

# *The Tech Troglobyte*



*Spring '98*

**THE TECH TROGLODYTE**  
**A JOURNAL OF THE VIRGINIA TECH GROTTO OF THE**  
**NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**



Spring Semester, 1998

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Editor Eileen O'Malley  
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with flash assistance from  
Barbara Graham & Barry Fizer

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## HOPING FOR VPI HELP WITH SPRING VAR!

BY JOHN FOX, NEW RIVER VALLEY GROTTO

The Virginia Region spring meeting will be hosted by New River Valley Grotto celebrating their 10th annual Cave Escape. The date is April 30 to May 3, 1998. Camping will be at Horseshoe Campground in Draper (exit 92 off I-81). Cost will be \$20.00 per person (camping Thursday night, April 30, is free). There will be a catered dinner Saturday night, and music both Friday and Saturday nights. Beside caving trips there are activities along the New River Trail, Claytor Lake, and children activities.

For up-to-date information on this meeting visit our web page at [www.runet.edu/~jfox/nrvg/vars98.html](http://www.runet.edu/~jfox/nrvg/vars98.html).

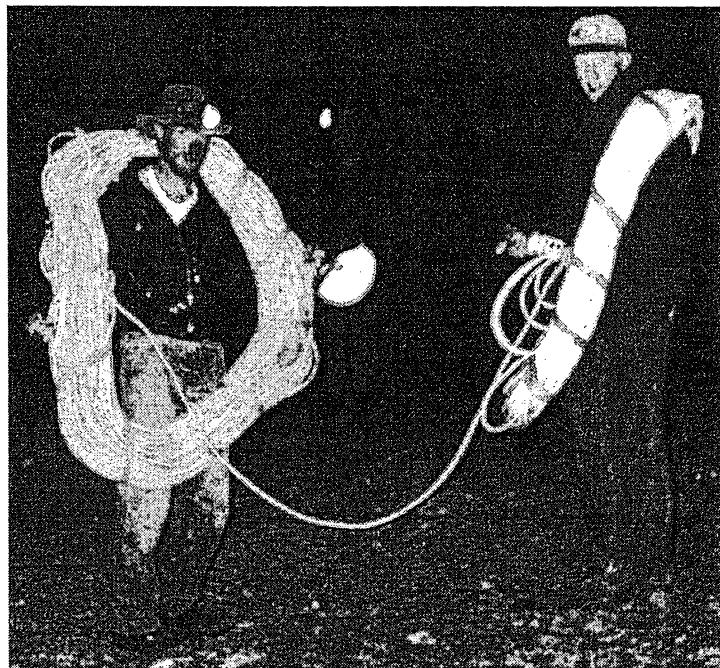
We are looking for volunteers for vertical trip leaders and help with children activities. If you are interested, please contact George Maurnich at [mtrogit@swva.net](mailto:mtrogit@swva.net) for cave trips and Tex at [bandycrow@aol.com](mailto:bandycrow@aol.com) for children's activities.

New River Valley Grotto Web Page:  
[www.runet.edu/~jfox/nrvg](http://www.runet.edu/~jfox/nrvg)

Host VAR Spring '98 meeting:  
[www.runet.edu/~jfox/nrvg/vars98.html](http://www.runet.edu/~jfox/nrvg/vars98.html)

Other cave listings:  
[www.runet.edu/~jfox/nrvg/ocl.html](http://www.runet.edu/~jfox/nrvg/ocl.html)

(Hint: if you're thinking that this looks like a repeat from the last *Trog*, you're right! Just a reminder that it's not too late to help out.)



So this is what 1500 feet of rope looks like!

Photo by Ray Sira

## ORGAN CAVE TRIP REPORT

### BY AARON GORDON

This was the first weekend in about three weeks that I had enough time to go caving, so I was actually very excited to wake up at 8:00 on a Saturday morning. I had heard a lot of talk about Organ cave, and this just added to my anticipation. I quickly got my stuff together, ate breakfast, got dressed, and headed off to Smyth to catch a ride.

In the parking lot I met up with Sandy Knapp and Marc Zahn. We piled into Sandy's van and headed over to signout. In the process of doing the signout thing, we got together with Eileen O'Malley and Patricia Feely. All of us got our gear together, and completed signing out. Then we headed off to Ray Sira's house.

As we pulled into his driveway over the bridge, I thought about the scenery and the whole attitude of the area. This was one nicest areas I have seen.

The van came to a stop, and we all hopped out. As Sandy went to get Ray, I noticed an old British sports car sitting not to far from the van and I took a look at it for a little while. After conversing, all the men left in Ray's Truck, and all the women left in Sandy's van. I have no idea how that happened.

Along the two-hour drive into West Virginia I forgot to buy food to take into the cave. I was caught up in the excitement and I just forgot. It was one of the stupidest things I have ever done. But it was a mistake I will never make again.

After a short chitchat with the landowner, we parked, changed, and went underground. It was the first time I have ever gone totally electric, so I was definitely anxious to see how it would be. We finally got into the Lipps entrance around 12:00.

The entrance was rather plain passage, with some water running at the bottom. This was the first time I had noticed, but there were a lot of crickets hanging around. We ended up going down the wrong passage for a while, but luckily Ray had his trusty Organ cave maps, and we were on track again towards the Lipps maze. On the way there was a neat little crawl where people had made nifty mud sculptures on a small ledge. I thought that was very cool because I had never seen anything like it.

We got to the Lipps maze, which is a little jumble of passages. After getting lost a few times and again consulting the mighty maps we were on our way further into the cave through a section called skid row. So far, the cave had been mostly representative of the typical cave systems I had seen so far. (For example, New River, and James.) When we reached Jones Canyon I was amazed at the size of the passage. Sometime during the walk through one of these large passages, Ray showed me the ceiling. He showed me how you could trace the path of the original force of water that had hollowed out the entire room. This was extremely fascinating to me.

