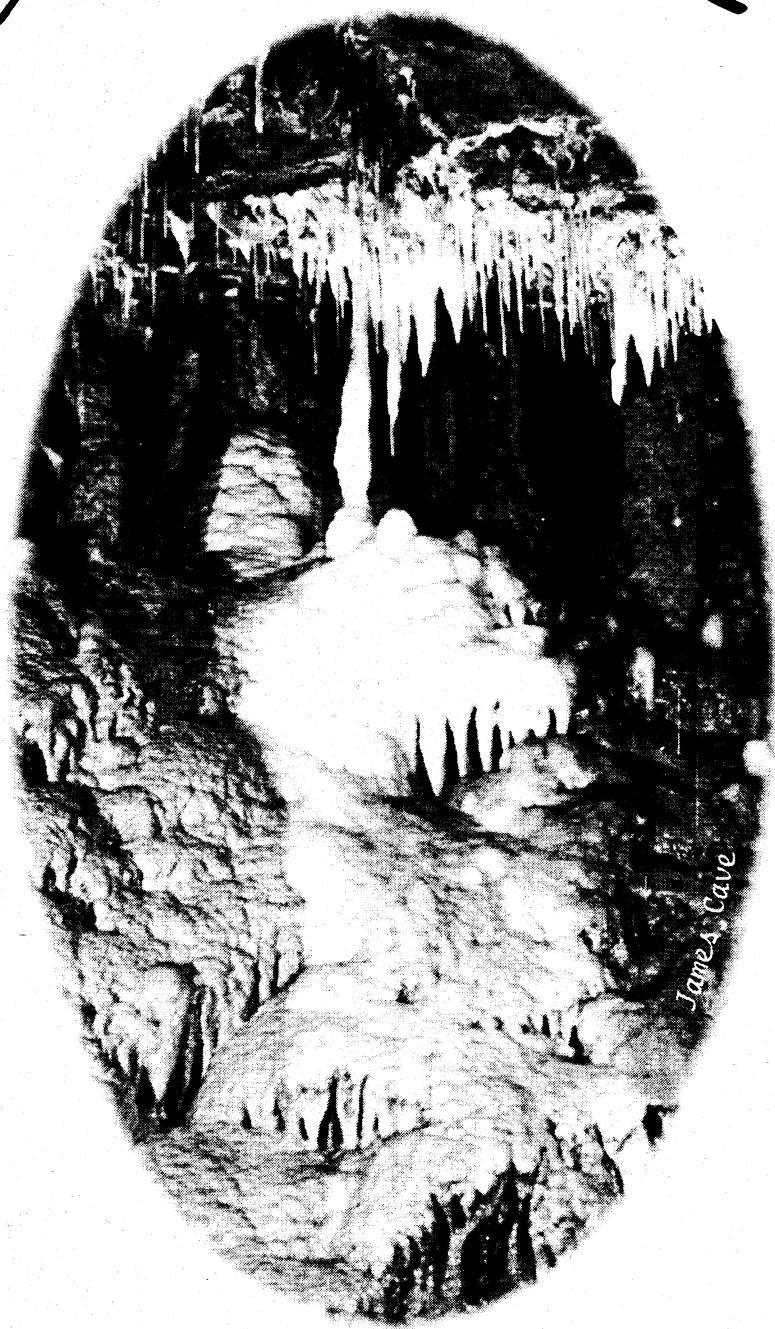


Hosted by the VPI Cave Club

Spring VAR 2000



April 28-30, 2000  
New River Park  
Giles County, VA

# **The Spring 2000 Meeting of the Virginia Region**

**HOSTED BY THE  
VPI Cave Club of the NSS**

**APRIL 28-30, 2000**

**NEW RIVER PARK  
GILES COUNTY, VIRGINIA**

**CHAIRMAN: SANDY KNAPP**

**GUIDEBOOK EDITOR: EILEEN C. O'MALLEY**

**COVER PHOTO: MATTHEW BURNETT**

## **Contents:**

Welcome to Spring VAR 2000!	3
Notes on Cave Trips	3
The Hike to Starnes	4
Popular Local Caves	5
Clover Hollow	5
James Cave	5
Links Cave	6
New Castle Murder Hole	6
New River Cave	8
Pig Hole Cave	9
Prices Strike Cave	10
Smokehole Cave	10
Spruce Run Cave	11
Starnes Caverns	11
Stay High Cave	11
Tawneys Cave	12
Wilburn Valley Cave	12
Yer Cave	13
History of Starnes Caverns	15
Why To Cave	17
Just Another Dog-gone Cavin' Story	23
Results of the Surveyor Survey	26



Artwork by Andy Yeagle.

# Welcome to Spring VAR 2000!

by Sandy Knapp, Chairman

Giles and surrounding counties have experienced a flurry of exploration and survey activity within the past year. Some of this has been pushing and remapping existing caves, while some is mapping newly discovered caves.

With all of this activity focusing on surveying, we thought we'd share some of our stories and new maps with the members of the Virginia Region. This guidebook is our way of letting you know what's going on.

We hope you are as excited as we are to know that there are still caves out there just waiting for discovery!

Also, you may notice something a bit strange about the back of this guidebook. Since this VAR coincides with the time our club newsletter is usually published, we thought we'd combine the two publications to give everyone a chance to see them both. Enjoy our grotto gossip, trip reports, and artistic efforts.

Thanks to all who donated tarps, equipment, time, and energy to make this a great weekend for everyone.

## CAMPGROUND RULES

While our ultimate goal is that everyone has a wonderful weekend, we do have some rules which we expect you to heed:

1. Please wear your name tag while in camp. You need this for Saturday night's dinner and beverages. The tags are color-coded: yellow for staff, green for over 21, and red for under 21.
2. No nudity in the campground. This is a public place and we're obliged to follow the rules.
3. Alcohol consumption is permitted, but please use discretion around families who are not part of the VAR group.
4. No underage drinking. Sodas are available for the under 21 crowd.
5. Please keep pets on a leash.
6. There will be a large bonfire on Saturday night. Keep individual campfires within designated areas.

## MED TENT

We will have basic medical supplies available at a tent near the Registration table, but this will not be staffed with medical personnel.

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

### Saturday:

8:00 am – 11:00 am: lead trips leave the campground. See individual signup sheets for times.

5:00 pm – auction begins

6:00 pm – tap the keg!

6:00 pm – dinner and soft drinks available

7:00 pm – door prizes

8:30 pm – slide show

after the slide show – music by *Las Cucarachas de la Muerte*

9:00 pm – light the bonfire

### Sunday:

9:00 am – VAR meeting begins

after the meeting – geology field trip leaves the campground

3:00 pm – time to head home

Note: the bonfire, dinner, drinks, band performance, meeting, and vendors will be concentrated in one area. Find one and you've found them all.

## Notes on Cave Trips

All self-lead trips should contact registration about the access policies and guidelines for the cave you plan to visit. Directions to local caves may be acquired at the Registration table. We will have a cave trip log book available at registration, and we encourage you to record your cave trips. Note: this book is *not* intended as a signout! Please sign out with your friends by letting them know what cave you plan to visit and when you plan to be back at the campground.

**Clover Hollow Cave** – you must sign the Clover Hollow guest book at the Registration table. In addition, please pick up "We Cave Responsibly" placards and display one in the windshield of all vehicles parked outside the cave.

**New River Cave** – no waivers are necessary, however the landowner requests that those who have never been to this cave should go to Registration and get on a lead trip. He kindly opened the cave for us **this weekend only**.

**Pig Hole Cave** – the only trips to this cave will be lead trips organized at Registration. In addition, only vertically experienced cavers are permitted on these trips.

Please remain respectful of the landowners and their property. Our local grottos have worked hard to keep relations good, and the result is that we're able to host this VAR to share "our" caves with out-of-towners.

## **The Hike to Starnes**

**by Sarah Husband**

---

i imagine snow covered  
soft hills  
whipping wind  
releasing and tugging  
on wisps of brown hair

ice stings and  
your cheek is red  
framed by gray blue  
background snowclouds

clouds touch the tips of mountains  
in a ziplock seal which protects us from

the sound  
escaping our red lips  
shining with saliva  
a song

none and particular  
and none that we can remember

all the words to

but we do remember  
our last lifetime together

I pleasure in the dark  
outlines of your form  
and we continue down  
the hill

## Popular Local Caves

reprinted from *Underground in the Appalachians*, the '95 NSS Convention Guidebook

### CLOVER HOLLOW

by James Washington & Susan Vermeulen

Requirements: vertical, advanced

Although known for many years, Clover Hollow Cave remains one of the showpiece vertical caves of the area. VPI Cave Club and many other grottos have been enjoying Clover Hollow Cave since the early 1940's. The cave is a must-see for vertically competent visitors to the area.

The entrance drop can be rigged several ways, but the usual main anchor is a tree about 20 feet back from the lip on the lower side. A 120 foot rope should do the job nicely. If it has been raining, rigging in this spot should keep you out of the waterfall. We do not recommend using the old wheelbarrow nailed to a tree at the edge of the pit as a redirection. Once on the bottom, proceed down trunk passage that seems to end, then through a crawlway (not in the stream bed) on the right. Soon you will get to the straddle canyon which will challenge shorter-legged people on the trip. Then, an 8 foot downclimb leads quickly to the flowstone drop. Some may rig a cable ladder here, but a 50 foot

handline should do if the team chooses to batman back up the 15 feet with a self-belay. Immediately following is a 17 foot drop that is free climbable, but it is usually rigged with a cable ladder or rope. Be careful at the bottom because of a 90 foot hole to the left. About 50 feet farther down the passage is the Canyon Drop, a 70 foot rappel. Rig a 150 foot rope to the large breakdown at the top. Use the existing bolts only for redirection if desired. Climb down through a hole to the ledge for the easy spot to rig in and avoid the lip.

After rappelling into the Grand Canyon Room, you need to decide where you want to go. A map or person familiar with the cave will particularly come in handy at this point. Those wanting more vertical work



Looking up at a caver from the bottom of Clover Hollow's entrance pit. Photo by Craig Ferguson.

snack break and a good read. The Library also has a register for comments. Adventurous types should check out the Gypsum Flowers Room, beyond the Thistle Tube; you won't believe it until you see it. The Dragon's Tail and the four foot soda straw are quite delightful in their own way. As for enthusiasts of boozing passage, Echo Hollow is one of the largest cave rooms in Virginia.

If there is a large caving party or several parties caving at once, expect delays due to the bottlenecks at the ascents at the Canyon and at the entrance. A

typical trip without delay takes around seven hours. If there isn't substantial runoff coming in at the entrance, the trip should remain relatively dry unless you decide to fall into the stream in the Canyon.

