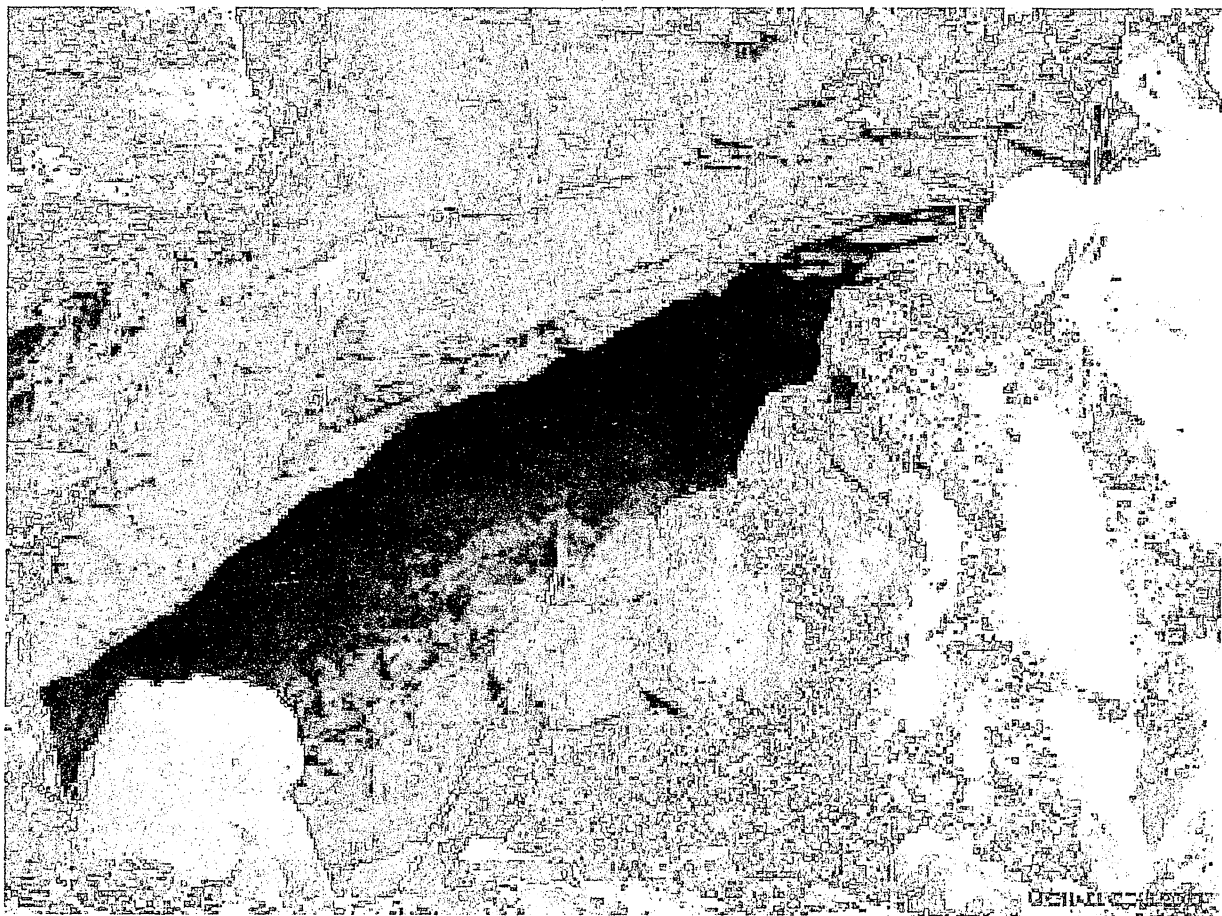


# ***The Tech Troglodyte***



***One last look...***

***Fall 2003***

# The Tech Troglodyte

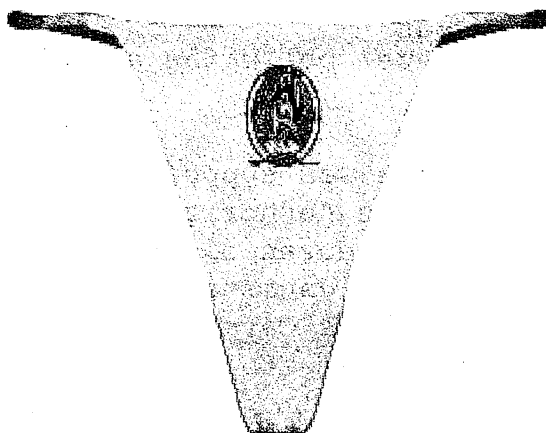
A Journal of the Virginia Tech Grotto of the  
National Speleological Society

## Fall Semester 2003 Officers:

President	Mike Cole
Vice President	John Booker
Treasurer	Spotty D. Rapier
Secretary	Mark Eisenbies

## Volume XXXVI, No. 2

Editor	Christina K. Lee
Cover	Tawney's Sinkhole by Mike Cole



## Contents

Nellies Cave Cleanout, compiled by Christina Lee . . . . .	2
Mythos of the Terrible Tunnel, by Aaron Thomas . . . . .	2
The Ballad of Sir Blunderbrain, by Dennis Lee . . . . .	3
Rosepetal Snowflake, by Mark Eisenbies and Philip Balister . . . . .	4
Up, up, up with a Steve, by Sue Setzler . . . . .	8
Two Days, Two Gates, by Eileen O'Malley . . . . .	9
Tawney's Cave Gate Access Policy & NSS Conservation Policy. . . . .	11
Listserv Discussion on Tawney's Gate . . . . .	13
Fatal Accident in Lori Cori Canyon Cave . . . . .	16
Quotable Quotes, submitted by your friends . . . . .	17
Grotto Grapevine, by AI Cartwright . . . . .	18
From Signout, compiled by Christina Lee . . . . .	19

*The Tech Troglodyte* is published each semester 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, PO Box 558, Blacksburg, VA 24060-0558

## Nellies Cave Clean Out

Information taken from an email from Joey Fagan. Compiled by Christina Lee

A Clean-out of Nellies Cave occurred on Saturday, September 27, 2003. This conservation project was held in conjunction with the 2003 Fall VAR. The project benefits cave conservation and karst protection. Trash in a cave such a Nellies Cave is aesthetically unpleasing, but it can also lead to groundwater pollution and be a safety issue for people visiting the cave.

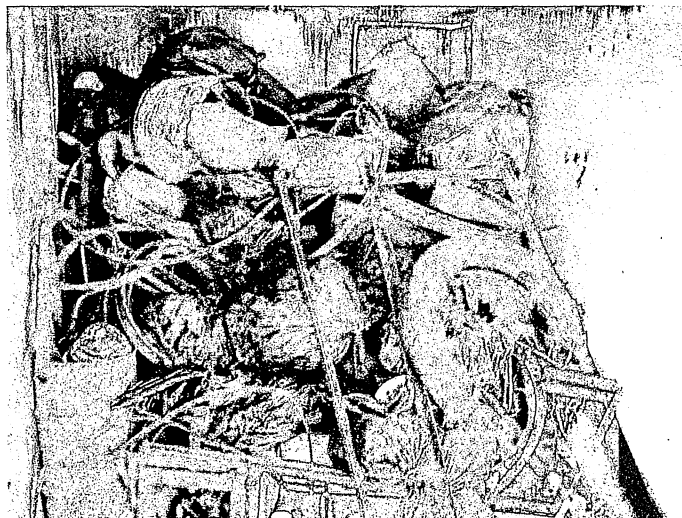


Photo by Mike Cole

Trashed pulled out of Nellies Cave

This cave conservation project was supported by the Montgomery County, Virginia Public Service Authority. A roll-off dumpster was provided by the county. Over a dozen old car tires along with bed frames, small engines and metal canisters were among the items hauled from the cave. The Nellies Cave Clean-out was registered with the Stewardship Virginia Campaign, a six-week, statewide initiative to help citizens with projects that enhance and conserve Virginia's natural and cultural resources.

