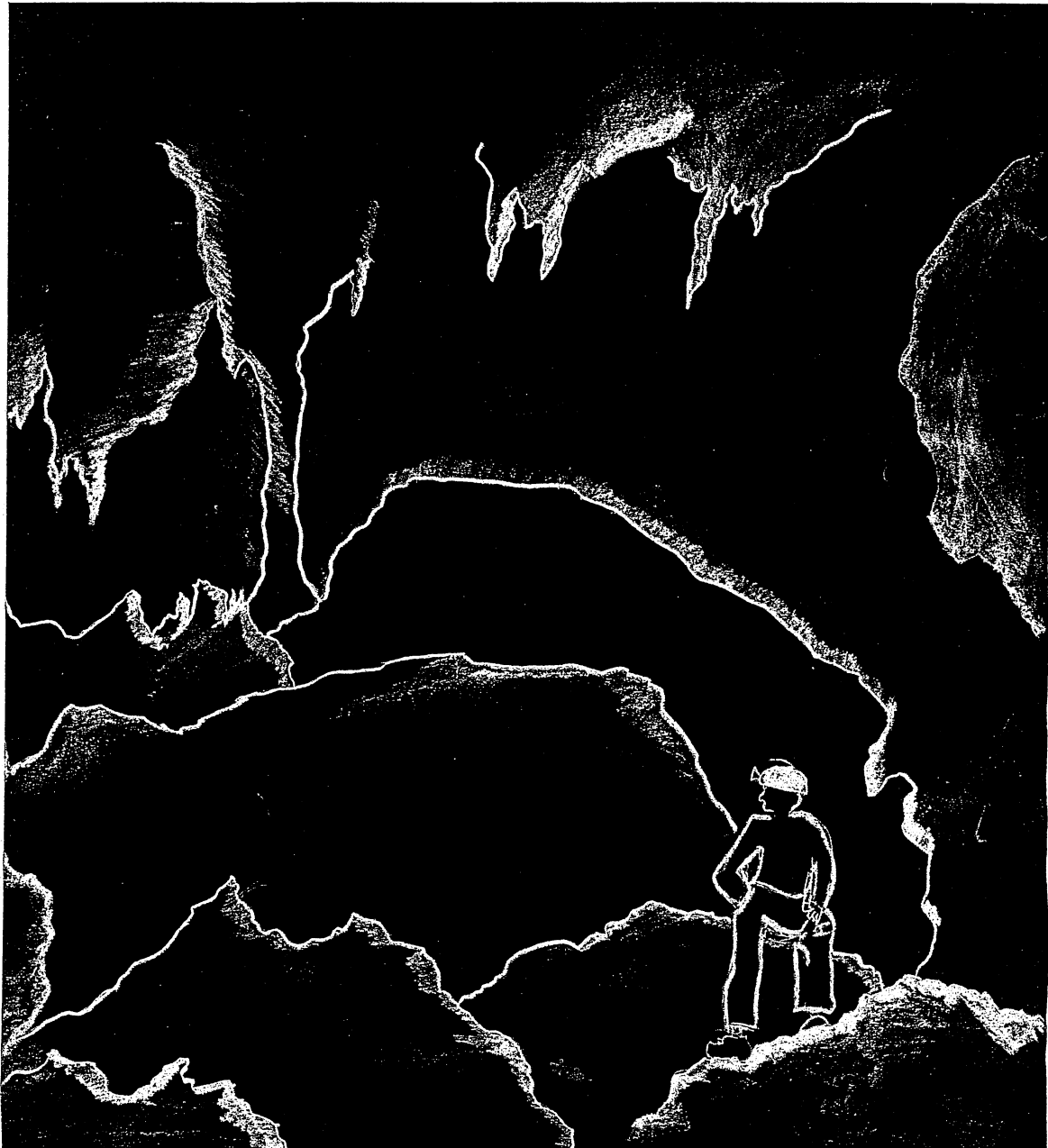


The Tech Troglodyte



Cover art by Samantha Lambert

Spring 2004
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The Tech Troglodyte

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

Spring Semester 2004 Officers:

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Falling in Caves: A Guide to Style

