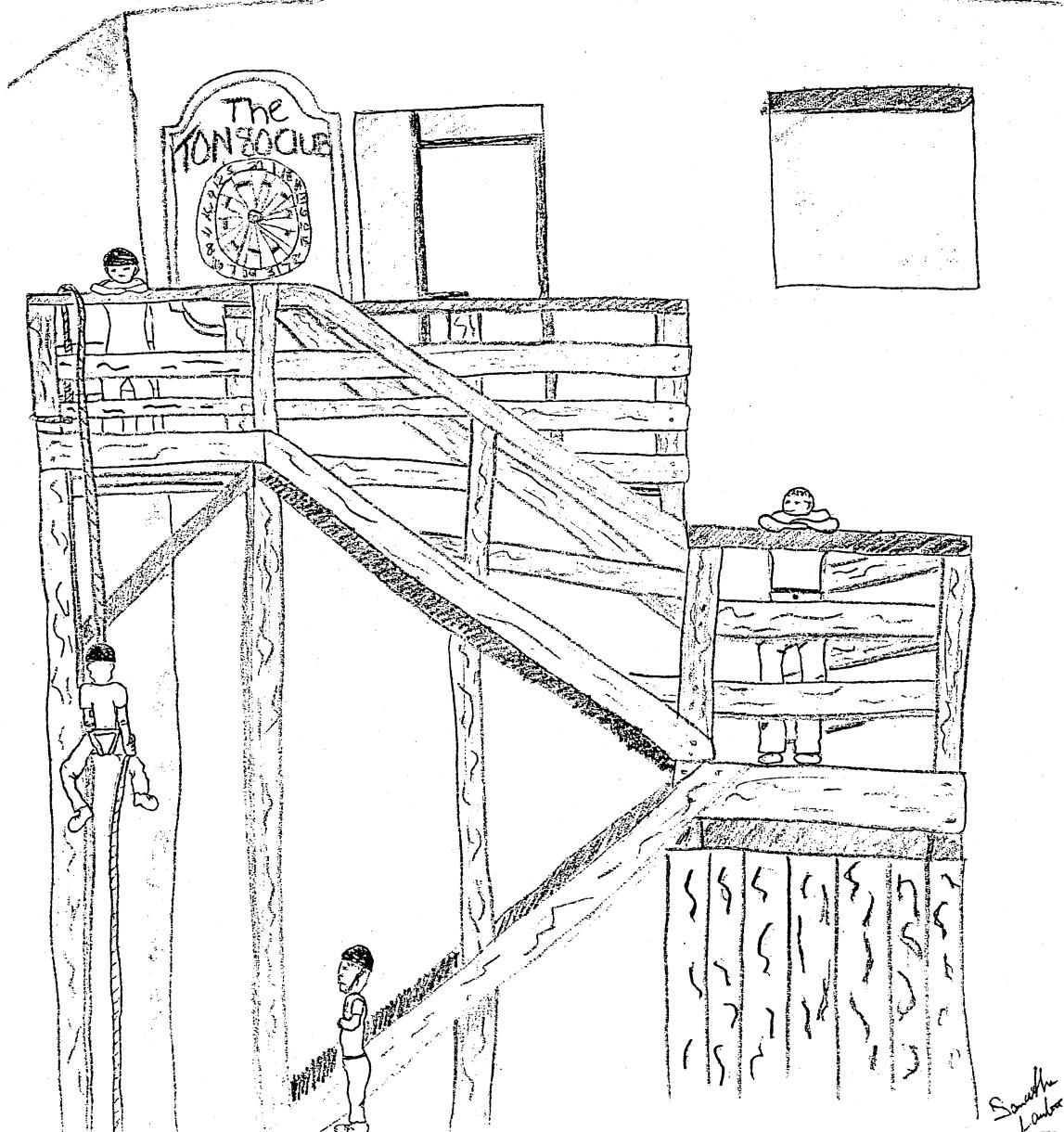


The Tech Troglodyte

Memories



Spring 2003

The Tech Troglodyte

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

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A Word from the Editor

The 2002-2003 academic year proved to be a very exciting and memorable year in my life. I relocated to Blacksburg from my rainy Seattle home (note: Blacksburg's annual rainfall seems to be equal to, if not more than, that of Seattle), passed the first year of engineering at Virginia Tech, started dating a great guy and then became the new editor of the Tech Troglodyte. Hooray for me! However, I think this year was not only a success for me, but also for our grotto. As I was reading through all the articles I received, I realized the extent of our success. There are 35 pages in the Trog this semester (despite my best efforts to edit out the boring parts). The contents of these pages are just some of the wonderful things the VPI Cave Club accomplished this year.