---

## Mythos of the "Terrible Tunnel"

by Aaron Thomas

The excitement of uncharted depth and darkness is something that is alluring to first time cavers. The uncertainty breeds adventure, adrenaline, and a thirst for more. However, if you have ever found yourself alone, waiting for your turn to ascend the vertical highway, to be reunited with friends, light, and safety, a cave can be an eerie place. Your senses are heightened, as is your imagination. Each water droplet becomes a footstep, any air movement becomes a breath, and just as you clear the ground you can almost hear a hideous, starving monstrosity scouring the ground in frustration because it narrowly missed its dinner.

Of course, these feelings soon abate as you are on your way topside; your rational mind regains control. But what if it was not your imagination? What if you were a second late clearing the ground, if you came face to face with a ravenous creature—never before identified and possessing a metabolism slow enough to allow it to go decades between feedings? Your rational mind tells you no, but what if you came face to face with the "Terrible Tunnel?"

I think we have all had this feeling, as fleeting or insignificant as it may have been. But of course, I also tend to think most cavers who were children in the 80s were also fans of Fraggles Rock without ever realizing where their curiosity would lead them. In commemoration of Fraggles Rock's 20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary, I wanted to draw attention to Jim Henson's take of the "Terrible Tunnel" myth.

# *The Ballad of Sir Blunderbrain*

by Dennis Lee

*Come gather round you Fraggles and hear the tale I tell,  
About a grand disaster and a wicked magic spell,  
About a Fraggles' bravery, about a Fraggles' brain,  
About a mighty knight in arms, the bold Sir Blunderbrain,  
About the tunnel back from which he never came again,  
About the tunnel back from which he never came again.*

*A thousand years ago or maybe even thirty-three,  
The ancient Fraggles wrestled with a strange catastrophe.  
Every time they wandered down a certain tunnel lane,  
One by one they disappeared like bubbles down a drain.  
The darkness closed around them and they never came again.  
A darkness closed around them and they never came again.*

*Sir Blunderbrain went bravely to the entrance of the tunnel.  
The wind was low and lonesome and it wasn't any, uh, funnel.  
And then he heard the spirits who cried their sad refrain.  
It was all the Fraggles who had gone and never come again.  
Yes, all the Fraggles who had gone and never come again.*

*Sir Blunderbrain he drew his sword and took a mighty swing.  
The tunnel drew a sword as well and swung right back again.  
And so for hours they battled, they fought with might and mane.  
And all the while the tunnel cried, "You'll not go home again!"  
Yes, all the while the tunnel cried, "You'll not go home again!"*

*At last Sir Blunderbrain he brought that tunnel to its knees.  
He cried, "Give me my Fraggles or I'll slice you up like cheese!"  
And so the tunnel coughed them up, they all went home again.  
Except our mighty hero, the brave Sir Blunderbrain,  
For the tunnel sucked him under and he never came again.  
The brave Sir Blunder stumbled and he never came again.  
Oh, all ye Fraggles blubber for he'll not come home again.*

## *Reprise:*

*Come gather 'round you Fraggles and hear the tale I tell,  
About a mighty triumph and the one who broke the spell.  
The tunnel nearly slew him as it slew Sir Blunderbrain.  
He trembled and he wobbled as he walked in paths of pain.  
His wine-dark muscles faltered as he fought with might and mane,  
But then he heard my story with its echoing refrain.  
A bolt of strength renewed him and he burst right through his chains,  
And he gathered up the prisoners and he brought them home again.  
Yes, he gathered up the prisoners and he brought them home again.*

Background information and lyrics found at the following websites: [www.punchandjewelry.com/legacy/html/frindex.htm](http://www.punchandjewelry.com/legacy/html/frindex.htm),  
[www.punchandjewelry.com/legacy/html/lyrics/lyr08.htm#FR\\_SONG\\_8\\_1](http://www.punchandjewelry.com/legacy/html/lyrics/lyr08.htm#FR_SONG_8_1) and [www.henson.com/index\\_standard.php](http://www.henson.com/index_standard.php).

The Muppets, Fraggles, all related images and all character, program, place, etc. names are copyright Jim Henson Productions (JHP).

# Rosepetal Snowflake

by Mark Eisenbies and Philip Balister

Some days it just pays to not cave. As Lao Tsu once said, "The softest thing in the universe overcomes the hardest thing in the universe. That without substance can enter where there is no room. Hence I know the value of non-action". While that may be all you need to know about caving, it doesn't work for digging.

On September 13, 2003, Philip Balister, Scott Rapier, Carrie Blankenship, Rob Story, and Mark Eisenbies embarked on a somewhat uninspired trip to Buddy Penley's Cave, in Bland County, Va. The first sign of the rift in motivation was apparent upon our arrival to the Son of Picnic campsite and Spot exits the vehicle already salivating for a large steak. Apparently he and Carrie had managed to completely displace their inclination to go underground with a desire to eat red meat. I was, of course, there to play with my newly operational LED array. Philip and Rob still had dreams of doing some real caving. As a whole we managed to poke around for 2 1/2 hours before passing by the entrance and losing myself to the outside. In my mind I was following Spot and Carrie, but Philip apparently managed to get them to go play in the maze before they could escape.

Napping topside for an hour I was finally woke by Philip and Spot berating me for bugging out of the cave before it was their idea.

That's where the day would have ended were it not for my obsession with Fletch Hole. It didn't take much convincing to get the rest of the group to go stare at Skydusky's biggest tease since Charlotte.

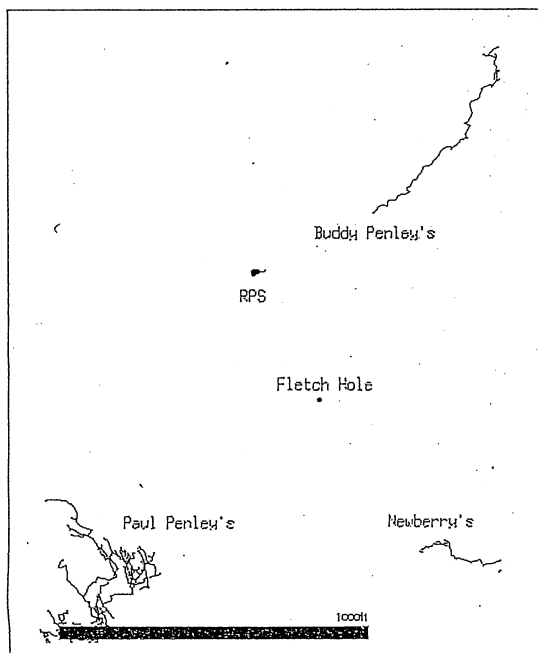


Figure 1: Location of RosePetal Snowflake relative to Newberry's Cave, Buddy Penley's Cave, and Paul Penley's Cave.