### JAMES CAVE

by Bob Lewis

Requirements: horizontal, beginner

James Cave is good for spending any part of an afternoon (three to eight hours). To view some of the most beautiful formations in southwest Virginia and encounter every horizontal caving technique known, go to James Cave. No vertical gear is necessary, although there are a couple of spots where a handline would be found useful to many cavers. Ten to fifteen feet of



Cavers descend Clover Hollow's entrance pit the old-fashioned way — lowered down by a winch. Photo taken on November 10, 1946 by E.F. Moore.

rope will be plenty long enough. Throughout the cave you'll experience crawling, stoop-walking, walking, some climbing (nothing beyond the abilities of novices),



The entrance to Link's Cave. Photo by Stephen Wells.

chimneying, canyon-hopping, bouldering and just good old fun, muddy caving.

A camera will get much use in James. Notable sites include the Mineral Room, the Volcano Room, and a large, almost white totem pole stalagmite named By God. One can also see a four to five foot batch of perfectly white soda straws named Nameless, the Rubber Chicken. The Formation Room, a 200 foot long chamber containing the Dagger, and beautiful rimstone pools, make the cave a sightseers' dream.

The cave is relatively easy. You can make the trip as long as you wish, you can take pictures or you can just take in the beauty of the hundreds of formations found in this cave. No vertical gear is necessary. The cave is now over 1.5 miles in length. If you are not from this area, this trip will make you glad you came. Enjoy.

#### **LINKS CAVE**

by James Washington & Susan Vermeulen

Requirements: horizontal, beginner

Links Cave is often described as a 3-D jungle gym. It is mostly dry

with an abundance of formations in the easy part and some interesting challenges in the optional, more difficult part. A caver's potpourri of pretties, chimneying and

5.9 (?) climbing, Links Cave does not require ropes or vertical gear, but bring your webbing, since beginners tend to like belays while attempting some of the climbs.

A typical trip goes from the entrance, negotiating a couple of easy downclimbs, back to the Wedding Room to view the beautifully tiered

draperies. Past that room through the "S" crawl is the 5.9 climb for a mental and physical challenge. Before the Wedding Room at a high lead is the way into the Chimney Section where the floor disappears regularly, but the walls aren't far apart. Multiple chimneys and straddles lead to one of the larger rooms in the cave.

A typical trip that explores the whole cave lasts between 2-3 hours. Links Cave is perfect for horizontal cavers that need a dose of climbing once in awhile. It is also quite photogenic. [See the latest Links map on the next page.]

#### **NEW CASTLE MURDER HOLE**

by Lawrence Britt

Requirements: vertical, advanced  
New Castle Murder Hole is located in scenic Craig County in a valley between two mountains. It was formed in a tension fracture associated with the Saltville Thrust Fault. Survey work on the new map is almost finished, with 1.53 miles of cave. The cave has a lot of vertical work and LOTS of exposure! While not a particularly decorated cave, it is a climber's delight. The landowner requests

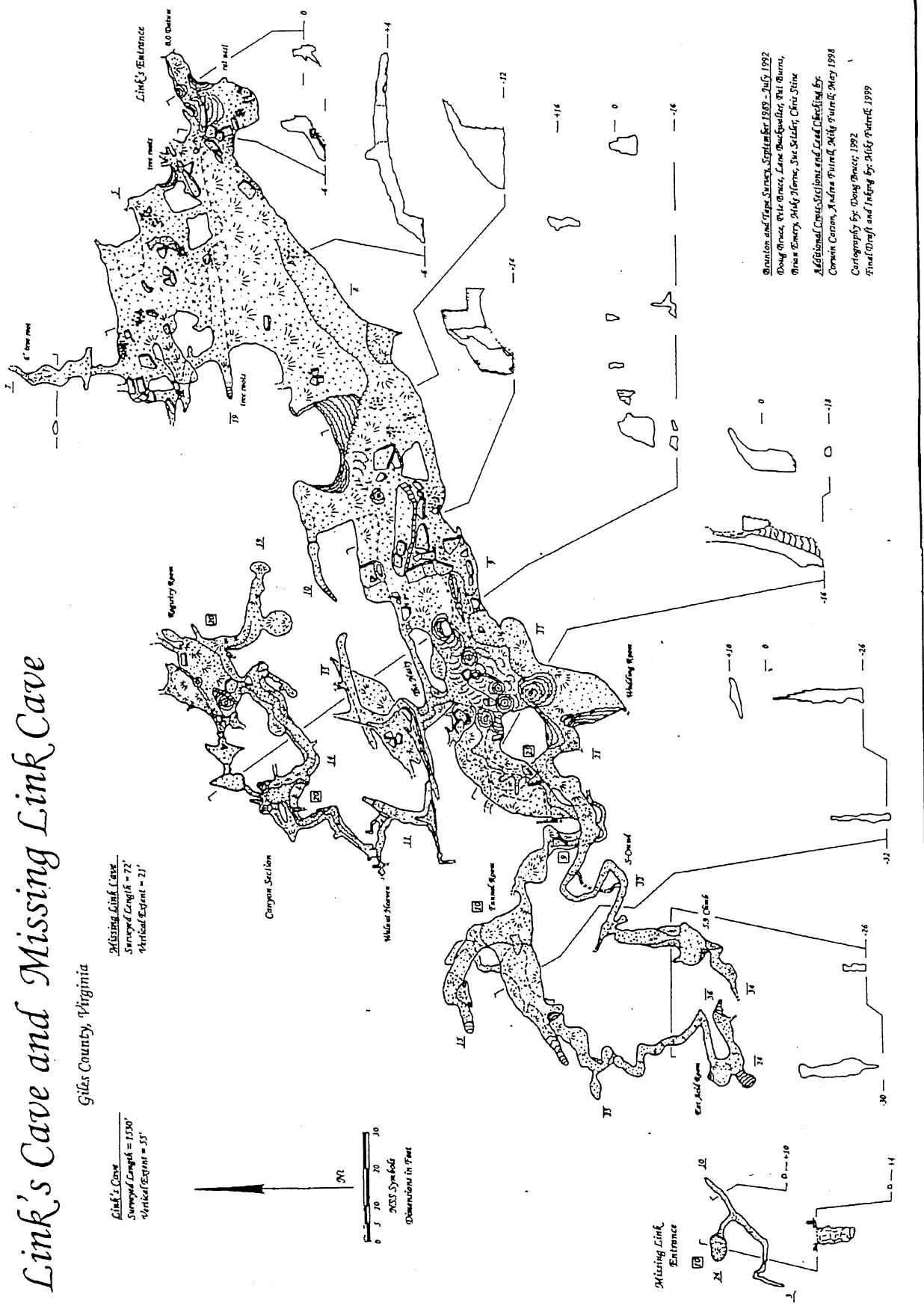
that only vertically experienced people visit; this is not a cave for beginners. Once at the property, check in with the landowner and sign in. Parking is normally just beyond the gate in inclement weather, although the owner may let you drive up to the entrance. **ALWAYS ASK!** He is very concerned about erosion on the hill. There is a gate in the fence surrounding the pit. Please tie the gate shut every time you pass through. As the owner's son commented once, "Who would want a cow falling on them while on rope?" The entrance area is VERY slippery when wet!

The trip starts with a 78 foot rappel down the entrance pit followed by a series of straddle pits. The first room beyond is the Meander Room, a central location with many major routes converging. To the east is the Elevator, a steep shaft that has no handholds; it is a pure ceiling-floor friction decent. At the bottom is the Elevator stream which is a common passage to almost the whole cave. Just beyond the top of the Elevator is the Butt Ledge, so named for a common way to cross it. It is a sheer 30 foot pit below. Halfway across are two bolts that were used long ago for belays. The first one dates before 1960, the other dates around 1970. A regular belay clipped in to these might hold; use caution. Beyond this area is Double Wells, twin 90 foot pits with sheer walls. A popular trip is to rappel, then climb back up from the bottom through a breakdown route. Beyond here are three more rappel areas that are more trouble than a sport trip warrants. The first is an unnamed 81 foot pit that ends in a sump. A minimum of five rope pads are needed here. This is currently the deepest spot in the cave at 240 feet. The second is Seven Second Pit, named apparently by dropping a rock that rolled from ledge to ledge before

## *Link's Cave and Missing Link Cave*

Giles County, Virginia

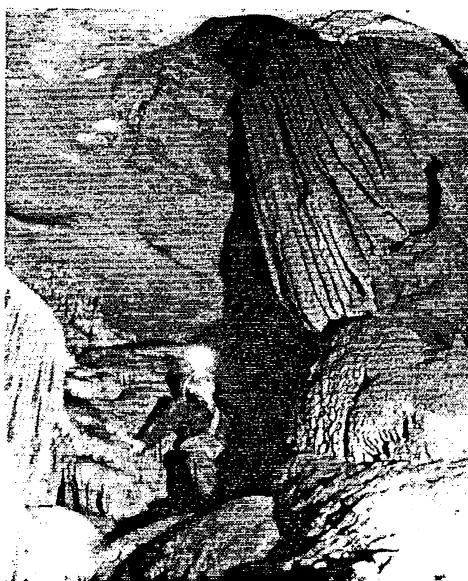
Summation of the first 10 terms = 155.



splashing into the sump. The third is an equally muddy area that also ends in a sump.

Westward and down from the Meander Room is the start of the Climbing Section, a popular place for prospective VPI grotto members to get their climbing skills signed off. Many dicey climbs dot this area. Several climbs down is the Rabbit Hole that leads to a funnel area. Use your air brakes here. At the bottom is Chum Chute (don't ask) and the Elevator stream. Going west and up leads to Slot 43, a bypassable human play-dough machine.

North from the Meander Room leads to the Park Bench which overlooks a deep chasm area that marks the beginning of Sizer's Park. Much dowclimbing will get you to the pool area. If you stand on the ledge looking down at the pool, turn around and look at the high water mark scribed on the



Jeff Jablonski investigates Links' Wedding Room. Photo by Craig Ferguson.

rock. When it rains, this innocent looking area turns into a raging flood zone fed by the waterfall 60 feet over your head. DO NOT pass through here if rain is expected. A difficult upclimb will get you to the Layback Climb which is much

harder to get back down from once up. Above this are passages in both directions that are fun to play in. One of them leads to a spot that is directly over the pool area, 60 feet below. Another leads to a too-tight lead with air flow that may be a surface connection. Connecting the Elevator stream and Sizer's Park is a sump called Atlantis. Shortly after the survey was started a long drought made the connection possible. Rain a few weeks later closed it again, probably for another eleven plus months.

If you want to armchair your way through this cave in 3D, download MURDER2.ZIP from many sites on the Internet. DOOM version 1.2 is required!

#### **NEW RIVER CAVE**

**by Tim Kilby**

Requirements: horizontal, beginner

New River Cave has been a favorite of recreational cavers for over 50 years. The tarnished image of a sacrificial cave has given way in recent years to one of a gem in the rough. Beauty and mystery, and a great day's outing, are still available for those willing to challenge the darkness. Obtain written permission from the owner before entering New River Cave.