I've only been here for two semesters, but I feel like I've become part of my very own (somewhat dysfunctional) family. I want to congratulate all the people I've met in the VPI Cave Club for being who they are and express my gratitude for the knowledge and friendships offered to me. Enough sappiness from me. I hope you enjoy the Trog. Please send me suggestions, comments and/or criticism. DO NOT POST TO LISTSERV!! I hope to see everyone back at Tech next fall. Now be gone!

-ck

[insert boob picture here]

Can I Call Myself a Caver?

By Samantha Lambert

Throughout my four years as part of the cave club, I can not recall how many times I have been asked, "Why Caving?" I guess you can call it the 64,000 dollar question. I mostly hear it from my family and friends back home. They always get the same response from me, "Just because I like it".

I have never once truly explained why I picked caving, to them. Maybe it is because I, myself, have never sat down to figure why caving is my *bag*. In the beginning, a part of me was afraid. I knew I would come up with the wrong answer. I was only playing around in the wet cold caves just to spend time with the guy I was dating. That is not a good enough reason to call myself a caver.

I still struggle with this question every time I go caving. What have I done to be called a caver? There are a lot of things to justify me being a caver, but some, I just don't agree with. For an example, I have my own cave gear. What does that mean? I know of a few people who went caving twice, bought all the gear, and then never went caving again. I would not call them cavers. Oh, I got it! I have been in 12-15 different caves. But over half of the time, I was crying or swearing, instead of caving. One of the most famous phrases you could catch coming out of my mouth is, "I will never go caving again!" That is definitely not caver-like. Some would say I was chairmen of the club's Publicity Committee for two years, so that might make me a caver. My response is, I am an advertising major and used it as learning experience. Maybe I am caver because all of my friends are cavers. No, that would make me a groupie. It could be the bat sticker on my car. If that is the case, then the person who bought my old car is a caver too.

I have thought long and hard about this question. The only thing I can come up with is this: every time I go caving I look at the trip as a journey. It is a journey to a place that is not commercialized, that is not a tourist trap. Caving is my journey to a place where I don't have to pay a fee at the gate. I am one with nature. While caving, I am as close to nature as one can get. It is not only the purity of the caves that draw me near, but now there is more. (and no, it is not just to spend time with the guy I am dating. He does not cave very much anyway). My love of nature and caving bring out my love for challenges. I had never thought I loved a challenge, but I must because I can't get enough of Links. Every time I take my journey underground, I am faced with challenges, physical and/or mental ones. And yes, most of the time I find myself crying through them, but as soon as I step out of the cave into the bright light of the sun or moon, I get a feeling of achievement. I accomplished my goal for the day. I walked into a cave and I walked out of a cave safely.

So maybe in the end, that is how I can call myself a caver. To me, being a caver is not what you buy, or who you hang out with. It is how you feel when you are underground. This is what draws you back down every time.

Lost Promise is no longer LOST!

By Sandy Knapp & Philip Balister

Or rather, we now know ABOUT where it is on the surface. The Lost Promise passage, so aptly named with its roots and moss and surface air smell just begging for an exit, has been the bane of cavers for many years. After several grueling hours of crawling, a crack team of cavers, Matt Burnett, Kathy Despains, Kara Smith, and Kevin Rock ended up in the back of Starnes Cave. Philip Balister, Craig Ferguson, and Steve Wells were the surface group. Together, they determined that Lost Promise is directly under a ravine filled with old barn roofing, about 50 ft. from the surface. How do they know this?

Radio Location, location, location. Don't they say it's all about location? The equipment we used was designed by Brian Pease, specifically for performing radio location of points in caves. An antenna and transmitter are used to radiate a signal below ground, which is then monitored at the surface with an antenna/receiver combination above ground. It sounds simple, but it takes a trained ear to 'hear' where the underground signal is coming from and accurately locate the point on the surface directly above the transmitter. This is known as ground zero. The receiver uses several design techniques so that careful signal strength measurements can be made. From these signal strength measurements, the distance between the in cave transmitter and the surface receiver can be calculated to give an accurate depth.

The first problem we run into is that most waves; sound, light, radio etc., don't penetrate the ground very far. Of course if this were really true, I wouldn't be writing this article. An electromagnetic wave will penetrate into the ground for a distance called the skin depth. The depth is based on frequency (a parameter). As the frequency is lowered, the skin depth increases. Using a frequency of 3.5 KHz and good conditions, radio location has been able to accurately determine a cave depth of 565 ft. This was at Jewel Cave in S. Dakota by Brian Pease.