After that, our path went through a neat passage

called the breezeway into another huge passage called the Handley room. This is where the register was located, so we stopped for a snack and a rest. I didn't have any food, but the rest of the gang was nice and gave me something to eat. This room was another giant room that amazed me.

The next passage of note was the passage to the Flack room. This passage had a very scary hip crawl over a tiny ledge. Nobody liked this move. It was my first real encounter with exposure. During the crawl there is a small period where you feel very uncomfortable, like you are going to fall. I got through it very slowly, and so did Patricia and Mark. Sandy and Ray however, being more experienced, had a lot less difficulty negotiating it.

After this experience I felt good that I had done it and this feeling of accomplishment made me like caving even more. We rested a minute, then headed up through the Floyd-Collins Highway. In this large passageway I noticed some rimstone dams formed where some moving water was flowing through. Rat Alley was next which was a long muddy crawl that had a neat mud sculpture of a rat at the end of the passage. This brought us out into the Bone room.

This was a huge room full of gigantic breakdown. After scrambling around on this for a while, we realized we were lost again, and hit the maps one more time. By the time we got to the Sarver room we decided that we had been in the cave long enough and planned the quickest way back.

We climbed up the back of the Sarver room into a long walking passage called Octopus Alley (or something very close to that.) At the beginning of this passage is where Ray had fallen on a previous trip, so it was a point of interest and of conversation as we waited for people to climb up into the passage.

Next on the route was a neat room that had some kind of knobby formations on the wall called the fun room. This room led us back into the Flack room and we once again traversed the terrible hip ledge. This time, however, it wasn't nearly half as bad. It was much easier to cross coming from the other direction.

From there on, we trudged back the same path we came in. I noticed how quick it seemed to go in proportion to the time it took us to come in. I guess not getting lost, and anticipation made it seem shorter. I also noticed that the crickets I had forgotten about had re-appeared near the entrance passageways.

When we finally got out it was about 9:30 and it was very cold. It didn't seem that long, but my knees told me it had been a long time.

On the way back we stopped in a small Italian restaurant and ate dinner. We were all very tired, but I kept thinking about how fun and interesting the trip was. I couldn't wait to go caving in a cave as cool as that again. I vowed that I would never forget food again, and that I would buy some knee pads at the first opportunity I came across.

## TRIP REPORT: TAWNEY'S BY JANICE MATHESON

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

-T. S. Eliot

I hesitate to go underground, it takes too much time and energy to get ready and get organized. The world above is consuming, devouring my energy and time. Can I possibly spare the hours it takes to go underground? Is this "wasted" time justifiable? But, I've never regretted any of my underground diversions. Never regretted the weeks of soreness, the bruises, the bleeding of my scraped dry hands, the muddy torn clothes, and the money spent on equipment. The time underground is not lost but transformed. I emerge from the ground renewed, returning from adventures normal people won't have in a lifetime. Lingering discomforts are fleeting souvenirs. This time underground is my refreshing asynchronous chord dropped in center of the monotonous and repetitive symphony that is my life. This time is different, bold, and risky.

In the darkness there might as well be nothing else. For all I know when we turn out our lights, everything vanishes into nothingness. Cave walls, formations, bats, crickets, bodies, mud, and everything else around me might just dissolve or change shape. For this reason my faith strengthens in the dark. Not necessarily a faith in God, but a faith in the rocks. I BELIEVE they are not getting up and dancing or melting into lava. In mud we trust.

Sounds grow deafening. Every movement of the people around me becomes disturbing, interfering with my study of the metronome-like tempo of the water dripping from the ceiling, echoing, dripping, echoing. Trying to adjust my breathing my life functions to the rhythm of the surrounding environment. Silly meditation, I am neglecting my social obligation to entertain the others. New cavers intrigued by the promise of something, lured underground. What do they expect to see? What did I expect to see? I don't remember. I try to go into new experiences without many expectations or imagined scenarios, at least that way I can't be disappointed.

I've been disappointed before. Life doesn't always surpass the imagination. We are the misguided travelers of Voltaire's Candide. "If we do not find anything very pleasant, at least we shall find something new." Searching for happiness at the extremities of the world, finding only pain and hardship before settling for the contentment of a tranquil garden. Did they overlook the joy of the pain and hardship? The bliss of a painful journey terminates with the disappointing attainment of the destination.

I've been here many times, but I never realized how much there is to see. I am impatient, attention-deficient, and suffering from tunnel vision. Focusing my light on the uneven ground before my feet, not looking up at the glistening walls and ceilings. That has to stop. Ancient water droplets collecting on the sides of the cave look like precious diamonds glistening in the light. Surrounded by droplets frozen in time, but not really frozen. The deeper we venture into the earth's crust, the slower the time seems to move. Water suspended in another time dimension, collecting for centuries before gaining enough mass to fall. Could the gravity be different here too? The powerful mysterious power drawing us further underground, forcing me to fall on even ground, and pulling me into the crevices. Like an astronaut exploring the lunar surface, I make adjustments to the gravity, the darkness, the unheralded beauty of water, and the impact I have on an environment lacking the turbulent forces of atmosphere.