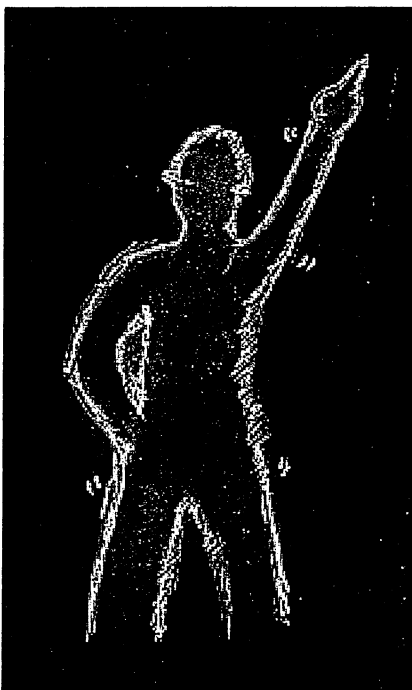
By Cameron Keyes

Falling down is something that any seasoned caver faces while underground. It is important to remember a few basic rules in such an event; doing so can help you preserve your body as well as save face.

The first rule to remember is to avoid falling down entirely: know your own limits so that you don't overextend yourself. If you are unsure about an area you need to chimney up, have someone else go first. This is good advice from a safety standpoint, but much more importantly it allows you to remain looking calm, cool, and in control. If that ledge is going to fall, then by god somebody else is going to figure that out before you do. If someone else goes up first and does fine, then it's ok for you. If they fall, then they're the ones who look silly and not you. Your style, class, and caving ego are all safely intact.

The second rule of style is to cave in close proximity to other cavers. While some will tell you this is so that if you fall there is someone nearby to help you, those people are as un-cool as recently used baby diapers. The real reason you cave near others is so that if you fall you can take them down

with you. Sure, you look silly lying there on the ground covered in mud – but then again so does the guy beside you, and the girl beside him...oh and that other fellow over there. In the proceeding confusion it will be easy to blame that first fateful slip on someone else.



The final, and by far most important rule, is to always, ALWAYS, cave with a trainee. This rule is useful in the direst of circumstances, when you fall in a wholly unstylish manner, far, far away from other cavers. Here rules one and two fail you because no one could go before you to test out the ground, and there is no one to trip in order to distract the group from your cave-fashion faux pas. Someone who is inexperienced in the art of chilled out caving might panic in a situation like this. They might even be foolish enough to say something like "Ouch." But this is where your many years of coolness have time to shine. As

you fall tumbling down the rock wall you had been so deftly climbing a moment ago remember to stand up slowly and calmly, brush yourself off, and shout "That was YOUR fault, you damn trainee. Now grab that 900 feet of rope and let's get going. Tawney's is a big cave."

Quotable Quotes

Submitted by your 'friends' for our entertainment

S&S on repairing cable ladders

SL: You fucked it up.

SW: I didn't fuck it up, you fucked it up!

SL: Well now it's fucked up.

KT to PH: Scott's is better; his is *smaller*.

PH to group: Guacamole does not hurt a gin-n-tonic.

PK to PB: But don't forget that alcohol can serve as a tenderizer.

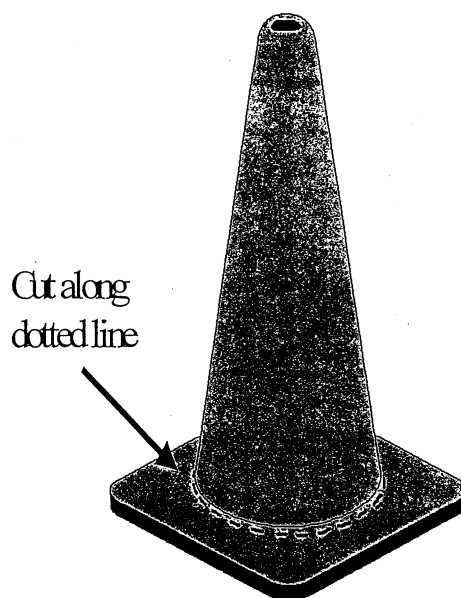
Traffic Cone Mud Bucket

By Mark Eisenbies

Last fall the cave/dig RosePetal Snowflake was discovered in Bland County. The dig currently produces mud of a peanut butter consistency that must be hauled 50 feet from the dig to the entrance through two crawls and up the entrance. The first few digs involved putting the mud into cave packs, but it is almost impossible to remove. In search of an alternative we came up with a reasonably good solution involving a bucket made from an 18-inch traffic cone. Good enough that haul crews began to refuse to use the bags in favor of waiting for the limited number of cones to cycle.