Now, for those of you who don't know the particular significance of Fletch Hole, it resides between two spur ridges that are bounded by several well-known caves to the east as well as to the west (Figure 1). The total length of these caves would be 20-something miles if the connections were ever found. Three dimensional line plots reveal a veritable swiss cheese of cave passage except for the area under these two ridges. You barely need to know how to spell speleogenesis to know what that could mean.

Fletch has been a particular tease with all the rain this past winter, and a lot of active meander near the streams sink. Every visit yields a different stream behavior, and this day was no different. Picnic yielded a failed dam project (something to do), and people poking their heads in every sink in the vicinity. Craig

Ferguson and Ray Sira both finding little holes in the ground worth noting, but barely.

After salivating over Fletch for half an hour or so, we started to trudge back to the cars to return home. For no reason other than not be part of the herd, I traversed down the line of sinks progressing from Fletch Hole rather than walk along the 'road'. Then I noticed a hole underneath a rosebush and cherry tree. It didn't look promising. It didn't look much different than the things Ray and Craig had found in April. However, it's everyone's compulsion to look into holes promising or not.

Crouching down to a deep duck walk, I endured the rosebush enough to look down the hole. It was about the size of a manhole and six feet deep with sheer sides. The first thing you notice was that the air was cool. Not just hole in the ground cool, but cave cool. It just smelled like a cave.

Calling up the hill to Philip, I thought everyone might like to have a look at this thing. This was the point where Philip had finally been infected by the demotivation bug (leaving only Rob). However... holes like this are a compulsion and they started to trudge away from the beer in order to stick their head down it too.

So we all peer down this thing. We all note the coolness of the air. We all note that Philip has gotten far more excited than I've seen him since he set Chris' ceiling on fire, and he jumps down the hole. Then rocks start exiting the hole. Then two Photons enter the hole. Then the kind of grunts and moans that make you worry for Sandy exit the hole. Next, the type of howl of triumph that make you really worry for Sandy emanated from the hole.

Unfortunately, it choked off immediately to a dig... but a blowing dig.

On the way back to the cars, Spot asked what the name should be. In the random access that makes you worry for Penelope, I just said "Rose Petal Snowflake". Energized, we returned home and ate our steaks.

#### *Dig trips:*

Sunday, Sept 14. The day after its discovery, Spot and Philip returned to clear the entrance of poison ivy and groom the rosebush for easier access.

Tuesday, Sept 16. Kevin Rock, Tom Mallibad, Philip Balister, and Mark Eisenbies enter the historical section dig into the new section. This managed to more than double the length of the cave and left us with two blowing leads. The crew also took the opportunity to survey the cave (~40 feet) (Figure 2).

Saturday, Sept 20. Large VPI crew dug directly into the 'solution tube' in hopes for a cheap victory.

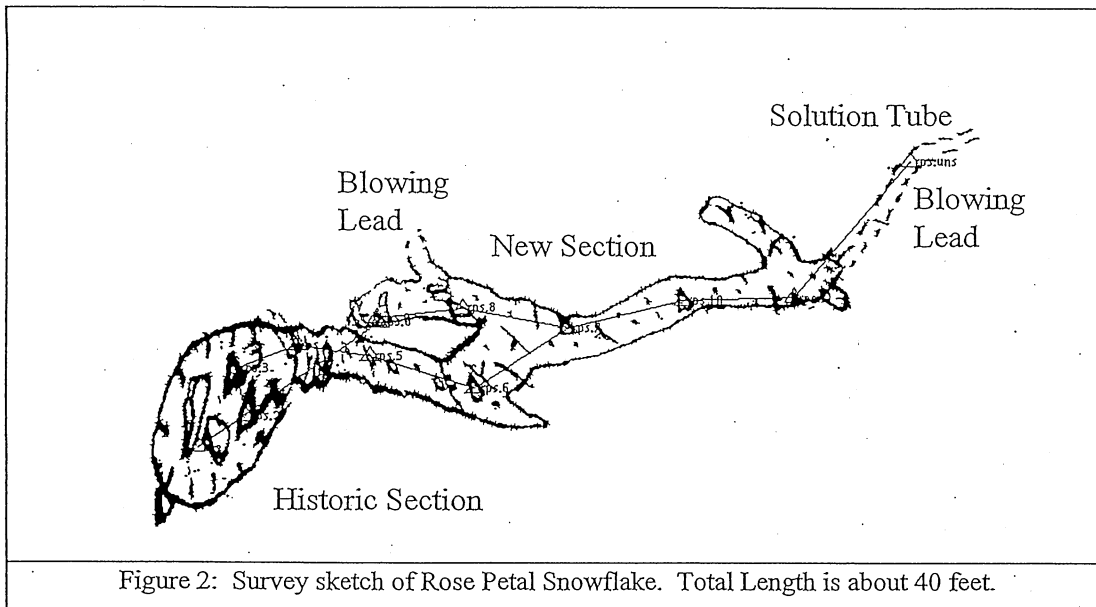


Figure 2: Survey sketch of Rose Petal Snowflake. Total Length is about 40 feet.

Sunday, Sept 28, 2003. Tom Malibad, Tim Bleech and Philip Balister eviscerate the solution tube and pack every extra crevice in the rest of the cave with mud. It became apparent that this dig is to be more of a commitment, so efforts currently focus on making it a user-friendly dig.

Saturday, Oct 4. Large crew worked to extract the mud from the trip before. The mud, being the consistency of peanut butter proves to be very difficult to remove from bags. An experiment making a bucket from an 18-inch traffic cone turns out to be a boon for mud removal. Kept clean, mud plops out of it like a teflon pot. Digging crews have since revolted against the bags.