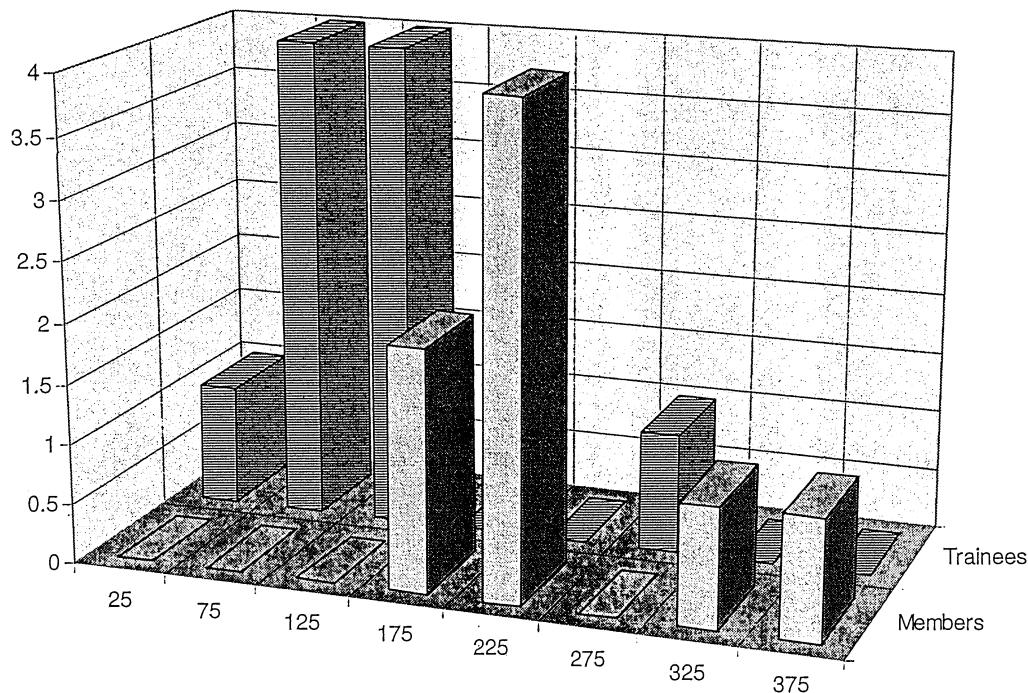
Past the watery jewels there is a wall of fossils. The rocky wall is covered with the small indentations of seashells, each about a centimeter across. The underwater history of the limestone comes to life. Oceanic creatures die and collect under the pressure of the deep waters. Their flesh decays, but the calcium of shells and bones form rock under the immense pressure of the sea. Pangea moves, and the rocks emerge from the sea to form mountains, and the rainwater carves a labyrinth of tunnels through the mountains. I walk through the dead bodies of ancient sea life, an earthly museum wall covered in their images, proving their existence. I stare at them in awe, hundreds of them from another time and place. Cave – porthole to another world.

## A MEASURE OF CAVE CLUB PURITY

SUBMITTED BY STEVE WELLS AND STEVE LEPERA

Just how pure are you? How do you rank with your friends? The chart below was created from the scores received from the Purity Test which Steve and Steve forced on unsuspecting trainees and members alike. As your score goes up, your purity level goes down.

The x-axis shows the score while the y-axis gives the number of people. Looks like the trainees have some catching up to do!



## **BY THE SKIN OF MY ASS TRIP**

### **BY BRAD ATKINSON**

It was a cold, dark, and windy night at the Bat-Ranch, and many people were tucked tightly into the hot tub (in that ever so wonderful caver fashion) to the point of overflow. When someone mentioned that the only way this could become any better was to have a good fun cave trip but with a twist, boy did I learn my lesson: the twist being the lack of clothes. Some people looked on as so to not catch the gaze of those who had already decided upon going on this trip. Yet still there were only two takers (their names will not be shown in order to protect the innocent and not so innocent) who I knew would have been first in line for this trip anyway. So with that we began our ordeal of getting ready. By the way, this is made very easy when you a) don't have to remove any clothes, and b) you don't have any wet muddy caving suit to put on.

As we took off towards Links we noticed that the wind was blowing even harder and snowflakes were falling. This is a bad thing when you are dressed for naked caving (that is, if you call it dressed). When we were at the opening of Links we had forgotten about the cold or it's just that we were too afraid of the possibility of losing parts of our bodies underground. So now the question is brought up, why can't human skin be like cordura? As we entered the cave we began to note how much warmer it is with no clothes and that it was actually comfortable in there. Then came the hard part, that being the slide down that is a few feet from the entrance. For any of you nude cavers out there you know this is something you do not do when you cave in this way! So it became a climb down. By the way I would like to take this time to mention that nude caving will definitely improve one's caving abilities mainly because you can no longer use your ass to slide along in low ceiling areas, or your knees for that matter.

Trudging on like real troopers we made it to the first junction before the Wedding Room and we were very happy because we still had all our parts. When we made it to the Wedding Room we found it a great op-

portunity for a portrait so we could have proof we did Links nude or just so we can have a picture show up later on in the years after it had long since been destroyed. This just goes to show things will always show up at the worst possible time. After the photo shoot we went through the "S" crawl; this still gives me shivers because of the nicely placed puddle of COLD water that a part of my body dragged through. The crawl was not that bad, probably because the walls had been worn somewhat smooth by the many trips that have passed through there. The only bad part was that someone other than myself had decided to bring along his gas, too. Reaching the 5-9, green and dazed by asphyxiation, we decided to try the 5-9, which the other two did and I chickened out because I found the rock to be a little closer to parts that it should not be. With this being another fine and opportune moment for photos, some took breaks in their climb in order to have a picture taken. Then it was back through the S crawl and the trapped gas back out into the Wedding Room. This is where we had a splitting of ideas.

The other two wanted to go through the canyon section which the thought sort of turned me a very pale shade. So I then had to follow my instincts and stay back to fill out the registry and to be able to walk out of Links with all body parts intact. After a few minutes they showed back up in what seemed one piece but I was not going to look to closely for obvious reasons. We mentioned we had been in there a little longer than planned and so decided to head on out. By the way, don't forget there was still the small climb at the entrance to go up. This in itself could cause a grown man to cry but we made it through it. While walking back to the Ranch we noticed other people walking up the hill from the barn, which turned out they were checking on us since we had taken a little longer than planned. I believe I even heard someone say "rescue", and if that is so the question is would it have been a naked rescue?

## GROTTO GRAPEVINE BY A.I. CARTWRIGHT

### ROVING CAVERS

As usual, many cavers ditched their families over Christmas and headed south. This Mexico trip consisted of Steve Wells, Steve LePera, Joe Thompson, Ray Sira, Jim Pugh, Mark Morton, Chris Rourke, Suzie Warren, Dave Warren, Chris (Jake) Brown, and John Deighan. While none of the lazy asses wrote a Trog article about the trip, Ray did manage to submit some photos (randomly dispersed throughout this issue). There were the usual explosions, beer drinking, and illnesses. (Ask Jake about doing the "consolation pit".)