As a bucket, traffic cones have proven to be superior to other methods on several counts. (1) They are easy to fill; the cone can nestle in the digger's armpit in tight digs. (2) They pass through tight passages nicely; the soft sides prevent them from snagging firmly even on craggy walls with redirections. (3) They are easy to empty; the hole on the other end prevents suction from forming and the PVC acts like Teflon with mud (needs to be cleaned occasionally at the dig to restore non-stick properties). (4) They are durable; you can beat the living snot out of them when the mud fails to come out easily. (5) They are inexpensive; less than \$10 from Home Depot if you don't want to steal one.

Making the bucket is easy. An 18-inch cone is the preferred size because the taper on taller cones gives them less volume.

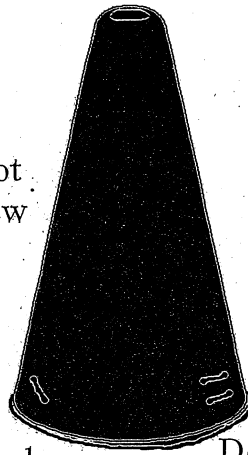


Step 1: Cut of the base leaving a rim to help reinforce the lip of the bucket (Figure 1)

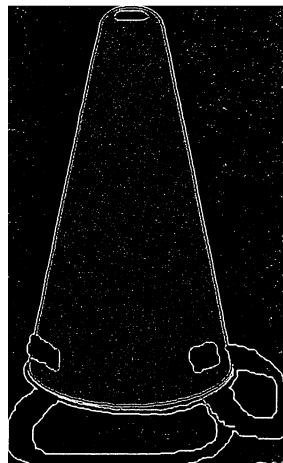
Fourth Slot
Not in view

Angled
Slot

Double
Slot



Step 2: Cut four 1-inch slots at 0, 120, and 240 degrees. Use a pair of slots parallel to the lip at 0 degrees, and angled slots at 120 and 240 degrees. This will create a 2-handle bucket with straps that are easy to move out of the way for filling and emptying.



Clip Carabiner
Through Two
Handles

Step 3: Thread about 3 1/2 to 4 feet of webbing through your 1-inch slots to form handles. Secure with a water knot. Adjust straps to make the handles even.

Step 4: Clip an old carabiner through the handles. Slide biner toward the dual slot so that the straps can be moved out of the way for filling and emptying.

Step 5: Find a dig.

I think this bucket could be modified into a pack for longer trips. It is certainly flexible enough to be folded into a pack. For sticky/muddy digs, this bucket has proven to be a real asset to quick removal of material; especially when that material has to be hauled a fair distance through tight crawls.

Elvis Grotto: The Twilight Zone of Caving

By Rob Story

In the rolling hills of Giles County, amidst farmland and horses (I will get to them later), there lies a cave which defies the normal rules of caving. Elvis Grotto #1 looks fairly innocuous at first; it's just another hole in the ground in a state filled with much of the same. But this cave isn't like the others....This cave is jinxed.

My first experience with Elvis Grotto really wasn't my idea. Philip Balister came to me one night with a gleam in his eye that I should have, and now know, to fear. He told me that Dave Colatosti and Kevin Rock were going to do some surveying in Elvis Grotto in hopes of getting to and drilling the bolts for a "promising" forty foot virgin pit and they needed another person for the trip. I, not having been there before, was mildly excited at the thought of getting to see a new cave as well as possibly dropping the pit. We set out the next morning.