#### *Status:*

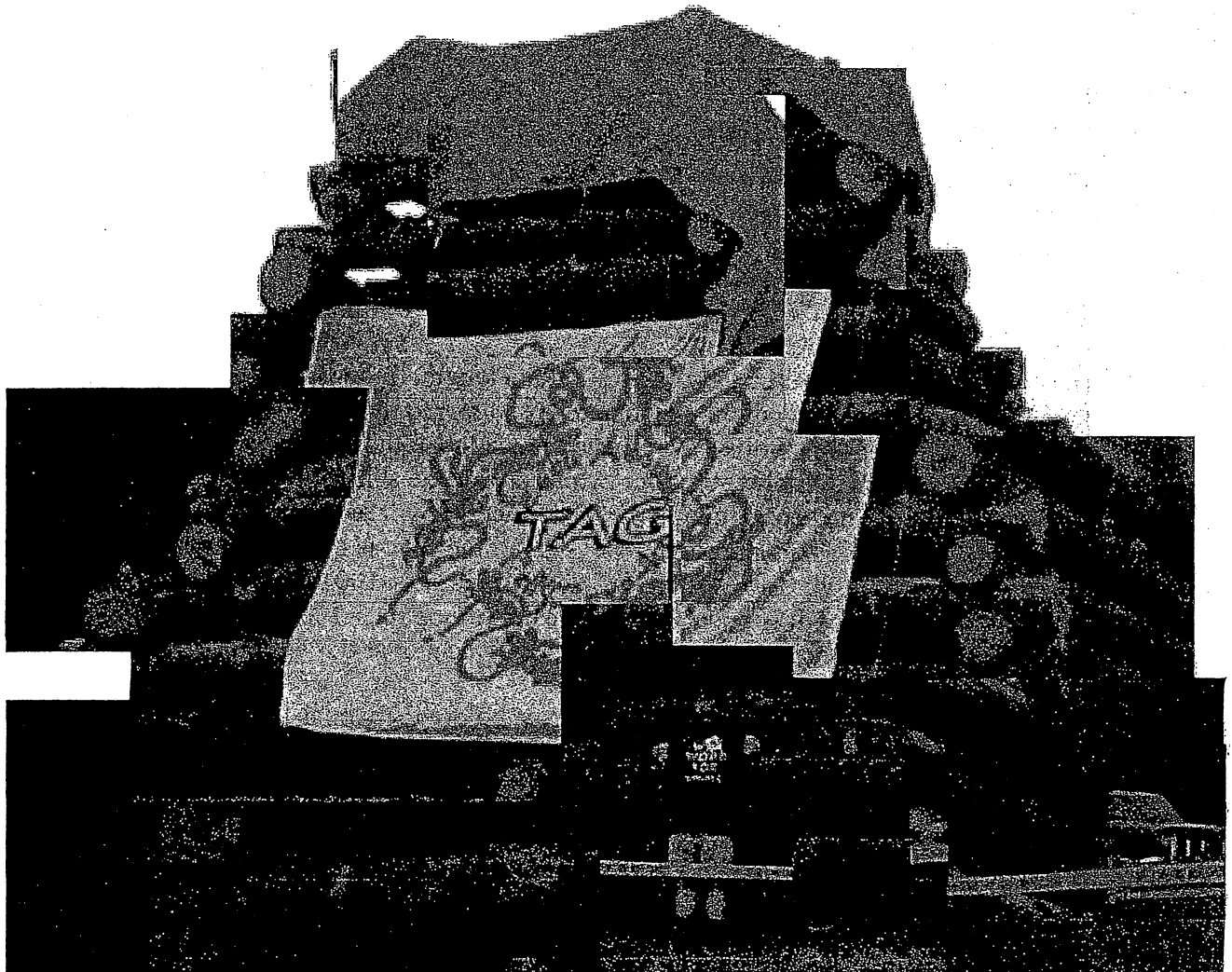
The cave now stands at approximately 50 feet in total length. It begins with a 6 ft drop into the main hole, a pinch and climb down another 10 feet to the floor of a narrow canyon-room. The first dig involves a crawl under a ledge to the left then opens to a larger canyon-room. It's still blowing from two leads and the solution tube looks like it'll go as long as you want to keep digging in it. The other dig will require more advanced digging efforts because it is mostly rock. The trend of the cave is into the mountain, and toward Ed Devine's Buddy Penley's surveys. However, we are 100's of feet away and it is impossible to tell what will happen. Ideally we'll move another 100 ft into the mountain where we hypothesize we might get some contact over our heads.

The priority for now will be to stabilize the entrance before the winter freeze/thaws close it in and send more mud than we've pulled out down the entrance. Effective digging requires crews of six or more because mud has to go from the digging site, all the way out the entrance.

It blows and it's in a big blank spot on the map... it's a promising dig in an area with proven potential, but it's going to take time. I look forward to seeing if we can make the breakthrough before my impending graduation.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to everyone who's helped. Hopefully this list is not incomplete: Carrie Blankenship, Tim Bleech, Mike Cole, Kirk Digby, Craig Ferguson, Chris Lee, Geoff Lewis, Tom Malibad, Brian McCarter, Penelope Pooler, Sandy Ramsey, Scott Rapier, Kevin Rock, Zack Sawyer, Kara Smith, Rob Story, and Steve Wells.





## Two Days, Two Gates

by Eileen O'Malley

Most of us never expected to see one of our local favorite caves blocked by formidable piles of steel. However due to years of disrespectful spelunkers vandalizing the landowners' property, they decided that gating the Tawneys road entrances made an attractive solution. So on November 15 and 16, 2003, a large group from VPI Cave Club and several folks from Blue Ridge and New River Grottos gathered on Zells Mill Road to fulfill the landowner request.

The organization began months in advance when Steve Wells contacted Roy Powers, a well-known specialist who has gated hundreds of caves. Steve had recently seen Roy's work at Greenville Saltpeter Cave in West Virginia. Over the course of many phone calls and faxes, Steve provided a rough sketch of the two entrances and Roy provided a list of materials he would need for both gates. Also, Roy's regular welder could not make the trip; Steve needed to find a replacement welder.

One evening at the London Underground, as Steve wondered if he'd find a welder in time, he met up with Charlie Maus. Charlie had recently completed a welding class and recommended Adam Mount, a classmate, for the job. Charlie volunteered himself to spend the weekend cutting the steel, and we ended up paying Adam \$300.00 for the weekend.

The gating activity actually began on Friday. Due to some miscommunication, the steel company could not deliver the steel on time; we had to send some cavers to Lynchburg to retrieve it. Steve LePera, Mike Cole, and Sandy Ramsey made the trip and acquired \$866.00 of steel – ask LePera about driving Ray Sira's van in the dark without headlights. Despite his reputation as a Bastard, Wil Orndorff also contributed; he picked up and later returned the canisters of gas needed for the torches (an expense of \$55.00).

Saturday's project, the larger of the two entrances, began at 8:00 a.m. in the Bat Ranch driveway where cavers met in the rain (naturally) to get ourselves and the gear organized. Roy came prepared with welding torches, a generator, extension cords, and all the other tools needed for the job. We parked his red truck on the road by the entrance and placed orange "road work" cones along the road.

Thanks to continuous morning drizzle, the path to the Tawneys entrance presented a slippery, muddy challenge. One manly crew struggled to bring gas canisters up the slimy slope and then roped them to trees; the rest of us carried smaller, lighter gear up to the entrance.

Then came the steel. We had purchased angled, flat, and round steel in various sizes in 10-foot lengths, and the biggest piece of 6-inch angled weighed a hefty 150 pounds. Given the slippery conditions, we decided to pass the steel up the slopes similar to passing a litter in a cave rescue. Stationed near the top of the slope, I glanced down to see a string of females lining the route – the big beefy men gathered at the bottom chatting! Though I don't doubt the strength and toughness of caver women, I noticed smiles of relief when a few strong men noticed the discrepancy and weaved their way up through the line.

Like many others I didn't want to see the cave gated, yet the actual gate-building process fascinated me. I tried to stay involved near the entrance so I could see as much as possible. Most of the time I probably just got in the way; luckily Roy didn't seem to mind me or my pesky questions.

First Roy and some caver helpers placed a large (4' x 8') sheet of steel mesh on the floor of the entrance to serve as the bottom of the gated area; Roy cut the edges to make a better fit. This will prevent gate vandals from digging below the gate to gain access. Then Roy determined the lengths of steel needed for the actual barrier bars and support structure, and Charlie fired up the torch.

As Charlie cut the steel, glowing sparks attacked everyone and everything nearby. When a newly cut piece fell to the ground, someone grabbed it and placed the hot end into a bucket of water to speed up the cooling process. Steam rose as the water hissed from the intense heat.