Ray gets ready to take the big plunge at the lip of El Sotono.  
Photo taken by someone other than Ray.

Thanks to heavy snowfall and poor mountain conditions, a New Mexico trip was cancelled and instead cavers spent a long weekend in TAG. Organized by Sandy Knapp, the crew consisted of Sandy, Dave Colatosti, Eileen O'Malley, Katherine Shelor, Walt Pirie, Barbara Graham, and Barry (Pyro) Fizer. They were met by an offshoot of the returning Mexico trip: Steve, Steve, and Joe. Thanks to Barry's wonderful meals, the group had enough energy to bounce several pits and actually spend time in a horizontal cave, Guffey's, before dispersing for home.



Sandy, Dave, and Katherine hanging out at TAG.  
Photo by Eileen O'Malley

Not to be outdone, the richer folks flew to Amsterdam for an extended weekend: Craig Ferguson, Dave Shantz, Jerry and Joan Redder, Joan Johnson and Ko Takimizawa, Bob and Jackie Hoell, Bob Simonds, Doug Perkins, Bill Stringfellow, and Walt and Lynn Pirie. Though temptation was great, Mr. Ferguson claims that none of the travelers did anything illegal while they were there. Hmm....

### BANQUET '98

This year's Banquet was held, where else, at the Newport Rec Center and catered by Steve Williams. Mike and Andrea Futrell presented an interesting slide show of their exploration in the caves of Borneo. (Don't go there if you don't like bugs.) This year's awards ceremony was hosted by Dave Colatosti and his assistant, Mike Horne. (Dave should clearly have his own late-night talk show.)

#### Guano clusters:

Lawrence Britt, for taking care of the rescue gear and club files;

Mike Newsome and the Bat Ranchers, for opening their home and their cave to us cavers;

Carol Zokaites for promoting karst sensitivity awareness through her work with Project Underground;

Ray Sira for taking over the club store;

Steve Wells for maintaining signout;

Amy Johnson, for helping the club acquire much needed map cabinets;

Mike Horne, for his work on the Safety Committee.

#### Other awards:

A "sun" for Chris Rourke to remind him what it looks like (because he spends so much time underground); Trainee of the Year to Chris Garguilo;

*Where's Ed Fortney?* to Ed Fortney to know how we felt we couldn't find him;

Mad Dog rejection letter to "Private" Ed Fortney based on his performance in Cass Cave;

Brain Bucket to Carl Bern for his incident in Cheve (with runners-up Steve Wells and Jonathan Altman);

A hoe (no, really) to Steve Wells to assist him in future vehicle repairs;

A picture frame with broken glass to Carl Bern for punching his windshield out on a trying Mexico trip;

Driving awards to Jim Washington, Jeff Uhl, and Lawrence Britt for encounters with cops;

Book of Quotes for Sandy Knapp to assist her in future conversations;

Most Obnoxious Trainee to Mark Morton for obvious reasons;

Flame Out Plaque to Eileen O'Malley for puking almost on the landowner's property just before a cave trip;

A golden hammer to Jean McCarthy and Richard Cobb for reviving the old signout house on Eakin Street;  
 A cardboard butt to Wil Orndorf for baring it all on Float Trip at the wrong moment;  
 A Homewrecker crowbar to Eileen O'Malley for prying apart the long-standing couple Steve and Anti-Steve.



Seating was limited, so these folks decided to belly up to the stage for dinner. Photo by Steve LePera

#### FIRST COMES LOVE, THEN COMES....

The club will celebrate two weddings this summer, both on May 16th. Jean McCarthy and Richard Cobb, who bought the old signout on Eakin Street, will wed in the back yard. The party afterwards is sure to be a blast. Said Jean, "People want to know if we'll be leaving early to go on a honeymoon. What, and miss our own party?!" That same day, Scott (Hoss) Leifer will wed Laura Ludeke somewhere in Virginia. (If it isn't Blacksburg, it's just somewhere else.) Shortly thereafter, they'll head out to Seattle, where Hoss has been working in a fancy Italian restaurant. Laura has just enough time to graduate and pack before she's married and whisked away. (Does the word *inbred* mean anything to these couples?)

#### THEN COMES BABY IN THE BABY CARRIAGE

After several years of marriage, Adam Hungerford and his wife Tracey have reproduced. Jebediah David Hungerford was born on April 15. The baby had a bit of trouble getting out (not a promising caver!), but he and Tracey are doing fine. Adam and family are living in Pennsylvania.

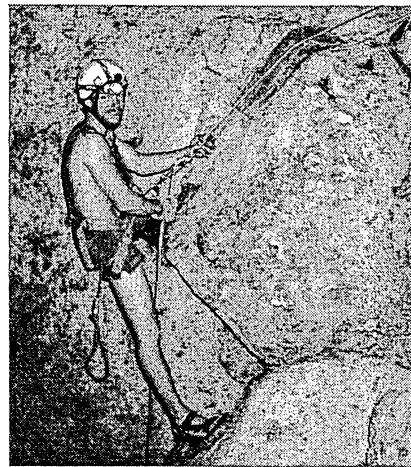
#### BEWARE: RAMPANT DOMESTICATION

After an extended stay with Hugh Beard and Karen Little, Dave Shantz has bought a house in Williamsburg, Virginia. Dave claims, "I love the new house, but it's awfully quiet without Hugh around."

At about the same time, Paul Kirchman and Dabney Hammer bought a house in Maryland. There's plenty of back yard for chickens to roam and their dog Zephyr to romp.

Steve Wells is attempting to purchase a true caver house. If the deal goes through, he'll have eight

rooms to rent to fellow cavers. No word on whether he'll rent any of the rooms by the hour.



