle. Woohoo! That rocked! We let her crawl everywhere she felt comfortable crawling and we would carry her over some of the rougher obstacles like streams and cobble floors. This was a significant improvement on time.

The trip to the entrance was rather unremarkable at that point. The only major obstacle left was the roughly 15-foot section where you generally have to squat down and wade through the water. I didn't think Cathy was moving enough to keep herself warm if she got that wet so Elliot and I carried her the best

we could through that. She got her butt wet but she was drier than if we made her do it herself.

After we climbed down the breakdown (well, some lazy people crawled but I won't mention her name) we ran back into John and the rest of the group. It turns out they were pretty much the cavalry since everyone else was gone for the weekend. It was all good though – they were rested up and warm and they were great moral support. At that point we lumbered out of the cave and we only missed our signout by something like 90 minutes. Damn 8-hour trainee trips.

Overall I was pleased with how the whole situation went. Every person on the trip acted extremely well under the circumstances and I thought they acted appropriately. On the surface John made sure the basics of a chain of command was being set up and people were being called out. Each person in the cave looked out for Cathy but also was very aware of their own status and never let themselves get too tired, cold, hungry, or thirsty. Cathy did an excellent job and she helped out a tremendous amount.

There were a few things that could have made the whole experience better. First and most importantly Cathy could not have gotten hurt. Damn trainees. That would have made the trip a whole lot better. We wouldn't have had to

carry a single person out then. I wouldn't have to sit down and write this article, either. Damn trainees. The only other thing I thought could have gone better was the treatment of her ankle. There was not much in the way of splinting material available so we kept it as immobile as possible. Second was that I should have made more of an effort to cool her ankle and elevate it. This would have gone a long way to reducing the swelling. Other than those two things I believe all went as well as could be expected with the equipment at hand.

This accident is best chalked up to the "shit happens" theory. Cathy hadn't done anything stupid or dangerous, she just landed badly. This could've happened to anyone on this or any other trip. In fact, I'm planning to do some research to prove it. I'll take all the trainees on another Smokehole trip and send them down the slide one at a time until enough of them get hurt to prove the point. Details will be published later.

After we left the cave, Cathy went to have her ankle checked out and found out it was sprained. She was in this funky-looking plastic cast for a bit and then upon being freed she went and broke some other part of her leg. I had nothing to do with that! Oh yeah, and this article had nothing to do with terror but I needed a title.

Attack of the One-eyed Cave Monster

by Eileen O'Malley

It was a dark and stormy night... okay, so it was actually a beautiful, warm, sunny day. But it *could've* been dark and stormy because we were in a cave and wouldn't know otherwise. Anyway, on this summer day of 2000 I'd talked Matt Burnett into showing me around Giant Caverns since I'd never been there. It's not a large cave, so there would be plenty of daylight left to enjoy after the trip.

We arrived at the cave through the usual route: get to Narrows (pronounced Nars) and then drive around picking arbitrary turns until you wind up on the right road. I tried to remember the street names of the most direct route, but it's like caving – you go down enough wrong passages that soon they look familiar and you're certain that's the way.

At the landowner's house we parked the car and knocked on the door a few times. A cat eyed us from inside a window, and we heard a dog barking incessantly, but neither of them opened the door for us. Nor did any humans. Since landowner permission is not explicitly required at this cave, we geared up and headed through the weeds to the entrance.

The fence had been cut and pulled back – not very useful in keeping anyone out. We passed easily through the opening. Then we rigged the entrance and dropped into the cave.

The entrance "pit" is mostly a slope, but it's steep enough to warrant rigging at the top. About fifteen feet down, the slope becomes more steep. You pass through a corkscrewy hole, and a few feet after that you drop straight down 10-15 feet into the cave.

Matt and I strolled through the cave (yes, strolled since it's basically two huge rooms) and poked through all the things one could poke through. We inspected the rotting remains of the old commercial entrance steps, and Matt pointed out the mud choke which used to be the main entrance. Apparently they even used to have dances and parties in the cave. However, many years ago the entrance had collapsed and sealed itself shut, thus ending the

commercial venture.

After a couple of hours of exploration, Matt and I decided we'd seen the cave and wanted to head back to the land of sunshine. On the way to the rope I heard a jingling sound. I glanced down to see if I had any loose gear – nope. More jingling. Maybe Matt's gear was making the noise.

"Hey, Matt. Is that you making that noise?"

"What noise?"

So I stopped him, and we stood quietly for a moment. More jingling. Suddenly we realized we weren't alone in the cave. We could practically here the ominous horror-movie soundtrack as the fear crept up our spines.