Last surveyed in 1976, the 5.3 miles of passages makes New River Cave the longest known cave in Giles County and the immediate area. While the vertical extent is 359 feet, virtually all areas of the cave are accessible to the horizontal caver. A variety of trips may be tailored to the experience level and interests of the cavers. First-time cavers and youngsters will enjoy the front rooms with their many boulders and alcoves. The most popular trip is a four hour trip to the 40 foot waterfall, suitable for novice

cavers with basic chimneying experience. Another nice four hour trip is to the Attic Room and Forest Room, also suitable for cavers with similar experience. These areas, and the downstream section, comprise two-thirds of the surveyed passage. The other one-third of the cave lies beyond Tuxedo Junction, a tight restriction. A trip to the back of New River Cave takes experienced cavers around 18 hours. As the map in the map packet [from the '95 Convention] illustrates, the cave is very linear, running approximately N70°E, but there are maze-like sections to test your navigation skills.

All caving begins at the single entrance, 200 vertical feet above the river. For most cavers, getting to the entrance is the most strenuous part of the trip. Easy walking, and some minor climbing and crawling, takes one on a well-worn trail through the first large room to the Church Room, the Winter Forest Room off to the north, and then the Big Room. You'll notice considerable damage to formations, most likely not done by careless cavers, although there have been many, but by speleothem miners of the early part of the century. In the Big Room you will see a signature characteristic of this cave formed along the Saltville Fault: the dolomite ceiling slopes 53° to the south. You wouldn't know it at this point, but a stream runs under you to the right, and, at the end of the room, an upper level is high to the left. The trail tends downward slightly.

The Attic Room and Forest Room are accessed through an oft missed passage above the Lunch Room. The Attic Room is the largest room in the cave, several hundred feet long, with high sloping ceiling and steeply sloping floor. You'll notice the massive breakdown blocks first, but look for helectites, anthodites, and a vari-

ety of dripstone formations. To reach the upper loft, first traverse the boulders to the east, then cut back west, up to a high room. Look for the pool drilled into the center breakdown. At the eastern end of the Attic Room is a beautiful flowstone wall. The Forest Room, given its name because of its forest of stalactites and stalagmites, is protected by a twisted, concealed trip route. Without a map, or a knowledgeable guide, you can waste hours searching for this elusive room. Be careful to avoid damaging pretties along the way, and take a handline for one modest traverse. These upper-level rooms are ideal for a morning or afternoon trip.

Water trickles from the Attic Room down under the breakdown to the Lunch Room, then through crevasses to the stream. A trip to the waterfall continues from the Lunch Room upward, to start, down the China Slide passage to the stream, then up and down, up and down, generally following the stream. Sometimes you will crawl, sometimes you'll be in water — normally the water is only boot deep. Inexperienced cavers invariably can't find their way through this section. Approaching the waterfall, you'll take a siphon bypass up through the Airblower venturi, and chimney down a ten foot hole once again to the stream. A hand line or belay is advisable for the beginner. The waterfall is a couple hundred feet beyond. The 40 foot free drop which intersects the main stream is impressive, even though the volume is not. This water comes from the perched water table above the cave. Expert rock climbers can continue up above the first falls to a second eight foot waterfall, and another nine foot fall above that.

There are two ways on from the base of the waterfalls: a belly crawl up stream in low-water conditions, or a 12 foot free climb up the right side of the waterfall to a passage which loops overhead, then continues through a fissure to the Boulder Room. A long hand line is advisable for the climb. In

New River Cave, some 2,200 feet beyond.

Take time to look into the nooks and side passages; that is where you will find much beauty. There are plenty of small wonders throughout the cave, but often they're out of view from tourist



James Cave is one of the more decorated caves in the area. Note the carbide lamp for scale.  
Photo by Matthew Burnett.

the Boulder Room you will find a level passage in the direction of the stream but higher. It leads to the Mud Room and back down a slippery slope to a deep pool in the stream. Back in the Boulder Room, to the left of the Mud Room passage, you will find a high, narrow passage to Tuxedo Junction. Tuxedo Junction is a point where the walls come together to filter out large-frame cavers and claustrophobes. Very slim cavers go up and over while those rubber-jointed cavers may attempt the floor-level squeeze. Remember, though, you have to come out the same way. Afterwards, expect more narrow passages which require strenuous crawling, the reward being the Gypsum Room and much more maze-like and narrow passage. This is the only way to the back of

trails. Bat lovers will find big and little browns and pipistrelles in this cave. Be at the entrance at dusk to see a modest bat flight. Also look for crickets, woodrats, and salamanders near the entrance, and isopods and arthropods in the stream. There is always something of interest to be found in New River Cave.

[Note: the Gangsta-mappers, members of PSC Grotto, have recently completed a resurvey of New River Cave. The map is not yet complete.]

#### **PIG HOLE CAVE**

**by James Washington & Susan Vermeulen**

Requirements: vertical, advanced  
Until recently, Pig Hole Cave was closed to all cave exploration due to past accidents. The owner has recently agreed to reopen the cave

to very competent vertical cavers led by members of the local grottos, but the relationship with the owner is still considered sensitive. Any complications or disregard for the landowner's wishes may close this cave again indefinitely. Please take care. No novices.

A vertical entrance pit and a caver-made blasted entrance through a concrete culvert service the cave. Most trips enter the cave via the 120 foot pit with a 180 foot rope. Double rigging is available. Photo opportunities at the bottom abound on sunny days.

From the bottom of the entrance pit go downhill and take the crawl-way on the short ledge on the right. Up muddy breakdown towards the Tool Room leads eventually to the Empire Ledge, a 180 foot rappel requiring a 250 foot rope. Be cautious around sudden

though the lip for returning up the rope is undercut, nontrivial, and usually bypassed by using another route up that requires pre-rigging a 20 foot cable ladder. Past the mud bridge there is an upclimb which leads to a junction of booming passage to the blasted exit or a crawl to the Queen's Bath.

For those wanting to exit through the blasted exit, be sure that the cover of the culvert is clear of rocks and debris. The culvert is approximately 5 feet long, not very wide, and not easy to find from the inside. Cavers with little upper body strength and long legs may need assistance chimneying out. Return to the entrance pit up the hill along the treeline.

A through trip consisting of rappelling the vertical entrance, visiting the Queen's Bath, then exiting through the culvert should take 2-



Andy Yeagle takes in some of the pretties in Spruce Run Cave. Photo by Katherine Shelor.

drop-offs on the way. In the other direction, Wildcat Run descends steeply, then cuts sharply right then left to a downclimb leading to the mud bridge across Hess' Hollow. Extreme caution should be taken here due to slippery surfaces and a drop-off of approximately 90 feet. A handline or belay should be used. One may rig a 150 foot rope to a jug handle on the wall to drop into Hess' Hollow,

3 hours of leisurely caving. An ambitious vertical trip may take up to seven hours.

#### **PRICES STRIKE CAVE**

by Mike Futrell

Requirements: horizontal, intermediate

Prices Strike Cave consists of stream crawls and breakdown scrambles. This is a contact resurgence cave formed along the

strike. The entrance is in a three-sided sinkhole about 500 feet beyond (northeast) of Starnes Caverns and a few yards before a boundary fence line. Just inside, past large hairy spiders, is a downward crawl to the right, followed by a wiggly fissure which opens into a small room. The cave can generally be followed by crawling in the small stream or scrambling through the breakdown over the stream. There are several small spots and a fair bit of loose breakdown. Towards the end of the cave an infeeder joins from the left. This is part of the same stream which disappears in the sinkhole. It can be followed up a low, wet bedding plane named the Reminder Crawl by Ko Takamizawa who, while lying in the stream feeling like a sponge said, "This reminds me of real caving." Although the crawl ends under the entrance there is no connection to the entrance passage. The cave ends in a small sump, but the water reappears several hundred feet later in Starnes Caverns. Air flows through breakdown and small fissures at several points along the south wall, likely in route to Starnes.

#### **SMOKEHOLE CAVE**

by James Washington & Susan Vermeulen

Requirements: horizontal, beginner

Smokehole is a major resurgence for Clover Hollow Cave. The cave has approximately 2 miles of passage, some of which is accessible only during dry weather. Like most caves with this name, it generates a large plume of water vapor from the upper entrance in the winter.

A "dry" trip to Smokehole begins at the upper entrance down varying slopes and downclimbs. This entrance may be difficult to find. Be nice to any fences. A handline at the very top may be beneficial

for some, since this area of the cave is often slimy. Upon encountering the stream, the main part of the cave lies upstream. "Up and over, then down through the slot" describes the method for negotiating the breakdown pile you will encounter just upstream. The water will vary from ankle to waist deep. At a major junction, the passage to the left leads to the Big Room which offers nice rimstone pools, soda straws, bacon, and other formations. Glow-in-the-dark frisbee has been played here. Exiting back through the upper entrance makes a trip relatively "dry."

A quick "just for cooling off" through trip follows the stream downstream at the bottom of the entrance slope. Depending on stream levels, some swimming may be necessary in the 50+ °F water. Two near-sumps with 0 to 6 inches of airspace must be negotiated to exit at the spring by the road. If the first near-sump, just as you get in the water, scares you, do not attempt this.

Ideally, choose a blistering hot day to do the wet trip. A good, hot bath may be required afterwards on less than warm days. Expect to spend 1 to 4 hours in the cave.

#### **SPRUCE RUN CAVE**

**by Steve LePera**

Requirements: horizontal, beginner

Spruce Run is a small but well decorated cave. At the entrance, the passage is mostly muddy crawling. It is not particularly tight but can be awkward at times, especially if you're carrying a bunch of photographic equipment (as many choose to do).

This crawl turns into a stream passage, but you need not get more than your boots wet here. As this ends, the passage opens up into a large room. This is where most of the pretties can be found, and photo-

tos from this room have found their way onto a popular karst poster.

A non-photo trip takes less than 3 hours, even with a larger group. A photo trip? Choose your caving partners well!

[Note: this cave description was not included in the '95 Convention guidebook.]

#### **STARNES CAVERNS**

**by Lawrence Britt and Steve LePera**

Requirements: horizontal (vertical optional), intermediate

Starnes Caverns is located in Giles county, just outside of Pearisburg. The continuing survey has brought the total length of the cave up to 4.34 miles.

Starnes challenges beginners and experienced cavers with a slippery 15 foot entrance climb and another 20 foot fissure climb just 30 feet beyond the light.

Once past these, visitors are treated to 1000 foot long 60x40 trunk, multiple streams, and a waterfall dropping 35 feet from the ceiling. This upper level is appropriate for beginners, but care must be taken near the drops into the lower levels. Also, due to the amount of breakdown, sturdy ankle boots are a must.

Experienced vertical cavers can rappel into the extensive lower sections. The connection to "New Starnes" through the Humble Pie crawl is in this area as well as some other grim sounding passage such as the Suction Sewer, Birth Canal, and Belly Flop. Be prepared to get wet and muddy!