For those who have never been there before, Elvis Grotto is almost inexplicably covered with mud. No matter how hard you try, you will be slimed when you exit the cave. It's just that kind of place. By the time Dave, Kevin, and I got to the lead, we were already decently covered with mud, having gone through the two rebelay and down mud covered ropes. What I didn't realize is what surveying the lead entailed. Basically, the hole drains the water that is dropping from the 100 foot pit. The mud in the tube has the consistency of peanut butter and is probably anywhere from three to six inches thick. I got appointed the job of lead tape, having never read instruments or drawn before, so I started my way down the hole. After setting up my first station (a mound of mud, incidentally), I was already completely slimed. I took a good bit of time to set up, so I probably laid in the same place for 30 minutes or longer. I remember that when I moved to the second station, Kevin took my place and commented on how I had warmed up the mud for him. My, what a generous caver I am.

After we had surveyed around 70 feet or so to the virgin pit, Kevin and I were downright cold, myself probably more so than Kevin. Dave set the bolts and grudgingly admitted that we should probably get out there, given our rather chilled and ridiculously muddy condition. I could tell that he really wanted to drop the pit, but to his credit he let us leave so that we could warm up. One muddy hole, three ropes, and about two hours later, we sat just inside the entrance. We knew this was going to be the worst part...it couldn't have been more than ten or fifteen degrees outside, and we were absolutely soaked through. We untied our boots and took off our vertical gear, which in retrospect was a very good idea. By the time I got back to the car, most things attached to my body were frozen. My gloves were frozen to my fingers, my helmet latch was frozen shut, and my boots were almost frozen to my feet. It was cold. Really...damn...cold.

After rapidly stripping and getting into a semi-warm car, we headed back on our way to Blacksburg, us looking like grotesque creatures with our faces and hair covered in mud. Here is where the first jinxed event occurred. Driving back from Elvis Grotto involves going through three gates, all of which need to be carefully shut and locked to prevent the escape of horses. I really don't know how I managed to mess this up. I was *sure* that I looped all of the chains the way I found them...but I guess I wasn't as sure as I thought. At the next Cave Club meeting Carrie Blankenship, whose family owns the land, cheerfully comes up and tells me that I let most of her family's horses out. This is after Dave, Kevin, and I had already let one escape in our journey *to* the cave. I apologized profusely and was relieved to hear that they thought it was rather humorous. Rather humorous indeed....I know what happened...I was jinxed by Elvis Grotto.

In my next cave trip after that fateful night, a trip to Link's cave, I truly realized what an enigma Elvis Grotto is. I didn't manage to clean my gear after that first trip, with the exception of all of my vertical equipment. Therefore, the rest of my stuff was absolutely crusted with mud. I literally

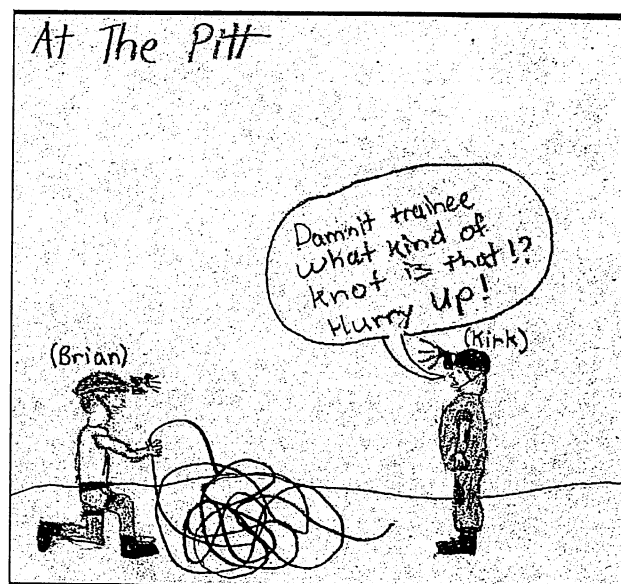
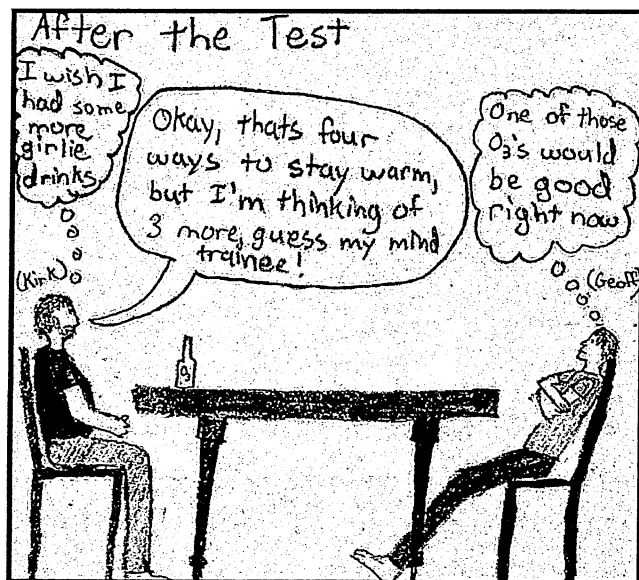
came out of Link's cleaner than I went in. I can't think of many other caves that will cause you to come out of a cave looking better than when you started. That's Elvis Grotto for you.