Adam used the arc welder to attach one bar of steel to the mesh reaching from one side of the entrance to the other – the foundation of the gate. Then he angled pieces towards the ceiling to form the outer edges, and one piece ran straight up from the bottom center to the ceiling. Charlie cut hangers (3.5-inch pieces cut from 6-inch angled steel) to hold the horizontal bars while Roy measured the distance between each row of hangers using a tool he created specifically for the job. The distance between bars is crucial to allow bats to fly in and out unimpeded yet prevent skinny trespassers from slipping through. Cavers clamped the hangers into place for Adam to weld them. I was able to help Kevin Rock place a few of the hangers thanks to being small enough to shove into a tight corner.

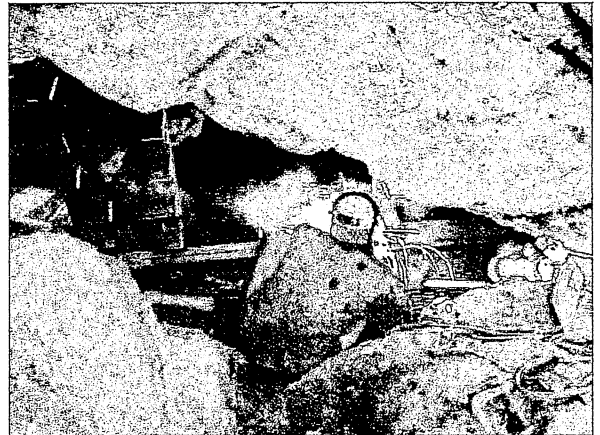


Photo by Mike Cole

Welding Tawney's Gate

And so we settled into a system. Roy measured and supervised, Charlie cut, cavers passed in the steel, cavers clamped steel in place, and Adam welded. Dan and Marian McConnell stopped by to check out the progress, and Dan took a several-hour turn cutting the steel. With each shower of sparks from the torch and each flickering glare of the arc welder, the gate took shape.

Once Adam welded the hangers into position, we placed the horizontal bars. We built each horizontal bar from 4-inch angled steel arranged with the apex pointing up, with 1.5-inch angled pieces welded inside with their "L" shapes back-to-back to form a flat bottom. The inside pieces act as stabilizers to strengthen the bars.

Before we secured the highest bar, we needed to remove a pesky section of the ceiling. Kevin Rock and Travis Coad each spent time using a hammer drill to make the "adjustment;" the task looked tiring but fun. I wanted to take a turn, but I reined in my request because it required more muscle and I didn't want to waste anyone's time.

With the horizontal bars welded in place, the gate looked nearly complete, but not so. We still needed to add the key-lock access and connect the steel to the cave ceiling and walls. The actual locked pieces used flat steel with holes torched into it; more flat pieces surrounded the lock area to protect someone from simply breaking or cutting the lock. As for securing the gate to the actual rock of the cave, Charlie cut 6-inch sections of round steel to act as pins. A drill-wielding caver opened holes in

the rock and placed the pins through the hole of a flat piece; Adam welded the pin to the flat piece and the flat piece to the sides of the gate.

We still had a gap underneath the mesh floor, but we intended to roll some big rocks into the opening on Sunday as a temporary measure. The long-term plan, by now completed, involved filling the opening with concrete. Roy tries to avoid using concrete whenever possible, but in this case it seemed the best solution.

Finally we declared the formidable gate measuring approximately 10' x 5' complete. By this time the sun had gone down and we brought the equipment carefully down the slope and into Roy's vehicle and lock-box. We guided our way with headlamps borrowed from the Bat Ranch; many of the cavers on hand (myself including) had forgotten to bring their own! The gas canisters spent the night on the hill between the entrances concealed with leaves and debris.

On Sunday morning we met again, but with a much smaller crew. We simply had no need for crowds since we moved most of the heavy steel up to the second entrance the day before. Good thing, given the lack of stable, flat places to stand. We repeated the process of Roy measuring, Charlie cutting, and Adam welding, yet we completed this gate more quickly because of the much smaller entrance (approximately 3' x 4'). We even had enough spare time and cavers to fill the previous day's gap with rocks as planned. Roy began his four-hour drive home by 3:00 p.m.

All told, gating both Tawneys road entrances cost around \$1500 which we covered with generous donations. We spent a very full weekend hard at work. Thanks to everyone who showed up to help, we honored the landowners' wish to control access into the cave. With the approval of the Link family, we created an official access policy which folks at the Bat Ranch will maintain. Please spread the word to everyone you know who frequents the cave.



Photo by Mike Cole

Lepera drilling inside the gate

## IN TAWNEY'S

photos by Mike Cole



Trainees stuck in the mud



Icicle Stalactites

## Tawney's Cave - Giles County, VA

The property containing the two roadside entrances to Tawney's Cave has been in the Link family for generations. The Link family feels that they are fortunate to have such a superb natural treasure on their property and have always been happy to allow others to enjoy their cave. However, in recent years, the number of groups visiting Tawney's has increased dramatically. With that rise in traffic the number of individuals behaving irresponsibly on the property and in the cave has also increased. In addition, there has been a noticeable impact on the entrance slopes and also within the cave. Several incidents of vandalism on the Link's property finally led them to limit access to the cave, and ask local cavers about the possibility of a gate to deter unauthorized access.

The roadside entrances to Tawney's were gated November 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003. To relieve traffic and disturbance on the Link's property, Mike Newsome has agreed to manage the keys to the gate and allow cave visitors to park on his property.

### ***Access policy:***

- Parking will be at Mike Newsome's house (the Bat Ranch). Please do not park in front of the covered bridge or beside the road.
- Group size will be limited to a total of 12 persons.
- No more than two simultaneous groups will be allowed.
- A maximum of 5 trips will be permitted per week.
- Each cave explorer must have a helmet mounted light.
- A valid drivers license shall be required in exchange for each key. Lost key replacement is \$20.
- Keys will not be issued to minors.
- Copying of keys is prohibited. You must always check out a key to enter the cave.
- Groups should plan access arrangements in advance if possible to avoid disappointment or conflicts. Mike can be contacted at (540)626-3386 between the hours of 10am-7pm.
- The granting of access by Mike Newsome or the Link family is not an endorsement of a group or any cave explorers ability. They are not responsible for cave explorers safety and are not a sign out.
- The Link family and Mike Newsome reserve the right to deny or grant access to anyone, for any reason or no reason at all. The cave is on private property and visitors are guests.

### ***Behavior Policy:***

- Cave explorers should respect that they are the Link's and Mike Newsome's guests and behave appropriately by being quiet, courteous and keeping the cave, property, and parking area clean of trash.
- Cave explorers will lock the gate behind them while in the cave, and be sure it is securely locked after they leave the cave.
- Alcohol or other drugs do not mix with caving. Possession of alcohol or drugs on the Link's property and/or in the cave will result in a call to the Sheriff.
- This cave is protected by Virginia State Law (Code of Virginia 10.1-1000 et. seq.). Trespassing, destruction or tampering with the signs or gate, vandalism, removal of formations, littering, and disturbance of wildlife in the cave will be prosecuted in criminal court.
- Cave explorers shall adhere to the NSS conservation policy, reprinted on back.

### The National Speleological Society (NSS) Conservation Policy:

- Caves have unique scientific, recreational, and scenic values
- These values are endangered by both carelessness and intentional vandalism
- These values, once gone, cannot be recovered
- The responsibility for protecting caves must be formed by those who study and enjoy them.