[See the article on the history of Starnes Caverns on page 15.]

#### **STAY HIGH CAVE**

**by Stephen Wells**

Requirements: vertical, advanced

This mile plus cave was discovered in 1988 by Jim Washington

and Dave Colatosti while ridge driving Clover Hollow. The tourist loop can be completed in three to four hours and will require a 150 foot rope. Plan to get wet, and be extremely cautious of loose rocks and slippery climbs.

The entrance to this cave is a 4 foot high horizontal crevice that in the past has trapped cavers with large chests. This is the tightest spot that needs to be traversed in the cave. Upon entering the cave (left arm down going in, and right arm down on the return; stay high) follow the obvious passage to the stream. Go downstream to the first of a series of three short drops. Rig the 150 foot (sparingly!) to the big rock approximately 15 feet before lip. DON'T throw the entire 150 over the edge or you will rappel ten feet into one hell of a bumble cluster of rope on the floor. The bulk of the coil should be taken down the drop by the first rappeller. The second apparent drop (where the water runs) should be skipped over. Lower the rope down the next drop, a 20 foot wall, and continue to the third. At the top of the third drop the rope should be rigged to the bolt on the right wall and with a good midline knot (butterfly) and a biner. The last person should unhook the belay since you will not be coming back this way.

From the bottom of the rope continue down the main passage until you reach a low circular room (the flat room). Straight ahead is a squeeze that goes nowhere. To the right is the Walnut Room, and to the left is a hole in the floor which passes under the Ko Crawl. Enter the hole and continue on.

At the end of the crawl you will follow the main passage bearing right, and this will bring you to the stream at the Big Draperies. Once your feet are wet turn around and take the first crawlway on the left as you head back towards the Ko

Crawl. Soon you will find yourself standing in the stream once more. This time take a left and go up stream. You will have to climb up one 10 foot waterfall (a belay will be desired by some). The 20 foot waterfall above is named Dragon Falls. Here you will find a permanently rigged rope, and unless you want to get wet, ignore it. Go left and up just before Dragon Falls. You will cross over the top of a step-across, then go through about 50 feet of crawl, miraculously returning to the bottom of the first drop. Follow your rope out.

#### TAWNEYS CAVE

by James Washington & Susan Vermeulen

Requirements: horizontal, beginner

One might consider this a multicultural cave due in part to its high traffic and notoriety. On any given day, cavers in Tawneys may be scouts, fraternity brothers, locals, high school science classes, or local grotto members. Often, 50 or more people can be found in this cave during the summer months. Its friendliness, prettiness, historical value, and ease of access have made this cave one of the best known caves in the east. It has approximately one mile of passage and three (some count four) entrances, so no route marking is necessary; no matter which way you go, you will find either a short, dead-end passage or an entrance.

The usual expedition to Tawneys Cave is basically an easy horizontal cave trip. It makes a good introduction to caving techniques and safety measures; vertical exposure up to 30 feet is possible. Most people visit the Moon Room, the Salt-petre Room and the sinkhole. Expect to get your boots wet. On a clear night when the full moon is high, the view from inside the sinkhole is spectacular, but don't expect to exit this way without special permission from the land-

owner who is intolerant of trespassing. Optional side trips negotiating crawls and climbs can make the cave as challenging as you want. A tight spot and a stream crawl must be negotiated to visit the Emerald Room, an area with many small and beautiful formations. Typical trip time is 3-4 hours.

#### WILBURN VALLEY CAVE

by Mike Futrell

Requirements: vertical, advanced

Wilburn Valley Cave is a muddy, joint controlled cave containing a nice 110 foot pit. The cave was found in 1972 by Tom Calhoun and members of the VPI Grotto. Several mapping attempts were made before the effort was completed in 1986. The cave generally receives little visitation. It is located on the contact in the edge of the woods above Hodge's Cave. It can be characterized as a two level series of strike and dip fissures formed in a dendritic pattern.

Much of the cave is damp and muddy, particularly toward the ends of the smaller in-feeders.

The entrance is a fissure in a small sink on the west side of a draw. Just inside is a small junc-

tion room and the home of numerous cave crickets. To the right the cave continues past wet, drippy

breakdown to a couple of short downclimbs. A small formation area can be seen in the second left intersection. To the right a sloping fissure leads to the pit. The passage splits near the pit with the small stream flowing out a window. Up above, rigging can be made around a large breakdown block about 15 feet away from the lip. The lip is slightly undercut and may contain loose rock, bring a pad. The rope will hang a couple feet away from the wall making a nice rappel.

At the bottom of the pit a sinuous canyon leads downstream to a three-way junction. Back to the right continuing above the canyon are the older levels and the largest passages in the cave which double back and window onto the pit. Downstream the passage continues a short way to a breakdown end and the grim low point of the

cave. Upstream, to the left of the junction, a short climb leads to a series of joint controlled fissures. Some are rather muddy as they progressively fork and become smaller. The farthest point in the cave is the Troll Passage. This area can be reached by chimneying through Cess Poole Canyon, so named in honor of a young gentleman who quit caving and joined a fraternity after a mere few minutes of slime. One can be comforted in

knowing that at this point the entrance is just a couple dozen feet away — through solid rock.



Carl Bern makes his way through the Labia Pinch in Wilburn Valley Cave. Photo by Stephen Wells.

## **YER CAVE**

**by Mike Futrell**

Requirements: vertical, advanced

Yer Cave offers pits of 12 feet, 127 feet, 52 feet, 10 feet, and 35 feet to access the lower levels. A separate 50 foot pit may be substituted in place of the 127 foot and 52 foot combination pits. The entrance to the cave is in a large sinkhole used as a junk pit. The entrance is a narrow 12 foot pit (35 foot rope) under a boulder at the far end of the sinkhole. The obvious passage just inside ends in a pinch after about 450 feet. This portion of the cave was previously explored, though not reported, by Bob Alderson and others in the 1970's. The main cave was found by Mike Futrell and Doug Bruce on June 20, 1987 by digging through the breakdown near the bottom of the entrance drop. A breakdown crawl and short downclimb opens into a small room. From here a hole in the floor leads to the Vegetable Crawl (survey your vegetables before your dessert) and the upper levels. Or by following the obvious crawl for 30 feet the top of the Pleasure Greed Pits can be reached. Suitable natural rigging can be found through the crawlway and an adjacent small hole which open to the top of the pit. A 150 foot rope should be sufficient for this 127 foot pit. Loose rock still remains in the chocked breakdown void which serves as the top of the pit. Care should be taken. Pad, then rappel through the obvious hole in the breakdown to a large balcony below. A large obvious chock rock provides rigging for the next pitch. An additional 100 feet of rope is sufficient. Pad the abrupt lip well before descending 52 feet to the middle level.

### **Upper Level**

The Vegetable Crawl is a narrow fissure followed by a contorting "S" bend. A crawl is joined which

leads down to a fissure intersection. (This junction may not be obvious on the way out.) A popcorn fissure leads to a short downclimb and a larger intersection. To the left is a canyon leading to Jack's Drop (50 feet) which also accesses the mid-levels. This drop can be rigged naturally with a boulder way back the passage and then over a bad lip with 150 feet of rope, or with two Petzl 8 mil hangers (which may or may not be there) as is more often done. Straight ahead is the upper level of the cave. Continuing in this upper level, a couple infeeders immediately join from the left. Also on the west is the larger Flaming Glove Passage, named after the misfortunes of an inattentive novice. This is the western most point in the cave. Further along, the main passage joins the Rain Room and associated crawls.

### **Mid Level**

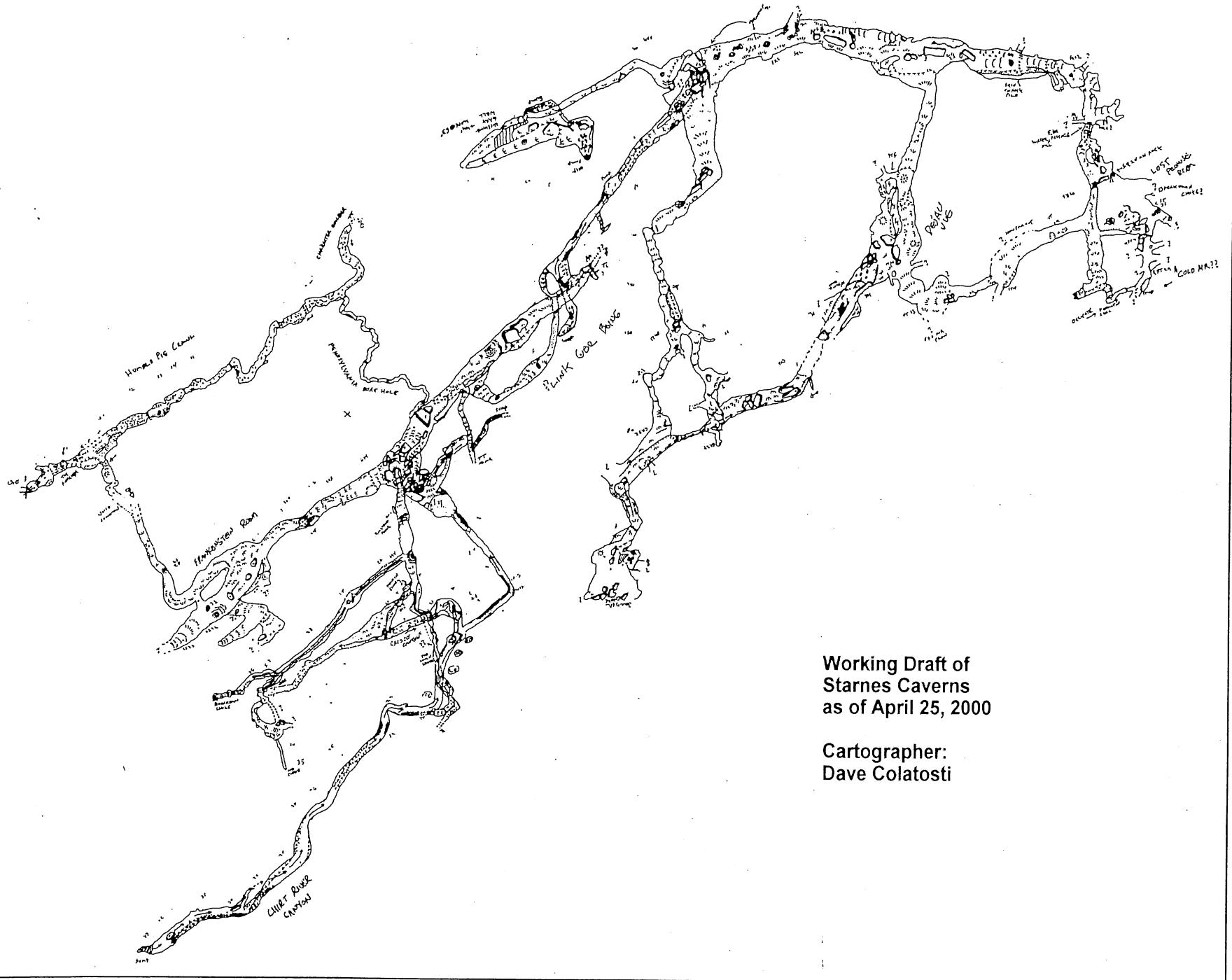
Whether reached by Jack's Drop on the west end, or the Pleasure Greed Pits in the middle, the mid-level is first seen as a 20 to 40 foot wide canyon 200 feet long. Of the big obvious continuations on the north side of the canyon, one immediately slopes down to a swim and several hundred feet of additional passage. The way on is in the opposite direction along a mud bank to a 10 foot nuisance drop (awkward natural or 8 mil Petzl hanger). This is immediately followed by a nasty 35 foot muddy slope drop to the stream passage. A mud covered rock in the floor is used for rigging.