Even after all of this, I volunteered to go back a couple weeks later, under the promise that I wouldn't have to crawl down that absolutely nasty hole that I did the first time. Philip, Steve Wells, Chris Garguilo, and I went back to survey a promising high lead that would go over the nasty crawl. We got to the lead and Steve commenced knocking loads of rock off of the wall, both with his hammer and with his explosives. Philip and Chris surveyed the small bit of new passage and then we waited for Steve to finish his bolting. That is when Elvis Grotto struck again. Half a bolt-hole away from our virgin pit, the drill quit. We didn't panic...after all, we had another battery. But of course, that battery didn't work either. I'm not sure who got blamed for the battery failure in the end; I was probably the culprit, having dragged the batteries through the water in that nasty hole on my first trip. We all cursed and moaned the battery packs and headed back out into what was thankfully a beautiful day. Elvis Grotto had struck a second time.

I'm not really sure if there were any more incidents worth noting after that. I do know that according to Wells, the 40 foot virgin pit that Philip had high hopes for pretty much did nothing. From what I understand, there is a good bit of water going down it that funnels into a small hole. The dye tracing done gives us good hope for a big cave in the area, so I am sure that there will be more trips into the cave to search for new leads. However, I am warning those who go to Elvis Grotto...the cave is jinxed...it is the Twilight Zone of caving.

For the Love of Kirk and those Damn Membership Requirements

By Geoff Lewis



First Time in the Club

By Geoff Lewis

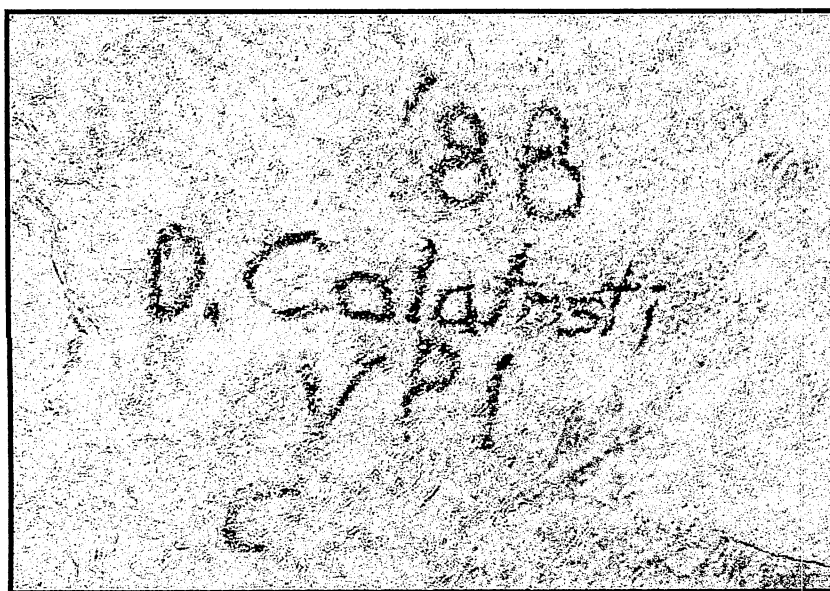
One fateful day, I saw a sign for a caving club while walking around campus. I had been caving with the scouts before so I decided to stop by the meeting. That Friday night I walked in Smyth 146, not knowing what to expect. I was met by a nice girl (Christina Lee) [ed.'s note: the author exercised his free will for all descriptive passages] and she told me about the club and how to get on trips. Then 7:00 pm approached and I took a seat since I thought the meeting was about to start. When it started fifteen minutes later, I knew this would be a good club for me since I am always late to everything.