Would you trust your visiting sister with this man?  
Photo by Ray Sira

#### STILL GOING....

Hoss isn't the only caver to head out west. Carl Bern moved to Washington recently, hoping to get a job as a guide on Mt. Rainier. He's been training for several weeks, and the guide try-outs are upcoming. Newlyweds Patty Kitchin and Mark Leach hosted Carl's going away party, which consisted of cavers, climbers, and other riffraff. Amy Johnson is hoping to find a job near Washington when she's completed her Master's Degree.

#### OTR?

Due to the problems the club encountered at last year's OTR, many old farts have reason enough not to return. There's talk of holding an alternative get-together on Labor Day Weekend for those who've had their fill of OTR and its representatives. Possible camping facilities will be discussed at this year's Picnic.

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"...nothing is more inviting than a dazed  
and disabled coot idling on flat water."

— New York Times

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Plenty of young farts and trainees plan to attend OTR as usual. For these folks there's a big push for VPI to kick ass in the vertical contests. Plans are underway to hold regular rope racing sessions over the summer to get folks fit and improve their times. If you are interested, talk to Eileen O'Malley or Ray Sira.

## YTR

Sandy is always trying to organize something! This time it was the Student Grotto Get-together, now known as Young Timer's Reunion. Students from as far away as Pennsylvania showed up at the WVACS field house north of Lewisburg, WV on April 4th. Only a handful of people didn't cave on Saturday, and that was due to "excessive fun" the night before. The camp-out weekend drew 66 cavers to the area. Of those, 28 are from VPI. (Hey, someone's gotta show these students how to party!)

## CLUB OFFICERS

An amazing two trainees were voted in as club members this semester. Chris (Guido) Garguilo became member #367, and Judi Wazilewski became member #368. Congrats to both! Joe Thompson has completed almost all of his requirements for membership, including the exam, but hasn't managed to complete the most intense, critical requirement of all: the Trog article.

Election time came around, and this year's competition was sparse. Sandy Knapp stepped down as President since she'll be graduating in May. (In June she begins working for VTLS in the Corporate Research Center.) She was replaced by Jessica Dorr, who promised to start meetings promptly at 7:00 p.m. (Yeah, right. The very next meeting started late.) Chris

Rourke, having done an excellent job as Vice President, defeated Guido Garguilo to hold the position. Although no one doubts Guido's caving abilities, many felt that he should have a bit more time and experience with the club. Conveniently, Guido was immediately voted in as Secretary. Not surprisingly, Steve LePera was elected club Treasurer for the 4th year in a row. (Hasn't he graduated yet?) Walt Pirie was re-affirmed as the Faculty Advisor.



The newly elected Treasurer does his celebratory strip tease.  
Photo by someone on the Mexico trip.

## TRIP REPORT: STARNES

### BY CHRIS (GUIDO) GARGUILLO

"Too bad you won't live; then again who does."

I heard the words echoing though the passages of Starnes. As we left the Starnes I was familiar with and headed to the new section I wondered how I ever got into this.

It was the night before, at the meeting during trip planning. None of the trips going out would keep me out of town during the Tech vs. Miami game. Disappointed, and preparing myself for a Tawney's trip, I heard that Dave Colatosti and Kirk Digby needed a third surveyor on their trip. Without thinking, I ran over and volunteered on one condition; I would miss the Miami game. I later realized that would not be a problem at all.

Dave C. planned on picking me up at 9 AM. This was before I was fully acclimated to caver time; Dave came after 10. We then had to pick up Kirk and get all the gear. By the time we made it underground it was around one.

In order to get to the New Section, we had to traverse several obstacles. Once we had rappelled down a drop and climbed down few others, we reached the twelve hundred-foot crawl. We inched along on our stomachs with our cave packs strapped to our legs. The passage varies in size in the crawl. At some areas there are small rooms and in others I could barely fit with my pack on. We made it through this crawl in an hour. When we arrived at the New Section, the passage opened up into a very large room.

We rested a bit and had a little food. Dave and Kirk were telling me about the New Section first aid kit. Ask them about it some time. We then had to climb up the bolt climb. It goes up next to a beautiful flowstone formation. I found it moderately difficult to pass the bolt. At the top was a very beautiful room. There were several pools that each had rimstone formations and crystal clear water. Along the walls there were soda straw formations over a foot long.

We reached a tricky traverse over a small pit. Dave and Kirk told me the drop was probably not enough to kill you right away. It would be a few days until you died. A rescue there would take days. By then any injury that made a self-rescue impossible would most likely kill the person. The thought of this made me a little more cautious.

We soon reached the beginning of the survey point. The room branched off into three passageways. I was given the honor of traveling ahead into "Virgin" passage. Taking the tape, I headed into the unknown. Stepping into a place where no one has ever been before is a very unique feeling. I was amazed just looking at the mud floor and seeing nothing: no footprints, garbage or signs of people. Looking around a corner became as exciting as Christmas morning. I never knew what I would find; the passage could end, branch off or open up to a new room. As

we surveyed and searched around for new passages this feeling of excitement never left.

We soon ran into a breakdown pile. It was full of loose rocks and boulders. After moving several rocks, I was able to make enough space between the pile and the ceiling to squeeze through. I passed over and around the breakdown pile to a wall with a small hole. Shining my light in, I saw it opened up to a small room. I had to dig a while in the mud to get the hole large enough to squeeze through. The room didn't go anywhere and the lead died.

Surveying is very tedious work. I would go ahead with the tape to find a survey station. The next station had to be in the line of sight of the previous station. When I found a station, I would use my carbide lamp to mark it with a black dot. I then held my light on the station while Kirk took measurements. Dave recorded the data and sketched the passage. I found surveying pretty difficult. I tried to be as accurate as possible, as quickly as possible. The tape got really muddy and made it difficult to take measurements. I had to scrape off the mud with my thumb before I could read the tape.