### **Lower Level**

The stream can be followed for a couple hundred feet to a sump. A walking size overflow leads to the Pudding Room (the dessert) on the far side of which is the sump and lowest point in the cave at -271 feet. A large high-lead on the east side of the Pudding Room was

climbed by Mike Futrell, Jack Kehoe, and Paul Kirchman in early 1989. This series of short climbs, (34 feet, 13 feet, 11 feet, 13 feet), was dubbed The Golden Showers. Over a mile of predominantly muddy fissure passage has been mapped beyond with names like "Dog Food," "Arduous Canyon," and the "Chestnut Ridge Fun Spot" where Doug Bruce spent far more time than he would have liked.

There are many additional bits and pieces not described here, but one may anticipate them all to be either small, muddy, both, or worse, and end before getting any better.



# Working Draft of Starnes Caverns as of April 25, 2000

**Cartographer:  
Dave Colatosti**

## **History of Starnes Caverns**

**by Chris Hibshman**

### **BACKGROUND**

Starnes Caverns (historically correct name) is a well-known cave located three miles southwest of Pearisburg in Wilburn Valley. Starnes is one of those caves whose location has always been known; no one really knows who discovered it. In fact, the location is found on many topographic maps. There are also writings engraved in the cave walls dating back to the mid-1800's.

### **LANDOWNERS AND LANDOWNER RELATIONS**

There is a report from 1946 in the club files that Mr. Tom F. Starnes owned the property around the cave. The current landowners are Mr. and Mrs. Barry Price and they have been the landowners since before the 1980s. They raise cattle on the farm where the cave is located. Two smaller caves are also located on the property, Yer Cave and Price's Strike. The Prices are excellent landowners who have been very cooperative with cavers who frequent the caves. In fact, the Prices have received recognition from the state for their efforts to maintain clean water farming practices, which goes a long way in maintaining good water quality in the caverns below.

In 1993, Lawrence Britt and the VPI Cave Club donated and established a register on site. This register, which is located on a mailbox with a bat sticker for decoration, provides several features:

- 1) A common place for cavers to park their vehicles and change clothes out of sight of the house. It just happens to be located next to Yer Cave.
- 2) A record of who visited the cave. (Note: this register is not a signout process.)
- 3) Prevents disturbing the Prices

to ask permission to visit the caves – they prefer that you sign the log book and proceed with caving. They also ask that you leave the gates as you find them and not to block any gates with vehicles.

### **STARNES CAVERNS**

The entrance to Starnes is a steep downclimb about 15 feet deep. This can easily be free climbed, but it is also an excellent place to practice a body (or arm) rappel. I once rigged it for an arm rappel when four inches of snow and ice covered the rocky entrance, making handholds and footholds very slick. The rope provided a means of descending and ascending safely, especially for the trainees on the trip.

About 50 feet from the entrance is a 10 foot nuisance drop that can be quite challenging, especially to inexperienced cavers. A short distance after this drop, the cave opens into very large trunk passage, measuring over thirty feet wide and 50 feet in height.

This passage goes straight for about 1000 feet, but also branches off to the left. Going straight consists of climbing and walking over many breakdown boulders. At the end of this trunk passage are several streams. One stream flows from a hole 35 feet off the floor, creating a pretty waterfall and series of pools. This stream then falls through a crack in the floor to form a 60 foot waterfall. There is also an adjacent room with some beautiful flowstone and rimstone pools. Other features include the Funnel Room and the Temple of the Sun.

The branch heading off to the left leads to the Cactus Room. From the Cactus Room, one can downclimb through some breakdown

and will shortly come to 35 foot drop, which can be descended with a cable ladder or rope. From the bottom of this drop, passage connects back to the 60 foot waterfall through some marvelously grim places with names like Sty-mies Delight, Belly Flop, Womb Room, Birth Canal, Suction Sewer and P.O.S Pit. Most of these features include gobs of the wet, sticky mud that will stain cave clothes for a lifetime.

Also located at the bottom of the 35 foot drop is a crawling passage. This is the passage that leads to the section of the cave known as "New Starnes" (a.k.a. Lost Starnes)! This crawling passage has been named the Humble Pie Crawl and goes through several pinches,

### **KIRK AND DAVE POPPED OUT INTO SOME MASSIVE TRUNK PASSAGE.**

such as the Hydraulic Press and Rib Tickler. After approximately 800 feet of crawling, the character of the passage changes into a narrow channel with a 3 to 4 foot ceiling known as the Pennsylvania Borehole.

The Pennsylvania Borehole continues for about two hundred feet and then opens up into some more fantastic trunk passage. This passage extends to darkness to both the right and left. One of the first features one recognizes in New Starnes is Andrew's Dice and Clay, which is two very large cubic boulders magically suspended between the walls of the cave. When I first noticed the two VW Bug-sized boulders I feared that my heavy breathing (achieved by crawling for ninety minutes)

would cause them to come crashing down.

From here, the cave continues for another two miles of passage. A room near the back of the cave called Lost Promise holds some potential to being very close to the surface. Here the cave ends in a boulder choke, but much surface debris can be found, such as walnuts, rotting wood, and tree roots. Other features include Chert River Canyon, Kirk's Chasm, and the Plink Ger Boing drop.

#### SURVEY HISTORY

There have been three major efforts to survey Starnes, all by the VPI Cave Club. The first occurred in 1948 and was lead by Earl Thierry and Joe Lawrence. This survey resulted in 3300 feet of passage. A resurvey was initiated by Lawrence Britt in 1981 and resulted in 2.19 miles of passage. Ten years later, in June of 1991, Dave Colatosti and Kirk Digby discovered "New Starnes," which added another 2.15 miles. Currently, the cave has been surveyed to a length of 4.34 miles and has only four leads to be explored.

According to a newspaper article in VPI Cave Club files, the initial survey of Starnes Caverns started in 1948 and consisted of at least four trips led by Early Thierry and Joe Lawrence. They mostly explored the upper trunk passage and the waterfall drop. They also did some dye tracing to gain an understanding of the hydrology of the cave. At first count there are six streams; two significant flows with four smaller tributaries. One stream is called the Waterfall Stream, which comes out of a hole 35 feet above the floor. The other is known as the Vanishing Stream because it flows into a passage that is too tight. Their conclusion was that the Waterfall and Vanishing Streams originated from the same surface stream, but split into two separate streams in the cave.

In 1981, Lawrence Britt began the task of doing a resurvey of Starnes Cavern. In the Fall 1982 edition of *The Tech Trogolyte*, Lawrence reports in "Starnes Goes" that 1.43 miles of passage has been surveyed, including the naming of the Birth Canal, Womb Room, and Belly Flop. He also mentions scaling pole climbs leading to virgin passage. In fact, a total of eleven scaling pole climbs were accomplished. Four of the pole climbs were located at the 35 foot waterfall. One was done in a high lead in the main trunk passage. Four more were done where the main trunk passage forks off to the left and heads down to the Cactus Room. Another one was done near the Cactus Room, and another near the P.O.S. Pit. This survey also resulted in the connection between the 60 foot waterfall and bottom of the 35 foot cable ladder drop. Eight streams are noted on this map.

Another big discovery came in June of 1991 when Kirk Digby and Dave Colatosti wanted to do a short caving trip after work. They headed off to Starnes to search for a dig that was a potential lead. They found the lead at the bottom of the 35 foot cable ladder drop, and it was blowing a tremendous amount of air. After digging for some time, they managed to squeeze through into another crawling passage. Just around the corner, they came to another pinch that needed digging. After squeezing through this pinch, which would later be named the Hydraulic Press, the crawling continued to another pinch. They both managed to squeeze through this pinch, too, but not without incident. Kirk suffered a fractured rib as he popped through this tight passage resulting in its name, Rib Tickler. After another couple hundred feet of crawling, Kirk and Dave popped out into some massive trunk passage. This is the dis-

covery of New Starnes!

Kirk and Dave have spent nine years surveying New Starnes, which has doubled the size of the cave. They performed three bolt climbs to explore the high leads and found five more streams. There is no known connection between "Old Starnes" and "New Starnes" other than the Humble Pie Crawl.

#### BIOLOGY

I have found several crawfish and salamanders in the streams and pools near the 60 foot waterfall. The largest crawfish that I have found is about two and half inches long. I have yet to find a white or blind crawfish, but some of the crawfish are lacking their full pigment. There are also reports in the club files that both a bullfrog and a common toad were found in the streams, presumably washed in from the surface streams. An abundance of bugs including spiders and cave crickets can be found, especially near the entrance.

During the winter, many bats can be found hibernating in the cave. The most common are the Little Brown Bat, Eastern Pipistrelle, and an occasional Big Brown Bat. Interestingly, bats have been seen in New Starnes, leading to speculation that there may be another entrance. No entrance has been found, but Lost Promise has been witnessed to blow some very cold air during the winter.

Many thanks to: Lawrence Britt for access to the club files and taking the time to talk to me about his explorations. Dave Colatosti and Kirk Digby for taking the time talk to me about their explorations and taking me "Starnesing" and teaching me how to survey.

## Why To Cave

by Ray Sira

### THE DIG

Back in the spring of 1999, fellow caver and coworker Phil Benchoff was walking down the hall at work when he heard the word "sinkhole" mentioned by another of our coworkers, John Lawson, during a conversation he was having with someone. Like all good cavers Phil of course had to ask, "Did somebody say sinkhole?" It seems that John's parents live in Giles County and have a neighbor with a number of sinkholes on their property. I believe he was telling about how a number of years ago they had diverted a stream into one of these sinkholes. The stream normally sinks but would occasionally wash out their gravel driveway during floods. This all sounded very interesting to Phil and he of course relayed the story to me.