Five minutes later I sat there trying to find out what was actually going on. The meeting appeared to be just random chaos, controlled by a laughing red-headed guy. (Mike Cole). Mailbag! An odd-looking fellow with gigantic feet started yelling and throwing ValU packs at people like it was candy at a parade. Accompanying this odd fellow's voice were random shouts from the rest of the club about random stuff that I had no clue about. At this point, I realized that there was nothing serious at all about this club and that it was exactly something I wanted to be in.

After the meeting I hung around and went to a speleoseminar where I talked to a few more people. A seemingly nice guy, Chris Michie, said he would take a group of us caving the next morning. We agreed to wait for Chris at Burger King at 8 AM. For an hour, we sat at Burger King. We were thinking about leaving when a knight on a white stallion showed up. We stuffed ourselves into the Mustang and then rode to Sign Out. Later we found out Chris had overslept and it was not the first time either. The trip turned out to be a blast and the club has been fun ever since, despite those first shocking experiences.

Shot in the Dark

a photo by your *friend*



The Ballad of Bane's Spring

By Brian McCarter

One meeting last year, an old fart declared,
"There's work to be done, and this work is best shared!
Let's all go to see how my last survey fared."
The name of the cave was Bane's Spring.

The plan was to get to some points below ground,
Then transmit a signal until it was found.
The old fart would meanwhile stack up a mound
Of beer cans over Bane's Spring.

"Radio-location," he said, "will allow
For reduction of error, and glitches, and how!
Our survey needs help! So get going now!"
With that, we prepared for Bane's Spring.

Such was our load when we packed up our gear:
Antennas, and batteries, but sadly no beer.
At that point I thought I had nothing to fear.
I knew not the woe of Bane's Spring.

The entrance was neither too grim nor too tight.
I could stretch out, and an elephant might.
But as we walked on, my heart filled with spite.
Whose idea was this awful Bane's Spring?

Crawling, and stooping, and breathing in dust.
I couldn't go on, but I knew that I must!
All I could think of was soft pizza crust.
Instead I just chewed on Bane's Spring.

We got to the points, on time without fail.
We sent out our signal, an electrical wail.
Meanwhile I looked for a cab I could hail.
Get me out! I'm stuck in Bane's Spring!

At last we arrived at the end of our trek.
The old fart had fled with no thanks, just neglect.
Next time he needs help, I'll write him check.
I will not return to Bane's Spring.

I swear there was never a nastier cave!
It fit me around like a fresh dug grave.
I used to think I was hardy and brave,
But it kicked my ass: Bane's Spring.

Grotto Grapevine

By AI Cartwright

New couple, Rob Story and Carrie Blankenship, made their first public debut at Easterbeer. Rumor has it that the older wiser Carrie heard of Rob's date-worthiness through the unpublished grotto grapevine. The couple has been coupling since early March.

Although this semester has seen a hoard of new faces, one will surely be missed. Lisa Gough, a local kindergarten teacher, has fled the club. She seemed to have a good time at Banquet, scoping out the younger guys. It has been suggested that a date with Brad is enough to turn any girl away.

Brian McCarter beat down the Menacing Michie after taking Michie took his role of Carbide Lamp Test Interferer too far. Congratulations on passing your Carbide Lamp Test and getting your membership, Brian!

Three of the four '04-'05 officers earned their membership cards this semester in a successful attempt to overthrow the club's aging government.

The four newest members: Christina Lee, Geoff Lewis, Brian McCarter and Rob Story finally rolled the club's membership number into the 400's! According to crude calculations, that is about 6.5 members voted in every year.