Then we saw the dark shape about fifteen feet ahead of us... between us and the rope. The shape was moving low to the ground and appeared four-legged. I grabbed Matt for protection (yeah, I know, but nobody else was there to hide behind). The shape kept its distance, which was just fine by us.

Our initial horror-movie panic gave way to the realization that the animal was most likely a pet, since the jingling sounded like a collar. The shape was too big for a cat, so it must be a dog. Did the dog fall in the way we'd come?

Then we noticed that when Matt shone his light around, one red eye reflected back at us. Only one. "I guess it's a one-eyed dog," I ventured. Matt blurted, "Oh, God. Maybe his other eye got poked out when he fell in!" Instantly we both had the mental image of a dog with one eye hanging bloody and grotesque from its socket and a dirty stick protruding. Thanks, Matt.

We moved hesitantly towards the rope and the dog moved as well, keeping a wide berth. We still couldn't get a good look at it, but it moved without any evidence of broken limbs. By this time we realized we'd have to catch it and haul it from the cave. Was it dangerous? Would it attack us? Was it some nasty, vicious breed? We were both very nervous, but we made it to the

rope without being mauled.

"You go up and call someone for help. I'll stay here and watch the dog," Matt offered heroically.

"No way. I'm not leaving you here alone with this thing."

"But someone should keep an eye on it so we can find it again."

"Forget it. You're coming with me!"

I believe I detected a hint of relief in Matt's voice as he agreed. I hopped onto the rope and frogged up faster than I'd ever frogged in a rope-running competition. The second I was at the top, before I'd even removed my gear from the rope, I called "Off rope!" Matt's ascent was equally speedy.

Once out of the cave, Matt and I found the landowner's son mowing the lawn. We told him about the dog in the cave, and he assured us their dog was safely in the house. We asked a few neighbors, but none of them had a dog missing. As we started back to the car, one of them offered, "Hey, I think I've seen some missing dog fliers around town. They've been there for maybe a week."

Matt and I changed out of our caving gear, piled into the car, and headed towards the Burger King/little store to make some calls. We located Chris Rourke and told him to bring some gear and meet us at BK. He grumbled, but agreed.

While we waited (and waited, and waited....) for Chris, I went into the little shop and bought a can of easy-open Alpo. Hmm, if I were a hungry dog stranded in a cave, would I prefer beef or chicken livers? Matt and I waited for a long time, but eventually a surly Chris rolled into the parking lot.

On the way back to the cave, we stopped at a light pole bearing a lost dog sign. Two black female cocker spaniels were missing. Could our cave dog be one of the spaniels?

At the cave, we geared up again and the three of us rappelled in. The dog was nowhere to be found. We walked around a bit calling, "Sally! Sofie! Whichever one you are, where are you?" Then Chris spied the dog in question. One red eye glowed back at him.

She kept her distance from us, barking and backing away when we approached her. She was obviously scared, and perhaps a bit crazed from her ordeal. Finally, the scent of yummy Alpo drew her in close enough for Chris to nab her. He tied a webbing leash to her collar. Captured, the dog tried to escape. Chris let the dog run around a bit, hoping she would calm down. Matt and I had started back towards the rope to get ready for the haul when we heard Chris say, "Hey, what do we have here?" He'd found the second dog.

The other, smaller dog was lying on the ground, barely moving. She didn't seem to have any energy left. But when Chris knelt down to her, she licked his hand and then sprang to life.

Suddenly she was full of enthusiasm, and her doggie friend seemed much less nervous once the smaller one so easily accepted us.

We leashed the second dog and walked them to the rope. Matt went up to lower us some gear and to set up a haul system. I sat down and placed a blanket on my lap, and both dogs piled on me. They settled in and showed no signs of ever letting me stand up.

Matt and Chris worked out the system. Chris cut holes into the sides of Matt's big plastic gear box and attached some webbing into a



Eileen keeps the dogs warm while Matt readies the haul.
Photo by Chris Rourke.

spider system. This attached to a beiner on the haul line. Then he cut a hole in the bottom of the box. Each dog wore a webbing leash which we knotted beneath the hole so they couldn't jump out.

We placed a dog in the box and set up the haul. I frogged up the rope next to the gear box, guiding it as Matt hauled from above. The dog was understandably nervous and tried to jump from the box, but the knot held and I was able to calm her down with petting and soothing words.

Chris then ascended with the second dog. His dog was a bit livelier, and he had quite a time keeping it inside the box. I assisted Matt at the top, and Chris and the dog finally joined us at the top.

Once both people and dogs were off rope, I tied the dogs to the fence while Matt and Chris derigged. The dogs were jumping and running and desperate to take off. By the time we'd reached the cars, darkness had fallen. We piled gear into Chris' vehicle and muddy dogs into mine, and set off to find the closest pole with the lost dogs sign.