We made a promise to check this out soon but with surveying in DMC, surveying in Newberrys, surveying in Starnes and various other caving activities, we didn't get around to it until August. I have been caving long enough to know better than to expect much from a report like this. Cavers have been wandering around Giles County for over fifty years looking for caves and I knew of some other

**THE MAN IS  
A DIGGING  
MACHINE.**  
  
cavers who had been working near this area recently. I checked the book of GCCS (Giles County Cave Survey) and the topo maps but they showed nothing in this area. So with nothing else happening on this particular Sunday, Phil and I met up with John and went to check things out.

We parked the cars and walked a

couple of hundred feet up an old logging road to where the sinkhole was. I don't remember what we said but we definitely had big smiles on our faces. The sinkhole is right at the contact of the sand-

October that Phil, Kirk Digby and myself were back and ready to dig. We dug for a while and removed a fair amount of dirt and rocks only to be stopped by a rock too large for us to move. We were going to



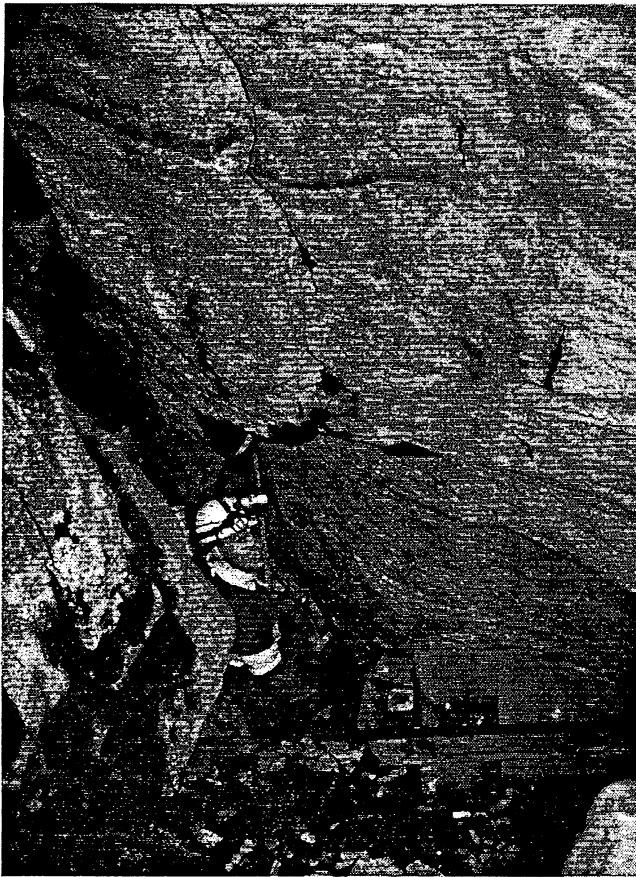
John Deighan lets Ray Sira do some work for a change.  
Photo by someone holding Ray Sira's camera.

stone and limestone where a majority of cave entrances seem to be found in this area. It's over 40 feet in diameter sloping from left to right as you look up the hill to a 30 foot cliff that runs perpendicular to the slope of the mountain. A fissure runs down the cliff face to a point where it was one to two feet wide and cut back into the cliff two to three feet. All of the dirt and rocks were being funneled down this fissure. We checked for airflow and found little if any. John told us that he remembered the sinkhole being shallower at one time many years ago. To top it all off, there was a large amount of trash scattered about. There had to be a cave down there!

It wasn't until the first weekend in

need more help and a better way of getting rocks and dirt out of the hole. Before calling it quits for the day we took some time to look around the area and were surprised to find a lot more sinkholes. The largest one I would estimate to be over 100 feet long by 50 feet wide. Most of these are filled with very large sandstone boulders blocking any attempt at digging.

The word had spread and two weekends later we were back with seven people including John Deighan. I don't think this dig would have been possible without John. The man is a digging machine. We had to beg him to let us have a turn in the hole. We rigged a hauling system this time so that we could pull stuff straight up out of the hole and then pull it over to the side and dump it. We didn't have access to chemical persua-



Dave Colatosti works his way gingerly into the cave.  
Photo by Ray Sira.

sion so we borrowed a Hilti drill that we used to place bolts into the larger rocks. We then attached a hanger and hauled away. This worked great and we were even able to retrieve some of our bolts afterwards to use again. But then we hit the sandstone boulders. A sandstone boulder can destroy a good drill bit in seconds. We made good progress anyway, but we still needed more help if we were going to move the bigger rocks.

Two weekends later we managed to talk a different group of people into this foolishness. By the end of the day we could see where the right wall was starting to cut back a little with some air pockets. This was a good sign that things might be opening up for us. John Deighan was in the hole and I was above him when his carbide lamp fell off his helmet and made the most wonderful sound as it went

"CLINK, Clink, clink" down a hole with a nice echo when it landed. There was definitely a room down there. And we were also getting more airflow. (By the way John's lamp is still buried down there somewhere.)

By the next weekend word had gotten around that we might actually be onto something. We ended up with about fifteen people showing up. A bucket brigade made quick work of getting the small stuff out and at one point we had ten people on a three to one hauling system to move a large boulder. At about 5:00 p.m. we had

an opening large enough for someone to stick his head into. Since it was my dig I decided to be the one to put my head between a large, possibly unstable, rock and a hard place. With someone holding my feet I stuck my head through and found myself looking into a fissure 8 feet deep and 3 feet wide at the bottom. I looked to the left and saw it got a lot bigger. I also noticed the air flow had picked up considerably. BOOTY! We spent the next half hour stabilizing the hole. This was a lot easier now that we could throw things down instead of hauling them out. At 5:30 p.m. on November 2nd I was the first person to enter our new as yet unnamed cave. We managed to keep our scooping to a minimum but the fissure opened up into a nice size room with at least two very promising looking leads. I estimate it took over 250

man-hours to open up this cave during four digging trips.

#### THE SURVEY

On November 13th Phil Benchoff, Dave Colatosti and myself were back for the first survey trip. Before starting we constructed a deflector shield out of some scrap wood and used some 4 x 4's to shore things up a bit. The entrance would need more work but we decided to see if the cave went anywhere first. We mapped down to the entrance room and then followed a large canyon passage with a small infeeder stream south for about 80 feet to a 15 foot upclimb. The small stream entered through a short wide slot at the top of this. We decided not to get wet just yet and headed back to check the lead heading west from the entrance room. This passage seems to be a continuation of the entrance fissure and starts heading steeply down hill. Two small intermediate level passages intersected the bottom of a dome we named the Rats Dome. When Phil first looked in here he found two glowing eyes staring back at him from the other side. We suspect the rat found his way in through another entrance too small for us. The dome is 40 feet tall with a twenty-foot drop-off to a lower level on one side. We backed up and found our way down a small hole through breakdown. At the bottom, a large breakdown slab shaped like the monolith from 2001 sits like a sliding board to the bottom of the room below the dome. All of the airflow was heading this way and there was a considerable amount of it. After only 20 feet, however, the passage narrows to about 3 inches wide, 15 feet high and much too long to consider blasting. This is the lowest point in the cave so far to 91 feet below the entrance. A small keyhole shaped opening at the top of this was saved for smaller cavers. With less

than 300 feet surveyed we called it a day. I believe it was sometime around here we decided we needed a name for our cave. Nothing really stood out about the cave but the big news around this time was the Y2K bug and the impending end of the world. I had also just found out I would have to work New Years Eve "just in case." Phil and I agreed that Why To Cave was just too good to pass up. When else would we have an opportunity like this? Sorry for all you cavers reading this 999 years from now, but Why Three Cave just sounds stupid.

One week later we were back. John Deighan, Kirk Digby and myself would climb the waterfall while Steve LePera, Steve Wells (on loan from Bill Balfour and the DMC Mega Dome Climb) and Eileen O'Malley would try to push the tight spot where the air was going. Above the waterfall we mapped two parallel passages each heading southwest for about 100 feet. The left-hand passage started out 8 feet high and 2 to 3 feet wide but soon turned into a crawl. It ends with an 8 inch high wet muddy crawl about 10 feet long with a 20 foot dome at the end. There are no possible leads at the end of this passage. The right hand passage starts out as a very narrow crevice about 10 feet long. A hole at the end of this drops down a few feet to the stream passage but it is too small to follow. Continuing straight, the passage widens a bit and a 20 foot dome with no leads is passed on the left. The passage then splits into upper and lower level crawls. Both passages reconnect after 50 feet and continue to a tight breakdown filled crawl. This lead still needs to be pushed. At this point a large dome is found to the left. We were able climb up this to a point 25 feet higher than the entrance. The top of the dome is perhaps another 40 feet higher. There were no ap-

parent leads off the top of this dome. A subsequent surface survey showed nothing on the surface at this point. However, continuing in the same direction for another 100 feet a sizable stream sinks in a large rubble-filled drainage divide. We have not yet encountered this water underground. The second survey team quickly determined the tight spot was a no go so they worked on a high lead that passed over top of the Rats Dome hoping to find a way over top and down the other side. This upper passage passes several small domes before ending in a small room. An upper lead continues a short distance but is blocked by surface cobbles. A hole leading down in this room was checked by Steve Wells who said "DON'T GO IN THERE. That is some of the scariest fucking shit I've ever seen." This is coming from a person who bottomed Cheve with a

trip we borrowed a scaling pole in order to reach a high lead heading north just off the entrance room. This passage continues heading up for about 30 feet to where it ends in a cobble fill. We then mapped an upper level of passages above the waterfall and heading back towards the entrance. Another 40 foot dome was found and a possible dig. While we were surveying we began to notice a considerable increase in the noise coming from the stream below us. Rain outside had dramatically increased the amount of water entering the cave. With the increased amount of water we were able to follow it down to below the Rats Dome to where it sank down through the gravel and breakdown on the floor.

Another trip a week later to push leads found the entrance had filled in after the heavy rains. A couple of large rocks will have to be moved before we can gain access



Kirk Digby and Ray Sira haul big rocks out to impress the watching chick.  
Photo by Steve LePera's mom.

broken foot and has done more scary things in caves than anyone I know. I think I'll take his word for it.

Our next and last survey trip didn't come until March. On this

again. I often wonder how soon after we got out of the cave that it collapsed. We still have at least one potential dig on the surface that may find us another cave. All of that water and air has to be going somewhere. Oh, by the way,

did I mention that another co-worker of mine has a 40 foot pit on his property just around the corner that needs to be dug into? Then there is another guy who says he knows of a hole near his house that opened up in the last few years. The easy-to-find caves may all be discovered but there are still a lot waiting to be found. You just have to work a little harder to find them.