Accordingly, the intention of the Society is to work for the preservation of caves with a realistic policy supported by effective programs for: the encouragement of self-discipline among cavers; education and research concerning the causes and prevention of cave damage; and special projects, including cooperation with other groups similarly dedicated to the conservation of natural areas. Specifically:

All contents of a cave — formations, life, and loose deposits — are significant for their enjoyment and interpretation. Therefore, **caving parties should leave a cave as they find it.** They should provide means for the removal of waste; limit marking to a few, small, and removable signs as are needed for surveys; and, especially, exercise extreme care not to accidentally break or soil formations, disturb life forms or unnecessarily increase the number of disfiguring paths through an area.

Scientific collection is professional, selective, and minimal. The collecting of mineral or biological material for display purposes, including previously broken or dead specimens, is never justified, as it encourages others to collect and destroy the interest of the cave.

### The Society encourages projects such as:

- Establishing cave preserves
- Placing entrance gates where appropriate
- Opposing the sale of speleothems
- Supporting effective protective measures
- Cleaning and restoring over-used caves
- Cooperating with private cave owners by providing them knowledge about their cave and assisting them in protecting their cave and property from damage during cave visits
- Encouraging commercial cave owners to make use of their opportunity to aid the public in understanding caves and the importance of their conservation.

Where there is reason to believe that publication of cave locations will lead to ~~vandalism~~ before adequate protection can be established, the Society will oppose such publication.

~~For more information on cave conservation, check out the NSS web page at:~~ <http://www.caves.org/>



## **THIS CAVE IS PROTECTED BY VIRGINIA STATE LAW**

(CODE OF VIRGINIA 10.1-1000 et. seq.)

**Caves are unique sensitive environments.  
Help preserve this cave for future generations to enjoy.**

#### IN VIRGINIA IT IS ILLEGAL TO:

- Write or mark upon the cave walls or surfaces.
- Break, deface, or remove any natural material or mineral formation.
- Litter or dump spent carbide or other waste materials.
- Disturb, harm, or remove any bats or other living organisms in the cave.
- Disturb or remove any historic or prehistoric artifacts or bones.

THANK YOU  
THE VIRGINIA CAVE COMMISSION

For more information on the Virginia Cave Protection Act see: <http://www.dcr.state.va.us/dnh/vcpa.htm>

## FROM THE LISTSERV

Exerts from 13 emails sent out by 11 different people, all written within 51 hours.  
This is the listserv at its best.

Monday, 01/05/04. (Originator of listserv flurry) Tawneys Gate Question: If you have visited Tawneys Cave since the gate was installed, please comment on the ease/difficulty of unlocking, opening, and relocking the gate, especially from the inside. Grapevine says it is a pain in the ass...I am curious what the consensus is.

Saturday, 01/10/04. 2:58pm. Re: Tawneys Gate Question: Tawneys gate sucks big time. It is dangerous, ludicrous, and reflects very poorly on the club. It is the most poorly designed cave gate I have ever encountered. Whoever designed and approved the design should be stationed at the gate 24/7/365 to operate the locks and move the access bar for cavers who visit.

1. The gate has two locks. (A cave with one ungated entrance has a gate with two locks?!)
2. The size of the cages around the locks allows only small, flexible hands to enter and maneuver the locks. Did the designer intend for every caving team to include a fairy or a garden gnome?
3. The size of the cages around the lock will not allow the lock with the key in place to be pivoted into the horizontal position necessary to disengage the lock from the gate's hasp.
4. The metal bar that must be lifted and moved out of position to create a slot through which a caver must slide must weigh 50 pounds. The garden gnomes on the trip will need to bring along some orks just to lift the bar. Removing and replacing the bar is a difficult maneuver from outside the cave, and a worse one while crouched on that little platform just inside the gate.
5. If it is pivoted in the least, the removable bar in the gate easily and quickly jams in the space between other bars that has been reduced in size by welding.

I think fair estimate is that it took us a half an hour to get through the gate and nearly as long to get back out. Our exit time was faster because we didn't lock the second lock. We even debated throwing it into the creek outside. Cave management need not be such a display of machismo at the expense of reasonable access.

Saturday, 01/10/04. 4:01pm. Tawneys trip tonight(Sat)/tomorrow(sun): In light of the recent comment about the new gate, I am curious to try it. And if I am going to spend a great deal of time (based on what I have heard) opening the gate, then I want to bebop around in tawneys some. Based on the description, [it] sounds like I might need a hobbit and an orca.

Saturday, 01/10/04. 4:31pm. Re: Tawneys Gate Question: I realize the gate may be a real pain in the ass, but I would just like to ask one simple question: how many people that knew about gate installation, design and use, offered any help at all when we were talking about needing a gate (by land owners request) for Tawneys?

Saturday, 01/10/04. 6:23pm. Re: Gate: I couldn't agree more. One of the big problems in this group is the difficulty in getting timely volunteer opinion, help and input. Most of the time, the Grotto as a whole refuses to volunteer time or input, and then bitches about the end product. It's reminiscent of a Dilbert cartoon. I didn't help, and I haven't seen the gate, but as far as I'm concerned, Steve, and the few other volunteers that offered to (including Walt) or did help performed a great service to the Grotto, and the caving community in general by doing what the LANDOWNER REQUIRED TO KEEP TAWNEYS OPEN.

I've heard it time and again, from many different folks. Those who volunteer, it seems, are doomed to be bitched at by those who don't. Don't get me wrong, I've done my share of both, and I know you've

done a great deal for the Grotto and for caving. But as a Grotto, we, myself included, can do a better job of helping the officers and committee chairs by volunteering our time and knowledge in a timely manner.

None of this means that the comments aren't unfounded. I've heard the gate is pretty difficult to use. Nevertheless, it is still easier to gain access to Tawneys through the gate the dedicated volunteers installed than it would be if they hadn't put it there. The owners of the gated entrance said they would BLAST IT CLOSED if it wasn't gated.

Sunday, 01/11/04. 2:23am. Re: Tawneys Gate Question: The gate was installed to reduce traffic into Tawneys. Most of you were not here this summer when there was literally 5+vans and a bus load parked outside the cave EVERY SINGLE DAY! That is no exaggeration, there were over 5 camps using the cave DAILY. Over 250 less-than-responsible people passing thru Tawneys weekly. Since the gate was installed, there has been no stray cars parked on the road.

The people from responsible groups have made no complaints about the gate. I like to think it is because they are just happy enough to be able use that special cave. Maybe I'm bias because I was there for the gating and have been in the cave over hundred times. I have pulled out whole coolers of beer, been in there w/ sorostitutes screaming at hibernating bats, and removed string from the entire cave (someone strung the whole cave like bread crumbs). I like the idea that the gate is a pain in the a@@. We have other caves and before Tawneys was closed, everyone was saying how boring it was.

Monday, 01/12/04. 8:56am. Re: Tawneys Gate Question: The gate is not finished. When weather warms up enough to work on the gate again, we plan to finish the concrete and other things around the main entrance and repair a small problem with the fat-mans gate. This work will require a welder and probably other "heavy" tools. It is likely the operation of the gate can be made smoother at that time. It will certainly be our intent to improve the situation at that time.