The adventure begins for one nervous dog. Photo by Chris Rourke.

(not exactly a traffic-heavy location) and removed the sign from the pole. No address, but there was a phone number. Chris produced his cell phone and Matt placed the call.

"Are you the ones who lost two dogs? We found them. We'll bring them by if you give me directions to your house." Matt gave her the street we were on.

On the other end of the phone, a woman asked, "Are you the two cars stopped in the middle of the road pointing right at my house?" Matt glanced up and saw a house set back into the trees straight ahead.

We drove to the house and I opened the back door of the car. The dogs ran out before we could even grab the leashes, right into the arms of two women on the porch. A very big dog bounded from the house to the join the greeting.

As we talked with the women, one the mother-in-law of the other, their story unfolded. According to them, the dogs had been missing for four weeks! By this time the family had just about given up hope of finding them. The dog we first encountered was older and had a cataract on one eye. That explained the creepy one-eyed glow.

The dogs belonged to the daughter-in-law. She and her husband had moved in with his mother when their own house burned down a few months previously. Tears streamed down her



Guiding the "stokes" up the rope. Photo by Chris Rourke.

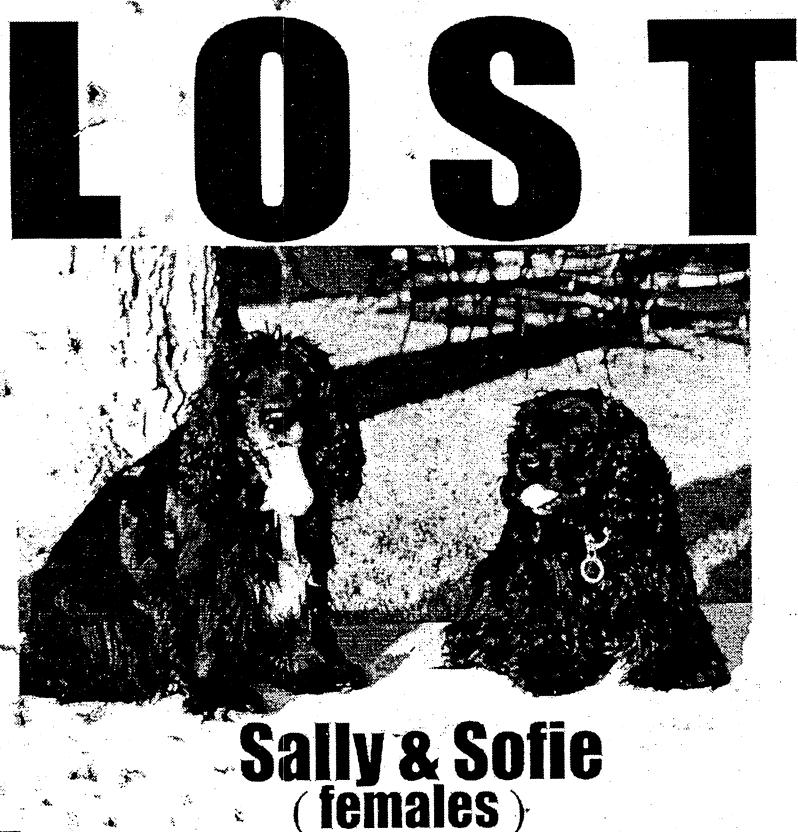
Just a ways down the road we spied one of the signs. We stopped in the middle of the road

face as she told us that losing the dogs after losing the house was just devastating. As we turned to leave, the teary woman gave me a fierce hug and thanked us again profusely.

Despite their urging, we left without the reward. However we did give them one of the club rescue cards, in case other pets go missing and they suspect the cave. We assured them our club has rescued many animals and would be glad to help out if we could.

Rescuing those dogs was quite a moving experience for me, Matt, and Chris. Giant Caverns isn't visited very often by VPI or local cavers. The next cavers to go there would've probably come across two dead dogs. The dogs survived as long as they had because there's water in the cave, but they had gone a long time without food.

Matt and I were silent and contemplative on the ride home, until he finally spoke up. "I can't believe I was scared of a cocker spaniel."



Incident at DMC

by Bill Balfour (as posted to a listserv)

Wells and LePera (Da Steve's) went into DMC on Friday evening [March 24, 2000] to push the top of Mega Dome. About 100 feet up the infeeder going to Mega Dome, Wells slipped and fell backwards a few feet into a crevice dislocating his shoulder. LePera spent several hours trying to get Wells bandaged up so that he could make it out on his own but Wells was in too much pain.