#### **THE MAP**

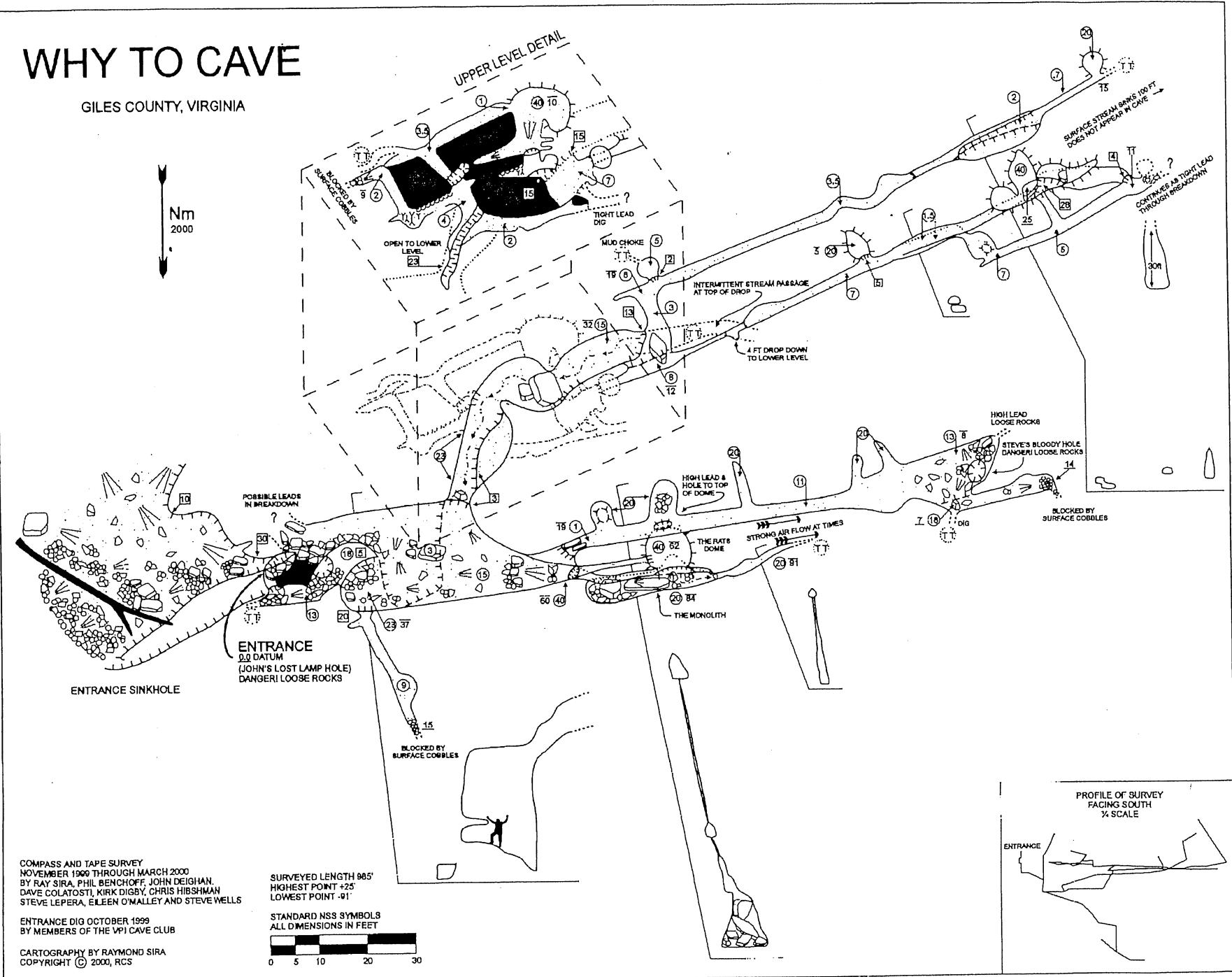
This has been my first attempt at drawing anything but a simple cave map and it has been quite a learning experience. I estimate

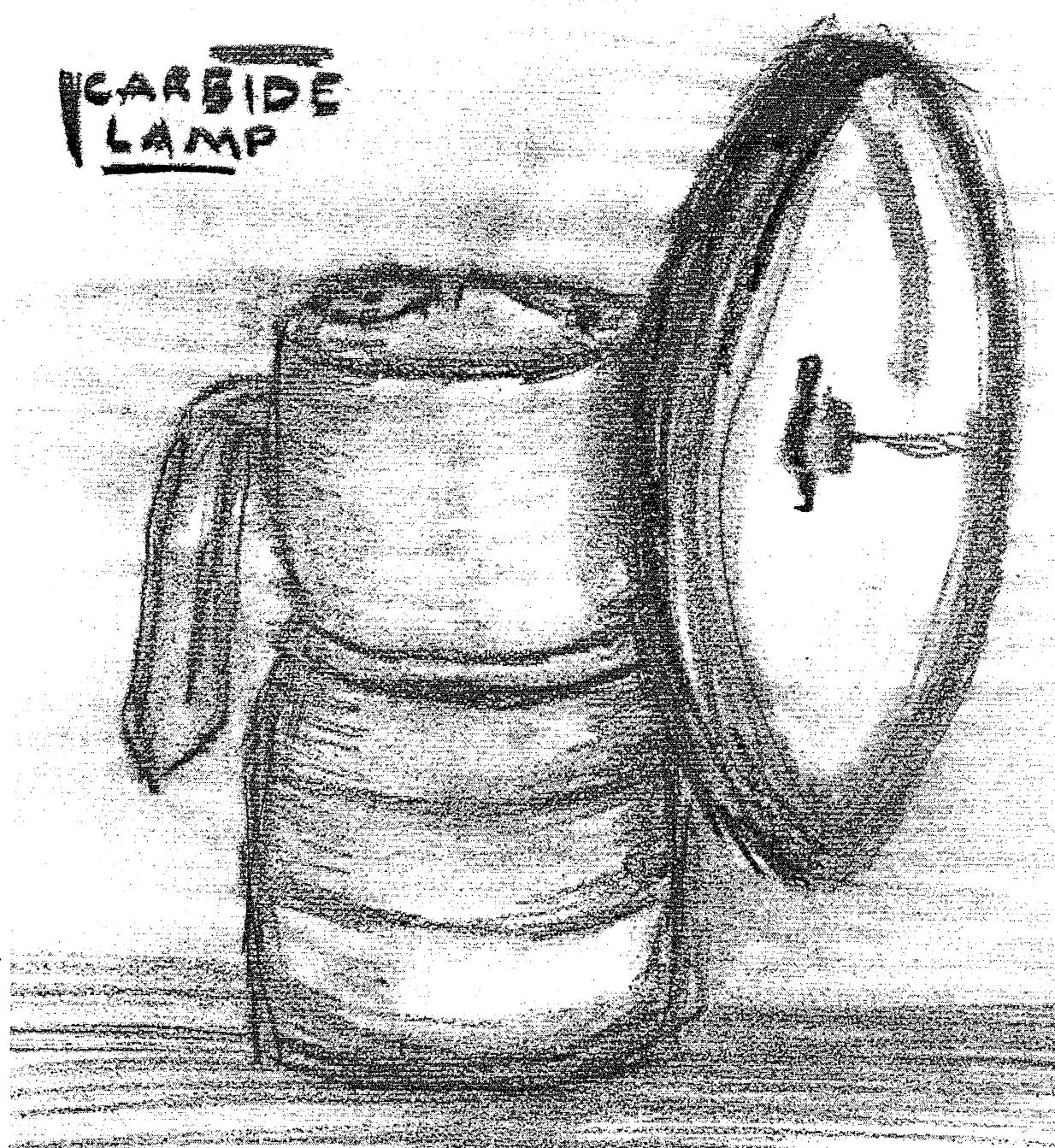
that I have spent over 50 hours drawing this map much of which was spent learning how to draw a map and learning how to use CorelDraw. It may have been easier to draw it by hand, but I now have the flexibility to easily add to it and change things later. I learned that you can't have enough detail and notes when sketching. You can always leave the details out later but trying to remember what something looked like months later can drive you crazy. And trying to interpret someone else's notes can be downright impossible when the

line plot and passage dimensions show one thing but the sketch seems to show something completely different. Drawing this map is going to make me a much better sketcher in the future. I would like to thank all of the cartographers whose maps I spent hours looking through while trying to figure out the best way to draw something. I now have a new-found respect for the people who draw the maps I see on display at Convention every year. They truly deserve of all the praise we can give them.

# WHY TO CAVE

GILES COUNTY, VIRGINIA





Artwork by Beth Geiger.

## Just Another Dog-gone Cavin' Story

by Wil Orndorff

Terri Brown was the first caver to hear rumors of cave passage on the Sink family farm in Giles County, a couple of miles southwest of Narrows on the west slope of Wolf Creek Mountain. She met the landowner, Cecil Sink, at a workshop on karst that she was running in the New River Valley. He mentioned that he had a couple of holes on his property, and that she was welcome to come check them out.

Terri contacted me, and in February, 1999, she, Steve Wells, and I visited the Sink farm. The farm sits high on the northwestern flank of Wolf Creek Mountain, with the upper contact of the cave-hosting limestone over 500 feet higher than the local base level (Wolf Creek). Knowing this in advance, we brought rope. Cecil and Ty, a Jack Russell Terrier, showed us three holes that day, two of which turned out to have cave passage. The one which didn't was a dead sink in dolomite, and was at the lowest elevation of the three.

The first hole Cecil took us to was high on the mountain, and we grew progressively more excited as we drew near the upper contact of the Middle Ordovician Limestones with the Mocassin Formation. The entrances to most of the large caves in Giles, Tazewell, and Bland counties lie at or near where streams sink along this contact. Rather than the gaping hole in a gully which we were hoping for, Cecil showed us what looked like a large groundhog hole about 100 feet east of a gully on the side slope. We, mostly Cecil, removed some small rocks and exposed a hole big enough to squeeze through. Wells crawled into the hole, and announced that it was indeed a cave. He emerged a few minutes later and informed us that

the entrance passage ended after about 50 feet, and that there was a downclimb to the left, but he would feel more comfortable with a belay. We decided to go check out another hole on the property, the return and investigate the down lead and see if we could find some water. Terri was interested in collecting aquatic troglobitic invertebrates (stygobites) as part of Virginia Natural Heritage Program's biological resource inventory.

The remaining hole was a couple of hundred feet lower on the mountain, offset slightly to the east. The entrance appeared as a tight fissure about 8 feet high in bedrock out-

crop at the head of a steep gully. We crossed several sinkholes on our way to this hole, and got the feeling that we could be over a decent sized cave. As we looked at this hole, Cecil described how after intense rainfall events water would spray out this entrance, which resulted in his family naming it "The Spout." I crawled in about 10 feet, observed that it became very (too?) tight, and backed out. We decided to check the downclimb Steve Wells had found in the first, upper, hole.