We continued to survey other passages and leads. There was one lead we found that was really nasty. It was narrow, wet, and full of loose, sharp rocks. One passage we found looked very promising. It was very narrow and difficult to access. We had already been underground for fifteen hours and none of us felt up to pushing this lead. We decided to save it for next time and headed back.

We were cold, wet, tired, and weak. Everything seemed much harder. It took me longer to climb over the "pit of a slow death". I was now muddy and therefore slippery. The thought of getting hurt on the way out was even scarier than getting hurt on the way in. I managed to make it over without dying and we proceeded to the bolt climb. When we got there, Dave and Kirk had to re-rig the rope. While I waited, I was falling asleep standing up. The bolt climb was harder on the way down because I was so exhausted. I could barely lift myself up to unhook my ascender.

We were at the entrance to the crawl again. I knew the way out was on the other side so I tried to go fast. Unfortunately, though, I found I could barely go through it slowly. I was so tired, I would crawl a few feet then collapse, rest, then crawl again. I did that for 1200 feet. The few small drops we climbed down on the way in were now very tiring to climb up. We climbed up the drop we rappelled down the day before as fast as we could. By then I just wanted to get above ground as fast as possible. I remember stumbling out of the cave, dozing off as I walked. We made it above ground about 20 hours after we went in. It was then Sunday morning.

**QUOTEABLE QUOTES  
BY VARIOUS FOLKS (CAUGHT UNAWARES)**

- CC to AB: "Actually, we're probably two of the more sensitive guys in the club."  
AB to CC: "Yeah, we'll actually listen to a chick's feelings and shit like that."
- EOM to EF: "It's not that I don't respect [him]. It's just that I'm twice the man he is."
- MM to KS: "Hey, now I don't have any room to stretch out."  
KS to MM: "That's okay, you can stretch out under me."
- SL to DC: "Just because she had yours first doesn't make it the original."
- DC to EF: "You pushed it out too far and I broke it."
- LB to EF: "People who are not artistically trained should not express themselves in other people's bathrooms."
- AB to crowd: "If I had six more inches to work with, I'd be fine."  
RS to AB: "I can help you with that."
- DC to KD: "I have an open relationship."  
SK to DC: "Which part of your body?"
- PB to EF: "We need to go to **Girls, Girls, Girls.**"  
EF to PB: "So I can have *professionals* tell me to f--- off?"
- SL to EOM: "You mean to say I can't have my cake and eat it too?"  
EOM to SL: "That's right. There'll be no eating of my cake for you tonight!"
- HE to KD: "Chris is really excited about playing with me."
- SK to LB: "In the many ways that we're alike, we're different."



"Hey, what's everybody laughing at?"

Photo by Kim Hansen

## THE TALE OF A CAVER CHANGED FOR LIFE

BY BILL STEIER

It was going to be a prolonged and arduous trip, a minimum of 10 hours. Nonetheless it was also an important trip to close off a back section of Starnes cave beyond P.O.S. Pit. The final lead at this section of cave was a small hole near the ceiling of a 30' long by 10' wide room. Steve Wells and a small group of other cavers were the first people to visit this part of the cave several weeks earlier, but without the aid of a scaling pole on that trip they were unable to complete exploration of the area.

Now some three weeks later Steve had convinced three others members of the club to join him on a scaling pole trip back to that far-off room. Steve, being the monkey he is, graciously volunteered to be the one to climb the cable ladder when the time came, if the rest of us would help carry the 25 foot scaling pole into the cave. Being typical pain-loving cavers Patty Kitchen, Bryce Bolton, and myself, Bill Steier volunteered to carry in a five piece, 25 foot scaling pole deep into Starnes. We would have to travel through the Suction Sewer, over the 50 foot P.O.S. Pit and finally attempt to close off this lead. Little did we know that this trip was going to be a trip that none of us would ever forget.

The trip started as usual with a quick stop at Signout where we left word of where we would be going and when we were expected back. By 10:30 that morning we were at the farm and preparing to begin our journey. It was sunny and warm as we got dressed, the skies were blue. Just beyond our parking place is the Price's house, a two story white farm house that looks a bit like a mansion. Four tall white pillars decorate the front of the house, stretching from the porch up to meet the second floor roof. The porch was decorated with only two old rocking chairs and a few potted plants.

Mr. Price does not care about cavers visiting Starnes, but he also prefers not to be bothered by cavers asking for permission to enter the cave. He only requests that people who visit the cave sign a log book which he keeps in a mailbox near the caver parking area. Personally I have never spoken to Mr. Price or his family. I have only seen them on occasion working around the house or in the fields. Today there was no sign of anyone around; the house stood solemn and quiet. While I find that most cave owners welcome company and cavers for a short chat before entering their cave, I find the mailbox routine a bit impersonal. Perhaps one day I may get the chance to speak with him.

As we began our walk to the cave entrance, Bryce was having a hard time controlling his humorous tendencies. "Hey this is a really big pole," said Bryce, referring to one of his 5 foot sections. "It's sorta like a penis. The farther we slide it back into the cave, the

bigger it will get." And with that he started to laugh in his uniquely Bryce fashion. Starting softly, as a deep throaty sound made while exhaling in short puffs, and ending in higher pitched tones. Quickly his comment became more and more funny to himself and he began to get louder and louder. As we continued on the laughing spell turned into a sort of laughing orgasm, finally climaxing with, "It's all good...you know it is!" It's sometimes hard to argue with Bryce since he stands at over six feet tall and must weigh close to 200 pounds. Of course I would never consider him fat, or obese. On the contrary he is very fit, in an extra large kind of way. One might even say Bryce sized. I could tell from this out of control beginning that we were in for a weird trip to say the least.

As for the rest of us Patty and myself were excited about seeing a new part of the cave that only one or two previous parties had visited. This was going to be as close to virgin passage as I had ever been, and if our high lead went then I would be able to say I had seen virgin passage. As we walked slowly through pasture these thoughts of witnessing these unknown places filled my head. To go where no man had gone before. I felt like James T. Kirk, well maybe not. Still as we walked past the old brown barn and I looked into the distance at the many varied outcrops of limestone rocks that dotted the field I could only wonder what waited for us under this beautiful valley floor.