However, the cave was closed to all. Now it is not. If it's too difficult for you to go in, then, uh, too bad. Lots of caves are too difficult for just anyone to enjoy. If TAWNEYS is now beyond the ability of some of us, such is life.

Monday, 01/12/04. 9:05am. Re: Tawneys Gate Question: Sorry to reply to my own post; while the above was meant to be in part a jab, I want to be sure my meaning is clear. When you carry a rope for hours halfway up a mountain to a cave, that is part of the trip even though it isn't caving per se. Think of the Tawneys gate this way - it is now part of the trip. Be careful, take your time, and enjoy the \_whole\_ trip.

Hopefully the issues raised can be addressed and the situation improved, however, it is not easy. Cave gates are not bought at Sears; everyone did the best they could under the circumstances, and we are all committed to the land owner and the club to make the gate as good as we can. Please be patient and constructive, not destructive.

Monday, 01/12/04. 11:36am. Re: Tawneys Gate - goals & a concern: A primary goal of constructing a cave gate is to make it \*DAMN DIFFICULT\* to access the lock (and sometimes the gate itself), thus significantly hindering anyone from picking, cutting, torching, etc.

Thank You! to the folks who worked on the project for ensuring that it is indeed a gate, not a barricade, and for negotiating a copy of the key. Mil Gracias!

Now, a real concern: Which, yes which, cave is going to take Tawneys' (and New River's (as most of its traffic went to Tawneys)) place among the unwashed hordes?

Monday, 01/12/04. 11:45am. Re: Tawneys Gate - goals & a concern: I would say most will still go to New River since there is nothing there to stop the "unwashed hordes".

Monday, 01/12/04. 5:03pm. Re: Tawneys Gate Question: Dave C. and Kirk did some modification to the removable part of the main gate yesterday at the bat ranch. I haven't heard if it made it any easier to get on and off or not.

Back when I was a Jersey caver this is how we built cave gates. check out the last couple of pictures. ([http://www.metgrotto.com/tripreports/trip\\_report.php?report\\_id=9](http://www.metgrotto.com/tripreports/trip_report.php?report_id=9)). It's an 18" diameter steel pipe with a solid stainless steel door on the inside. The last picture shows someone reaching through a 4" pipe to reach the lock on the inside which is covered by a piece of steel. Someone still managed to break into it by hauling an oxy-acetylene torch 1 mile through the woods reaching through the hole and melting the lock off. Bats have been seen using the 4" pipes to enter and exit the cave.

If your going to make a gate easy to open you might as well not bother putting one on because it won't last. At least on a cave as popular as Tawneys anyway.

Monday, 01/12/04. 5:12pm. Kirk & Dave's gate "improvements": Yes, the grinding made it MUCH easier to avoid jamming the 2 lock gate at the main entrance. Dave also donated some WD-40 which is now inside the cave for use on the locks. This may or may not help. They are not doing so well in the dirty wet environment.

Monday, 01/12/04. 5:20pm. Re: Tawneys Gate Question: I don't agree with that statement. It's certainly possible to make a gate easy to open - given that you have the key or combination - and yet difficult to break into. Perhaps with all the engineers (real or imagined) that we have in the club, we can come up with some ideas. I feel a "cave gate design" contest coming on.

Of course, if you haul enough equipment to the cave entrance, you'll certainly be able to break through any gate you wish. However, at Tawney's, Mike or someone else would discover it very quickly, so I can't see anyone going to that much trouble for a single cave trip, which might end with the group being arrested.

---

---

## Quotable Quotes

submitted by your friends

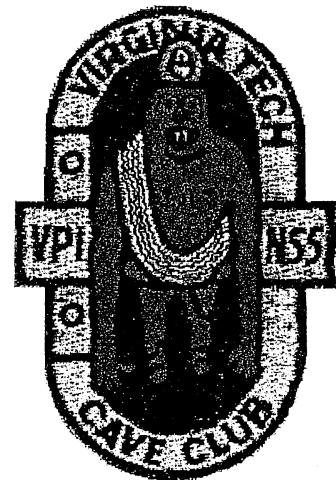
PB to group: Look! It's another pedestrian on a bicycle.

TC to MC: Hey! Just one thing at a time between my legs.

AS to SL: You'd think begging would work better with these balls.

SR to KE: Lick this and tell me what you think.

SP to group: If I want your advice I'll beat it out of you.





## Up, Up, Up with a Steve

(or rather, the risks of climbing, motorcycles, explosives, and all manner of Steve-ish activities)

by Sue Setzler

Of all the Steves that ever flew  
(and flying Steves are rather few  
(for to fly you ought  
(whether you are a Steve or not)  
to have some wings (yes, at least two  
(at least, no less than two will do  
(and Steves have something less than one,  
(one less in fact, (or, frankly, none,  
Which (as you will agree).  
Limits the flying of a Steve)))))).  
(I further make the point that Steves  
are prone to test hypotheses  
(an observation (you'll agree)  
both apt and pleasing to a Steve)).  
And let me add that Steves that fly  
Are known as broken (You can see why.)  
All I have said thus far is true.  
(If it's not clear, that's up to you.  
(You'll have to learn when a Steve is near  
That what is true may not be clear  
(While what is clear may not be true  
(And you'll be wiser when you do))))).

---

## Fatal Accident in Lori Cori Canyon Cave

This is a collaborative account by members of the group. Distribute as appropriate. Reprinted from listserv posting.

On Saturday September 27, 2003 a crew consisting of Mike Ficco, Andrea Futrell, Mike Futrell, Dick Graham, Sue Setzler, Ron Simmons, and Steve Wells entered Lori Cori Canyon Cave in Wise County Virginia. A routine survey trip had been planned.

Everything proceeded normally as the group climbed down the entrance, and then crawled, climbed and chimneyed down to the 90-foot pit. A nuisance drop of about 20-feet quickly follows the 90-foot pit and begins a challenging section of tall narrow winding canyon where one straddles and chimneys midway on slimy little ledges above a narrowing crack that in many places prevents one from accessing the 'floor' that is 20-feet below. This canyon loses 60-feet of elevation in a little over 300 feet of distance.

The canyon abruptly widens about 40-feet before a large dome-pit. Here there is a traverse line along the wall that allows one to cross a greasy sloping shelf, as the bottom of the canyon and its little stream are still dropping away below. In about 25 feet the traverse line meets another rope that provides an 18-foot rappel to another traverse line. This second traverse line extends 20-feet out

along a greasy sloping shelf to the primary rigging for a 213-foot drop. The rig points are bolts; the rope is 11mm PMI. At the top of the 213ft one would be cow-tailed to the traverse line while standing or kneeling on a very slick sloping shelf approximately four feet wide. A heavy pad is on the lip. From that point the rope hangs free to the bottom. For the upper few dozen feet the rope hangs inches away from the wall gradually increasing to several feet. By midway down the drop the wall is 8 to 10 feet away. Here a flowstone shelf rolls out and comes within 2-inches of the free-hanging rope. Below the flowstone are some nice draperies and the wall gradually recedes again to about 10-feet away at the bottom.

Communication up and down the big pit is very difficult due to the acoustics and small waterfall. It would take a concerted effort by both parties for a person at the bottom of the 18ft to clearly see the gear of a person at the lip of the 213ft.