Terri, Steve, and I suited up and entered the first hole. Just to be safe, we grabbed a 175 foot piece of PMI and rigged it near the hole. Steve, being a virgin passage hog,

went down first. About halfway down we started to hear a few ooohs and aaahs, which aren't easy to extract from Steve. The climb down turned out to be a 38 foot, mostly free, rappel, landing on a small area from which you could proceed in four directions, all vertical. Terri and I joined Wells at the bottom of the drop, landing on the well-aged skeleton of some small, unfortunate herbivore. What the drop lacked in size it more than made up for in style. It opened into a very large chamber, trending away from the entrance, with walls virtually coated with pristine flowstone. An alcove off the bottom proved to be loaded



Cecil Sink emerges from Scooter's Boneyard, named for his dog.  
Photo by Ray Sira.

with formations, as well as being the only place to stay out of rock fall. The floor of the alcove was crunchy mud. Closer inspection revealed the presence of abundant snail shells and fragments in the mud, giving it the texture of a Nutty Buddy. Three of the leads off the bottom of the initial drop went down. The other was a 12 foot climb directly over the deepest of the down leads. We continued down the rope another 65 feet in two drops against muddy, debris-

laden drops. Terri checked a few small drip pools for stygobrytes. Finding none, we pushed on.

We proceeded up a gentle, 10 foot slope. Halfway up the slope, we passed the skeleton of a small carnivore, probably a cat. This cave appears to eat small furry things. On the other side lay a muddy, 50-60° mud slope. We had just enough rope left to rig this, so we rappelled through ankle deep, Nutty Buddy mud down to its base. The walls of the room at the base of the drop were completely coated with mud, and in the mud were centimeter spaced vertical

striations extending six to seven feet up the slope across the entire mud bank. The mystery of the striations was quickly solved, however, when Wells looked down and saw the skeleton of a small dog in a rock pile at very base of the drop. Apparently, this unfortunate canine had chased something into the cave, turned the corner into darkness, and fallen down the series of small pits leading to the room. Cecil Sink had mentioned earlier that he believed he had lost one of his dogs, Sniff, in the cave. I'm pretty sure we found him. In his honor, we name the room Sniff's Tomb.

After paying our respects to the skeletal remains, we searched a few small pools for stygobrytes, finding none. There was no obvious way to continue here, so we prepared to ascend the rope. As we were getting our systems on, we heard the distinctive bark of Ty from the top of the cave. Yelling at him only seemed to excite him, so Steve "I'm so fast on rope" Wells caved quickly out to prevent a repeat of Sniff's demise: Arriving in the nick of time, he exited the cave

with Ty and settled down for a long winter's nap, waiting for Terri and I to ascend.

Despite having to scrape baseball sized clumps of mud off the rope every two or three bites, Terri and I managed to frog our way to the surface, finding a well rested Steve Wells hanging out with Cecil and Ty at the entrance. Cecil was excited about the cave, but a little bit sad about Sniff. After showing us the dead sink in the dolomite, Cecil enthusiastically invited us back to survey the other two caves.

Needless to say, we took him up on his invitation.

Because of its annoyingly vertical nature (lots of little drops) it took us five trips to survey the upper cave, and one lead still remains. Ty generally hung out in or near the entrance while we surveyed. We only netted about 250 feet of passage, but the depth is a respectable 125 feet. Surveyors were Wil Orndorff, Steve Wells, Ray Sira, Matt Burnett, Steve LePera, Eileen O'Malley, Joe Thompson, Kirk Digby, and Zenah Orndorff.

With the vertical potential of over five hundred feet, it goes without saying that we were a little disappointed. However, nearly all of the cave is well-decorated, and appears to be mostly virgin. Steve Wells found a couple of footprints at the top of the 12 foot climb at the base of the entrance drop, which were consistent with a local story of a couple of fellas who, several decades ago, entered the cave, climbed down something they couldn't get back up, and had to be hauled out. The debris that Cecil removed from the entrance had then been placed.

We named the cave Scooter's Boneyard, in honor of one of Cecil's hunting dogs that had recently passed away, and the ample skeletal debris found throughout the cave.

A lead off of the formation alcove at the base of the entrance rappel proved to be a short flowstone drop leading to a small section of horizontal passage ending in a breakdown choke. The climb at the base of the entrance drop led to an upper formation room with a short passage heading up toward the surface opposite the entrance. From the formation room, we rigged a clean drop of about 70 feet to the bottom of the cave, circumventing the nasty, Nutty Buddy coated route we'd initially used. A passage went off to the east about a third of the way down this drop. We had to pendulum over to survey it. Our efforts were rewarded in the usual fashion (it died around the corner).

A dig near the base of the clean drop rewarded us with little passage, but did afford the pleasure of hearing Matt Burnett grunt and groan for hours as he masochistically extruded mud a spoonful at a time. Another short lead heading up above Sniff's Tomb rewarded us with more pretties, but not much booty.

The final, particularly nasty drop off of the bottom of the entrance rappel has yet to be explored, but directly overlies surveyed passage twenty feet below, and appears to have little potential. Once this is done, I will be forced to draft the map. Hence, we are in no hurry.

Tom Lovejoy (the caver), Pat Lookabaugh, Terri, and I conducted another biological sampling of the cave in April, this time for millipedes. Terri collected six or seven, and shipped them off to the expert for identification. They turned out to be a previously un-

documented (new) species. The species has yet to be named. Suggestions from cave club members have included *Pseudotremia basardi*, *Pseudotremia ceciliusinkius*, and *Pseudotremia ty*. I am partial to *Pseudohumanbeingia lepera*.

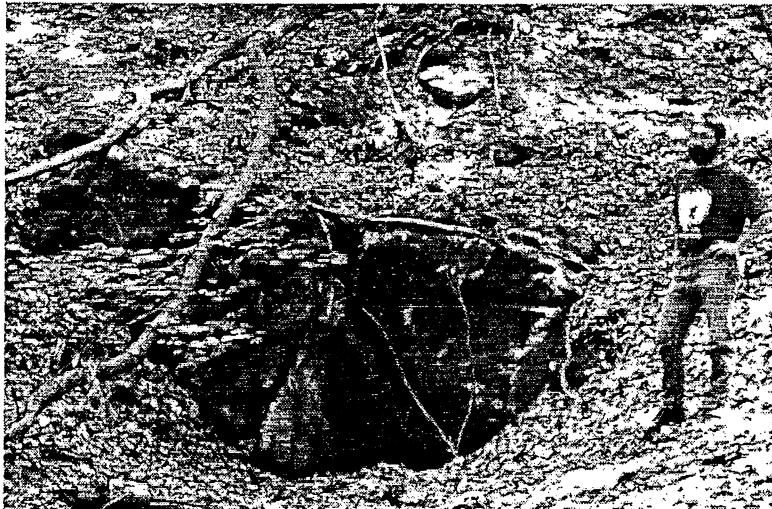
Once Scooter's was about dead, we turned our attention to the spout. Joe, Matt, and Zenah decided to push it on Sunday in the Autumn of '99, after hearing from Wells that a human could actually fit and that there might be cave. Thompson entered first. After some grunting and groaning, loud cursing preceded a rapid exit. "\$#@!\$ coons," he said. Upon hearing the word coon, or perhaps catching the scent, Ty made a

beeline for the entrance and disappeared. A few seconds later, barking started. Cecil recognized Ty's distinctive "face-barking," and assured us that meant the raccoons were safely cornered. Joe, Matt, and Zenah went in and started the survey. Ty kept the coons at bay the whole time (5 hours). Zenah describes seeing three masked faces peering out of the darkness, in tremulous terror of the terrible Ty.

The nature of Ty's Spout, as we have named it, is essentially tight, clean crawling with lots of corkscrew turns. Although only just

over 100 feet long, it took two trips to survey it because people kept getting stuck. On the second trip, Rance Edwards and Eileen replaced Zenah the caver warrior princess, yet still couldn't fill her boots. The coons weren't there on the second trip, presumably forced to emigrate by Ty.

A unfortunate sad footnote to this story is that Ty the caving dog died in an accident this winter. At least he was doing what he loved best, terrorizing other mammals, in this case mice, when it happened. Those of us who caved or just hung out with Ty will never forget his smooth, yet intense personality.



Wil Orndorff poses stylishly next to Ty's Spout. Photo by Ray Sira.

## Results of the Surveyor Survey

compiled by Steve LePera

A survey of cave surveyors was conducted this year in conjunction with the Spring VAR informational web page. The survey asked each participant their age, how long they had been surveying, and what their instrument preferences were. In addition, there was room for comments and desired improvements over the currently available instrumentation.

There were 66 total responses to the survey, although not every respondent answered every question.

There was some issue of the distinction between the many different models of Sisteco, Silva (who owns Sisteco, SurveyMaster etc.) and Suunto. A few responses placed their preference under Suunto but later in the comments identified which specific model they were using. As seen in the table, for the purposes of the "Currently Preferred Instrument" result the distinctions are not really relevant; the Suunto style instruments are clearly the most popular.

The amount of experience and age of the surveyors doesn't appear to be a very significant factor in choice of instrument.

In fact, the most significant determination of which instrument is currently preferred is what instrument the surveyor first learned. 68% of the respondents still prefer to use the instrument they first learned.

56% of the responders had used a Suunto as their first survey instrument, while 32% used a Brunton the first time.

The landslide reason most Suunto users gave for preferring their instrument was "Easy to use." Toughness and ability to make an awkward reading quickly were the

### RESULTS BY INSTRUMENT TYPE:

Instrument	Currently Prefer (%)	Have Tried Others (%)	Average Age of Surveyor (Years)	Average Experience Surveying (Years)
Suunto	64	74	39	15
Brunton	17	100	39	13
Sisteco	4	75	47	9
Silva	3	100	36	13
Other	3	100	42	18
No Preference	3	100	40	6

second and third most important features listed.

Among the surveyors that preferred Brunton transits, the most important feature was the sighting and balancing system. A related response was that this sighting system is better for high angle measurements.

Interestingly, the third most common wish of Suunto users was a better sighting and balancing method, while the Brunton users wished for a tougher instrument (especially resistant to the mirror getting broken) and a better clinometer!

Suunto users strongly wished for a more waterproof design, and one in which the eyepiece was easier to clean or replace.

The most common desire for ALL instruments was some kind of internal lighting system. Even users of newer models which have internal light sources complained that the current lights were not waterproof enough or not bright enough to be worthwhile in many situations.

Another hope common among

many of the surveyors was an electronic readout, memory, and possible download of data from the instrument to a computer later.

Users responses were pretty evenly split (no pun intended) on whether having the compass and clinometer together in the same unit is good or bad. Several Suunto users say having the separate instruments get tangled about their neck is a pain, but at the same time others like their lighter, compact size. One surveyor says he likes the separate instruments because if one gets broken, the whole unit doesn't need to be returned. Of course, who is going surveying with only a clinometer or only a compass?

I haven't priced any of these instruments, but the general sentiment among the responses was that the Suunto instruments can be had at a lower price.

Anyway, I'd like to thank everyone who responded for their participation, and wish everyone blunder-free work in the future. Here's to getting some new, high-tech instruments out in the field in the near future!