Lastly, I should not forget Steve, the ever confident climber and cave whore, as he has come to be known. No one quite knows whether his aptitude for climbing stems from actual skill or just a lack of brains. Whichever it is Steve was the first person to top out and cross Piece of Shit Pit (P.O.S. Pit) on an earlier scaling pole trip. As the story goes, the entire trip was assembling the scaling pole and preparing for the climb, while Steve chimneyed up a small canyon on the near side of the dome and eventually crossed over the top of the 50 foot pit unaided. For our group the chimney maneuver required to reach the top of the pit was easily accomplished, but due to the lack of a belay position on the near side the first person had to climb across unaided. Enter our fearless climber Steve – that was to be his job on this trip as well. "No problem at all," Steve said, "there are plenty of good hand and foot holds up there. You basically just need to lean forward over the pit, holding yourself with your arms, and then bring your feet ahead and step over." He was right as we would later find out; it was not a hard maneuver. Still the psychological effect of leaning over this pit without protection of some kind was a bit more than the rest of us could handle.

After walking up through the pasture and back down the other side we were standing at the entrance to Starnes cave. As we all stood near the entrance and

made final adjustments to our carbide lamps, I could feel the cool air which sat in the entrance pit reaching up to meet my face. The damp smell of the cave along with the cool air was refreshing to me as I sat and waited for the others to finish. This was still early October and while we knew winter would soon be upon us, today's temperature was well into high seventies, quite a contrast to the 54 degree cave air.

"Wow, Patty, this one single section of pole is almost bigger than you," Bryce observed out loud. "Huh-hh.....uhuhuhu."

"Real funny Bryce," she replied.

"It's all good, you know it is." With that comment we began our descent into cave.

Our goal was deep in the cave and our progress was steady, silent. We easily passed through the upper section of borehole passage, each person loaded down with their personal cave pack and the extra weight of a five foot long aluminum pole. Bryce carried two sections. Upon coming to our first and only drop, Steve and Patty quickly rigged the 75' rope we had brought along and we all rappelled down to an area known as the Suction Sewer.

The Suction Sewer is aptly named for the ankle and near calf deep mud on the floor. The passage is too wide to straddle the mud and everyone walked through the middle. Sucking sounds of boots being pulled out of the mud echoed through the passage as the four of us progressed. "Damn this mud is sloppy and holds tight," I wailed as the Suction Sewer tried to eat my left boot.

"Just keep moving," was Steve's answer.

I glanced at my watch, 4 hours underground already, and we were just about to reach P.O.S. Pit. It would take us another hour and a half to get everyone up the pit and across the top. Spirits were still high though, even though the poles were slowly becoming a tremendous hindrance. More than once we had to pass them from one person to another through tight spaces and here at P.O.S. Pit we raised each one separately from the bottom on a piece of webbing. But the pole climb was getting closer with every minute.

The last major obstacle before reaching the chamber which held the climb was a tight "s" shaped crawl which lead into a small room. Steve lead through slowly inching forward on his left side. "Make sure you start on your left side," he yelled from the far side of the passage. Body orientation is very important in this passage, for in any other position a person's body would not bend in the correct way. On the far side, this sinusoidal passage entered the next room about 5 feet off of the ground. With nothing but air to hold onto, the last move to get into the room was tricky and I almost fell on my head into the room.

"Hey Bill, take my pole," I heard Patty say. She was looking up at me from an almost body sized hole near

the floor. Patty was standing in the previous room. "Okay," I replied and in quick succession the other four section came through this hole as well.

We all made it through the little crawl, each with our own difficulties, and each person using their own choice of four letter expletives to aid their motivation. With that obstacle behind us we were only five minutes from our goal.

"Here it is" said Steve as we all entered the small canyon type passage. Just as he described it: high on the right hand wall there was an indentation that seemed to say, "I go!" By this point we were all beginning to tire but with possible passage in sight we energetically assembled the pole. To our dismay, after setting up the pole and leaning it against the wall, we found that it was about 5 feet below the ledge! "Okay, take the pole and prop it up on the wall; it will hold," Steve said.

"Yeah, right!" was my reply. "These walls are really flaky and mud covered; it will never hold." We had traveled this far though and it had to be done somehow was Steve's argument. We could not leave with this type of defeat. So, as Steve requested the rest of us lifted the pole up on to the wall and held it there tight with our hands and shoulders.

"Dead end!" was the shout that echoed back down from above. "Damn it, it looked so promising from below."

We all sat and ate quietly after Steve had come down from the ledge, contemplating the what we had done, thinking about the hopes of finding new passage, and thinking about the long and tiring trip back to the surface. With our meal done we packed up the pole and began our return trip.

Upon returning to the small room with tight "s" crawl in the wall, we had a frightful discovery; Bryce could not fit back through the hole! Of course Bryce is an experienced caver and he did not give up easily. We all watched him make several attempts at passing through the hole. Each attempt was to no avail. Bryce wasn't going to exit the cave through that passage. His only other option was to leave through the small hole in the floor, where we had passed the scaling pole pieces earlier. This hole was obviously too small for him to pass through in its current condition, but possibly with a bit of modification he could fit. Luckily we were prepared to do some digging and passage modification in case the pole lead needed it. We had no idea that we would be using it in one of the known passages.

With Bryce beginning to exhaust himself at attempting the "s" crawl, Patty suggested that he take a seat and rest a bit while we hammered at the rock around the small hole in the floor. "Okay," was his reply, but we all could see that he was not enthusiastic about having to sit. His jovial attitude from earlier in the day

was gone. Steve, Patty, and I all took turns hammering and Bryce sat on the opposite side of the room silently. "Bryce, if you start to get cold come on over here and take a few swings to warm yourself up," I said. But he only looked at me and quietly said, "I'm alright."