At 5:00 a.m. Saturday morning LePera headed for the entrance and arrived at my house at approximately 8:00. We called Steve Smith for some medical advice then we called Eric Stanley and Chris Rourke, two EMT's in the tech cave club and got them on the way. We also called Ben Schwartz to come. We wanted a fast team to get in and assess the situation before having to alert any full scale call out.

At 10:00 a.m. Ben and Eric entered the cave taking food and drugs. At 10:45 LePera, Chris, Matt Burnett and Alison Williams headed in. Ben and Eric got to Wells just before noon and administered some drugs and were successful in getting the shoulder back into the socket; it basically went back into place on its own after they got his shazaam suit off. Wells was then

ready to boogie and they started out, meeting the other crew close to the bottom of the Weathermaker. In the meantime, several other folks had shown up including Steve Smith, Wil "the Bastard" Orndorff, Phil Benchoff, Philip Balister, Eileen O'Malley, and Sandy Knapp.

Ben got out first at 5:00 and told us that everything was ok and that Wells was coming out on his own power. Wells exited at about 6:00 and the last person out was about 7:00. There was plenty of beer to go around at that point!

Several of the folks including the Steve's went on down to the Knipling cabin to partake in the Dudefest activities and were fed and roasted at the same time. Wells has a new nickname "Shoulder" for his troubles.

A big thanks to everyone for the quick response and getting the job done without any fuss or muss. Everything went very smoothly. Thanks also to Gary and the rest of the Knipling family for their hospitality and understanding. And thank you Steve for not hurting yourself any worse than you did; you're not a wuss in my book no matter what LePera says.

From the Signout

compiled by little elves

VPI cavers and their guests logged in 1207 caver hours from 1/20/01 to 4/30/01.*

1/20/01	Clover Hollow	Joe Thompson, Sandy Knapp, Olyssa Starry, Rob Payne	Wuss's aren't always bad
1/20/01	James	Kevin Rock, Rodger Jany, D. Ruppert, John Bonham, Valerio Viti, C. Blankenship, B. McCormick	The passage is around here somewhere
1/25/01	Tawney's	Mike Cole, Chip Mullins, Kevin Flaherty, Nicky LaBranche	I've never seen boobs catch like that.
1/28/01	Murder Hole	John Deighan, Pete Sauvigne, Julianne Schroeder, Travis Coad, Aaron Thomas, Michael Malsbury	being nervous is okay but have no fear!
2/03/01	Porter's Cave	Wil Orndorff, Andy Yeagle, Ray Sira	Ray luvs his new helmet!
2/03/01	Pig Hole	John Deighan, Olyssa Starry, Kevin Rock, Liz Jennings, Elliot Darchicourt	You gave her pants. She was going to wear her underwear.
2/10/01	Starnes	Elliot Darchicourt, Kat Lynn, Kara Curry, Nate Olson, Kevin Rock, C. Blankenship, Robert Wood	Mud wrestling is fun.
2/24/01	Stay High	Chris Hibshman, Pam Mohr, Kirk Digby, Kevin Rock, Robert Wood, John Deighan	Kirk, don't pet the bats!
3/03/01	DMC Sawmill Entrance	Matt Burnett, Steve LePera, Eileen O'Malley	That survey tape sure worked! Nothing went.
3/03/01	Wilburn Valley	John Deighan, Chris Hibshman, Ray Sira, Kevin Rock, Samantha Lambert, Aaron Thomas, Mike Malsbury	It started with a dam, then a naked woman, and finally a grinning buddha!
3/18/01	Tawney's	John Deighan, Dave Warren, Dave Evans, Aaron Thomas, Steve Segger, Rashmi Bansal, Jai Thakur, Parvez Shaikh, Gloria Chien, Geoff McKinley, Karen Heywood,	A fine filthy conclusion to a stellar weekend.
3/29/01	Stay High	Steve Wells, Matthias Wolter, Steve LePera	Too old to remember simple tasks...
3/30/01	DMC	Steve Wells, Amanda Stiles, Matthias Wolter, Nick Zegre	Way too wet.
4/08/01	Links	Kevin Rock, Andy Yeagle, Chip Mullins, Samantha Lambert	saw the canyon and the nasty
4/29/01	Ballard's Cave	Wil Orndorff, Zenah Orndorff, Mike Futrell, Andrea Futrell	If it has half the trash of Pearisburg in it, but no live human body has ever been there, can you still call it a virgin?

* Correction to Fall '00 issue. Aside from that brief slip into the past, the caver hours reported took place from 5/1/00 to 1/19/01, not to 1/19/00.

VPI Cave Club
P.O. Box 558
Blacksburg, VA 24060-0558