Several points along the traverse lines allow room to sit and wait. Available space and safety concerns necessitate spreading out along this area while waiting. Andrea was in the lead and was first down the pit. Dick was second in line. Mike Ficco joined Dick at the bottom of the 18ft. Dick began his rappel in a normal fashion and Ficco watched the reflected light from his lamp begin to fade as he descended. Mike estimates that Dick had rappelled 20-30 feet, after which he heard Dick say, "No, No!". This was immediately followed by a very loud "Boom, BOOM," which was heard by all, presumably a result of Dick first hitting the flowstone shelf followed by the floor of the shaft. Instantly, Andrea began yelling for Dick as she raced down and over from the waiting alcove about 100-feet distant.

Andrea found Dick about 25-feet away from the bottom of the rope and completely detached. With great difficulty she communicated that Dick was dead and that someone else should come down, carefully observing the rope and ledge. Ficco was ready and descended next. He confirmed Andrea's observations. Dick's bobbin (simple) was open and his gear appeared normal. Andrea and Ficco did not observe any evidence of rock fall.

The group left the cave in a state of utter shock and disbelief. A raging thunderstorm accompanied them on the hike back up the mountain.

At this point the cause of the accident is unknown. The police are developing pictures from the scene and from the medical examiner. Any hypotheses are strictly speculation, and it is possible that examination of the gear will not conclusively answer numerous questions. Dick was an extremely experienced, competent and safety-conscious caver. Please be considerate of the impact on his friends and family and refrain from public speculation until more is known.

A Great Deal of Credit and a Very Big Thank You are extended to: -The Wise County Sheriffs Office for doing everything they could to accommodate the needs and desires of the crew and recovery personnel. -Triangle Rescue for providing equipment, key personnel and for facilitating 'the correct amount at the correct time'. -All the people that dropped everything, cancelled work and lost sleep to assist in a very stressful and emotional situation.

Whether in the cave, on the surface, or hundreds of miles away, the collective efforts of these individuals and organizations, brought about what was the smoothest cave rescue/recovery incident that most of us have ever witnessed. We are very grateful. Thank you all.

## GROTTO GRAPEVINE

by A.I. Cartwright

The process of learning is the process of making new connections in your brain, wrinkles as it seems. The past six months as proved to be very wrinkly for the VPI Cave Club, with many connections solidifying and new wrinkles appearing.

### WELCOME NEW WRINKLES

Margaret Abigail Ferguson was born on June 25, 2003 at around 5 AM. Craig and Katherine are calling her Maggie.

Liz and Nathan Sharp also contributed to the Cave Club wrinkle-fest by bringing little Emma Zinnia into the world. Kudos to Liz for turning in her final draft of her master's thesis just one week before Emma arrived.

### THEY GOT TO THE FINISHLINE

Nick Zegre finished his Masters degree and quickly fled from Blacksburg. He now lives in Eugene, OR.

Alison Williams successfully defended her dissertation and has received her Doctorate degree.

### NEWS FROM CAVERS LOST TO THE RESCUE SQUAD

It seems as though the rescue squad kids are growing up. FINALLY! Eric and Rachel Stanley were married this past summer. Caver-friends did enjoy an in-town party but were mostly excluded from the apparently ritzy wedding.

Brian Ekey and Kristi McDonald have also gotten quite serious as they have become engaged.

### MORE ENGAGEMENTS

Jenn Albanes showed up to Son of Picnic with a big ROCK on her finger. Congratulations to Chris Michiel!

### BIG CHANGES + CONSTRUCTION

Patty Kitchin has been spotted hanging out with the grotto. Welcome back!

Philip Balister and Sandy Knapp have moved into a great house in town. They are the proud owners of a fantastic rebelay tree, which many trainees have not yet fallen out of.

Mike Newsome and Kevin Rock have continued to work on the bat ranch sauna project. It has been roofed, windowed, insulated, electrified

and is just about done.

Thanks to Mike, Kevin and all the cavers who helped out.

Some time ago, Steve and Steve bought the infamous

Blue House. The new slumlords offered the downstairs apartment on the listserv but had no takers. For the first time in a long time, there dwells a non-caver in that house.



Photo by Nathan Sharp

Maggie Ferguson at Halloween

Jerry Thompson, a good friend to the Cave Club and the landowner of our annual Picnic site (and Newberry Baines Cave), was elected as Bland County's new sheriff with 84% of the vote.

### VPI CAVE CLUB ONLINE

Thanks to Philip Balister, the Cave Club has a new website to fiddle with. At <<[http://wiki.vpicaveclub.org/wiki/wiki.phtml?title=Main\\_Page](http://wiki.vpicaveclub.org/wiki/wiki.phtml?title=Main_Page)>>, you can upload pictures, edit comments, add links and write trip reports.

In addition, the Club has added new merchandise to the usual T-shirt and sweatshirt lineup. All items have the club patch on them and can be found at <<http://www.cafeshops.com/caveclub>>.

### NSS CONVENTION AWARDS

Joey Fagan recieved a Fellows award during the 2003 NSS Convention this past summer.

## FROM SIGNOUT

compiled by Christina K. Lee

Between the dates of 4/17/03 and 12/31/03, the VPI Cave Club spent a total of 1622 hours underground.

05/24/03	Wet Cat Cave	Steve Wells, Steve Lepera Eileen O'Malley, Kevin Rock, Kara Smith	Saved a cat and found good air
05/31/03	Starnes	Craig Ferguson, Jeff Jablonski Matt Burnett, Dan Seibel	Colonoscopy complete. Starnes bowels—OK!
	Starnes	John Booker, Sandy Ramsey Brian McCarter, Cengiz Akinli	Arm hair casualties.
06/12/03	Links	Eric Stanley, Brian Ekey, Erin O'Brien, Ben Graboyes	Water in Links? WTF?!
06/21/03	Starnes	Matt Burnett, Amber Warren	Water in Starnes? WTF?! Oh yeah, nevermind...
08/02/03	Links	Kevin Rock, Dave C., Brian McCarter, John Booker	I like being in the middle. Then you can just sway and do no work. Man Train a-coming!
09/06/03	Pig Hole	Christina Lee, Travis Coad, John Deighan	The Queen will dine with Wine!
10/05/03	Rosepetal Snowflake	Mark Eisenbies, Rob Story Geoff Lewis, Christina Lee, Penelope Pooler, Mike Cole	CONEHEAD!
10/11/03	James	Samantha Lambert, Allen Smith Kara Smith, Kevin Rock	It hurts because it spreads my cheeks apart.
10/24/03	Pighole	Mike Cole, Kirk Digby, Rob Story	Grasshopper on knots
10/26/03	New Castle Murderhole	Mike Cole, Allison Barth Kirk Digby	Two men make it faster.
12/13/03	Pighole	John Booker, Jessica Dorr, Travis Coad, John Deighan, Christina Lee, Paige Baldasser, Aaron Thomas, Mike Cole	Up, Down, Up, Down, BEER
12/31/03	Tawney	Jerry Redder, Cheryl Nos, Barbara Chiles	3 hrs caving, 1 hr fighting with the #?! gate
12/19/03	Mexico	Steve Wells, Steve Lepera, Eileen O'Malley, Joan Johnson, Ko Tahimikawa	Hard to do 'drinas with no rope. At least the trucks survived (mostly).

VPI Cave Club

PO Box 558

Blacksburg, VA 24060-0558