After about an hour of hard work we had only made a small dent in the rock. Bryce still sat quietly in the corner not wanting to talk. Patty whispered to me, "I think being stuck here is getting to Bryce."

"No shit! I know I would be scared if this was happening to me," I said.

"Do you think there is anything we can do to help him?"

"Get him out of here and FAST!"

Several time over the next few hours we asked Bryce to come over and attempt crawling through the hole we were working on. Each time he would come over and try feet first, then when that did not work he would turn around and lower his head into the hole and try to pass his shoulders through. Each time he would do this in almost complete silence and with what seemed like less and less motivation each time. Now two and a half hours after we started hammering at the rock we finally dislodged a large piece.

"Bryce we got it! Come on over and get the hell out of here," Steve said excitedly. With only a minor amount of renewed enthusiasm Bryce walked over to the hole and with only a little difficulty passed his head, shoulders, and finally his waist through the hole. He was out!

We all could see that a bit of tension was released from his facial expression, but he was still deeply affected by the whole situation. His eyes by this time had a glassy appearance to them, and his face was a bit pale. A mute walking giant. "Time to get moving Bryce, how do you feel?" I asked.

No response. "Shake it off Bryce. We just need to cave safely back to the surface and you will be alright." I said, trying to be enthusiastic.

"Let's go!" Steve said and we started off again. (Several weeks later we would name this small room where

Bryce got trapped for almost three hours, the CAVER MOTEL. Where cavers check in but they don't check out!)

Once again we moved steadily through the passages heading back towards the surface. While Patty, Steve and I tried to keep up the enthusiasm, Bryce never once laughed or even looked half excited about anything we said. Even sheep jokes had no effect on Bryce's solemn attitude. He only stared straight ahead. We were all worried about him, but each of us also felt the best cure for his state of mind was be free of the cold damp cave and it's dark passages. Bryce needed the open sky. So trying not worry too much about Bryce's attitude we kept caving.

It was now almost 3:00 a.m., 15 hours since we had entered the cave, and we were once again approaching the entrance to Starne's cave. As we all climbed up towards the surface, large raindrops fell on our helmets. Apparently a front had moved through the area while we were underground and it had rained. Persuaded by gusts of wind, the rain-soaked leaves were now shedding their catch from the evening's rain storm. The air was also much colder outside, no more than in the mid 50's. The difference between cave temperature and outside temperature was almost indistinguishable.

"Bryce, we made it!" Patty said as soon as we all were out of the cave.

"Yeah," Was Bryce's subdued answer.

As we left the forested entrance and headed back out into the fields, the rain drops stopped falling on our heads. Above the field a full moon filled the night sky intermittently as clouds raced by in front of it. Even with the clouds above, there was ample light to see all around the field where we stood. The clouds were also illuminated by the moonlight. Each one had a grey/white tint, backlit by the moon. I stood mesmerized by the beautiful yet chilling night sky for a second and then continued to follow the others. As I walked up the hill towards the house and parking area the wind continued to blow hard against my face. The forest leaves sang out in the silence of the early morning hours.

**FROM THE SIGNOUT**  
**COMPILED BY YOUR LOVELY EDITOR**

VPI cavers logged in 14,375 caver hours from 12/6/97 to 4/12/98. Whew, that's a lot of caving!

12/12/97	Tawney's	Chris McClaning, Joel Bergstein, Brian Morrow, Matt Stec, Matt Burnett, Chris Rourke	Rourke: Hey! Why is my strap in this big pile of mud? My backpack! <i>You Bastard!</i>
12/20/97	Mexico	Steve Wells, Steve LePera, Ray Sira, Chris Brown, Suzie Warren, Dave Warren, Joe Thompson, Chris Rourke, Jim Pugh, Mark Morton, John Deighan	Flaming burros, burning turds and melted nylon.
1/2/98	TAG	Sandy Knapp, Eileen O'Malley, Dave Colatosti, Katherine Shelor, Walt Pirie	Wow. Bouncing pits in short sleeves in January!
1/4/98	Stay High	Carl Bern, Amy Johnson, Mike McAvoy, Kirk Digby, Sarah Husband	My hands were so cold I could've used a porcupine's ass as a handhold and not known it.
1/8/98	Giant Caverns	Amy Johnson, Suzie Warren, Chris (Jake) Brown, James Whisenhunt	Ah, James "I'm not going to get dirty" Whisenhunt stays clean until he slips 5 feet from the top of the drop and "soils" his pants.
1/10/98	Starne's (New Section)	Carl Bern, Matt Burnett, Dave Colatosti	Scooping booty with the Shovel of Doom.
1/10/98	Links	Sandy Knapp, Katherine Shelor, Mrs. Shelor	Sandy: Nice to cave with someone my own age!
1/25/98	Links and Tawney's	Matt Burnett, Brad Atkinson, Christian Miller, David Jones	We may have scared off a new trainee.
2/14/98	Links	Dave Warren, Mark Eisenbies, Shannon Burcham, Suzie Warren, Eileen O'Malley, Steve LePera, Chris "Guido" Garguilo	The breast hold was ineffective.
2/17/98	New River	Steve Wells, Joe Thompson, Mark Morton	Rock! Big Rock! Damn those moveable handholds.
2/21/98	Pighole	Judi Wasilewski, Matt Stec, Matt Burnett, Andrew Usery, Andy Yeagle, Chris Garguilo, Katherine Shelor, Chris Rourke	No, Judi, tossing the coil is not an acceptable way of lowering the rope.
2/26/98	Tawney's	Steve Wells, Mark Morton, Joel Bergstein, Chris McClaning	Chrissy's base ass never looked as good as it did tonight covered in mud.
3/1/98	New River	John Deighan, Joe Thompson	I'd be okay if the damn walls would just let go!
3/21/98	Starne's	Bill Steier, Amy Johnson, Kirk Digby	No wimps.
4/1/98	Spruce Run	Matt Burnett, Brad Atkinson	Why does this camera take more than 36 pictures? I don't know, did you load the film right?