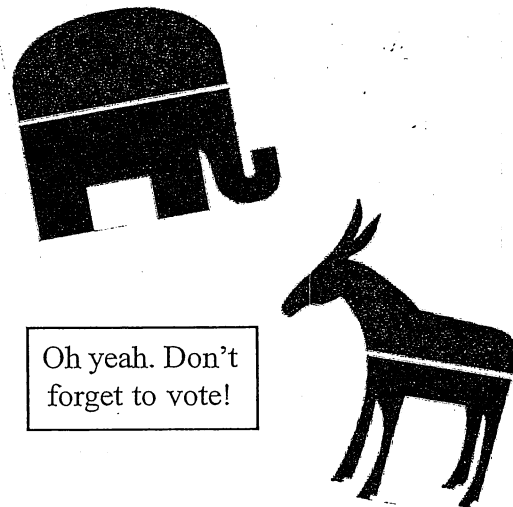
Aaron Thomas and Philip Balister both have official papers in the works! Aaron attempting to relocate and naturalize his Mexican bride, Zulema, before the end of the year. Buena suerte, gringo! Philip has finally found a good reason to become a citizen of the United States—to vote against Dubuya. Assuming the U.S. gov't will accept Philip, we can all blame him if/when Bush Jr. gets reelected. Damn Canadians!

Congratulations to those completing their degrees this semester! Mark Eisenbies will finish his doctorate work. There was an inkling that he may stay in town because of Tech's offer of a post-doc. YAY! Carrie Blankenship will complete her masters. Although she doesn't have a post-doc offer, Carrie is expected to stick around the club. For what reason, we don't know...

Niki LeBranch bought a townhouse at OakTree. Samantha Lambert and Chris Gargulio moved to a different house out on Spruce Run and out of their Zells Mill trailer. Chris has about a month to engage Sam before their one year goal expires.

Mike Cole was molested at the After-Banquet party by some anonymous woman. Go MIKE!

Ray Sira and Kirk Digby showed unusual excitement over Animal Planet's special on Cave Elephants. "These rare, cave-dwelling elephants spend as much time above ground as they do beneath it, feeling their way, trunk to tail, into the depths, where remote cameras capture them sleeping, splashing in pools and satisfying their need for salt." Are Kirk and Ray part of this underground elephant culture? Or are they just Asses?



From Signout

Compiled by Christina K. Lee

Between the dates of 1/10/04 and 4/11/04, the VPI Cave Club spent at total of 894 hours underground.

DATE	CAVE	PARTICIPANTS	COMMENTS
1/17/04	Cloverhollow	Kirk Digby, Brian Plisch, Brian McCarter, Mike Cole, Brad Atkinson	Q: Hey trainee! What did you lose? A: my keys...
02/01/04	Starnes	Every new trainee, including Geoff + Matt Burnett and John Booker	CRAP! We're late for Geoff's Test!
02/07/04	Tawney's	Brian McCarter, Raj Damodaran, Dan Rathbone, Sandy Ramsey, Zak Sawyer, David Klorrg, Chris Sharkey, Christina Lee, Eric Newman, Brian Wheeler	The swimming was great!
02/08/04	Elvis Grotto #1	Steve Wells, Philip Balister, Rob Story, Chris Gargulio	Technology Failed No Holy Grail Today.
02/08/04	GIANT	Mike Cole, Sam Lambert, Eileen O'Malley, Sandy Ramsey	Turns out Mike IS a dick.
02/21/04	Pighole	John Deighan, David Calder, Christina Lee, Rob Story, Zak Sawyer, Mike Cole, Chip Mullins	"Can we rappel naked?"
02/28/04	James	Sandy Ramsey, David Klorrg, Daniel Rathbone, Brian Wheeler	Look down BEFORE you start to go down!!
02/28/04	Pighole	Christina Lee, John Deighan, Chris Michie, David Calder	Groan, grunt, scream, moan... DAMN! Someone's been here.
03/14/04	William's dig	Eileen O'Malley, Steve Wells, Mike Cole, Steve LePera	1 step forward, 600 steps back
03/20/04	near James	Travis Coad, Justin Matous, Jenna	Dig your own pit in cowshit. Hyperactive charging cows.
03/28/04	Tawney's	Ty Brady, Joseph Landreth, Rob Story, Scott Rapier	Spotydog + Spot Rob see 81% of Tawney's

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