Initial testing was at Pighole in Giles County, Va. With a vertical entrance of about 120 ft. we made our first attempt at depth determination. Eileen O'Malley and Sandy Knapp positioned the 2'x 2' antenna at various places inside the cave. At each location, we would turn the transmitter on for a predetermined time; long enough for Philip to zero in on the signal above ground by moving his antenna so as to 'null' the signal at ground zero. We know we are at ground zero when the surface antenna is vertical and regardless the angle of rotation, the signal is minimized, or nulled as shown in Figure 1. Unless you have very good information regarding the location on the surface where you expect to find ground zero, hunting for ground zero can be quite challenging. You easily find one line of position (LOP) at a point, however deciding which direction to travel in order to find ground zero can be difficult. This decision is based on the angle the field leaves the ground and by finding a couple of LOP's and deciding in which direction they converge. In his notes on his website, Brian Pease also suggests starting uphill from the expected ground zero location.

The problem with the first trip was that there was no information we could use to compare to the depth found by signal strength measurements. We needed more data to confirm the equipment was operating properly and that we could interpret the readings correctly. On the next trip to Pighole, we wanted some way to confirm our depth measurements. The way we overcame that was by doing both a surface and in cave survey to connect the in cave radio location points with the corresponding ground zero points on the surface. The underground crew of Eileen O'Malley, Kevin Rock, Mike

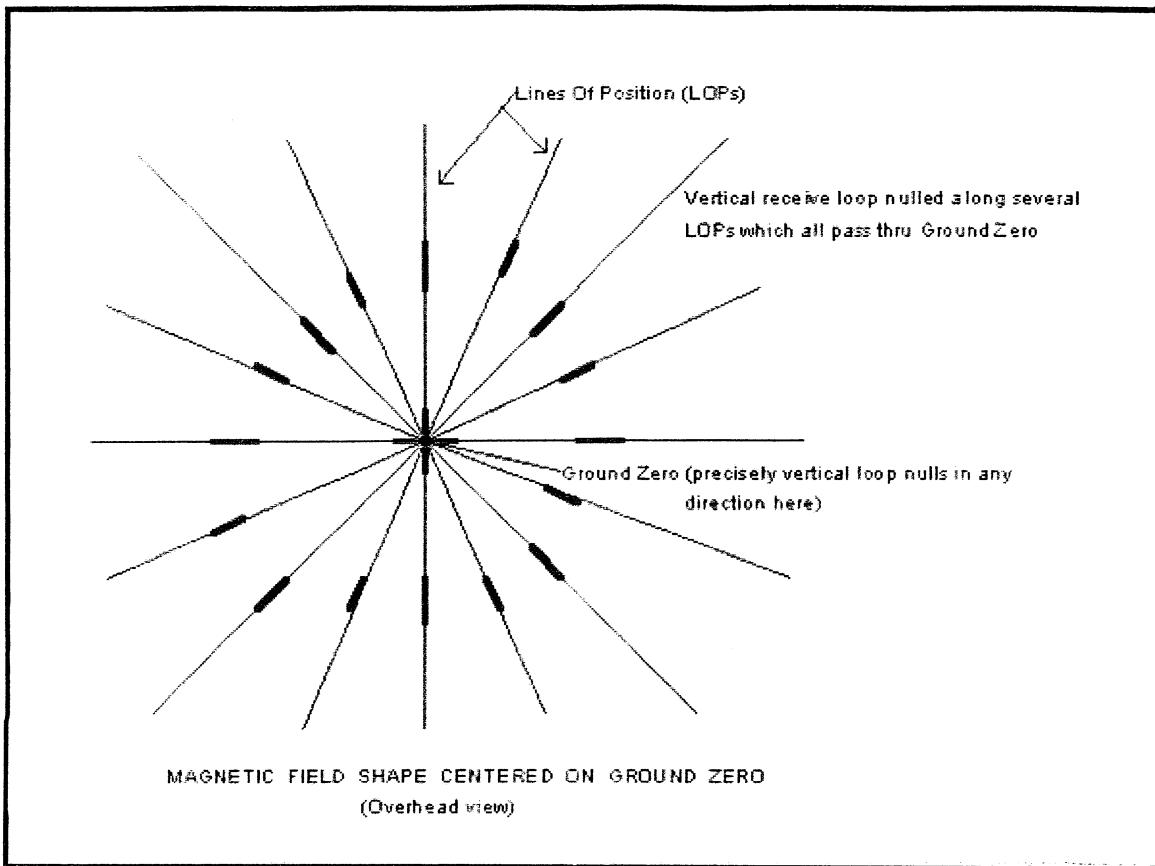


Figure 1: Lines of position (from <http://radiolocation.tripod.com>)

Cole and Ray Sira operated the radio location transmitter and surveyed from the Mud Bridge radio location point, to a radio location point located about halfway between the mud bridge and the back entrance, and then finally to the back entrance. An above ground survey from the lower entrance to the two ground zero locations was done by Scott Rapier, Steve Wells, and Sandy Knapp. You can think of the radio location measurement as a plumb line depth measurement, but just through rock instead of open air. With this in mind, you can see from Figure 2 that there are two independent closed loops created by the survey.

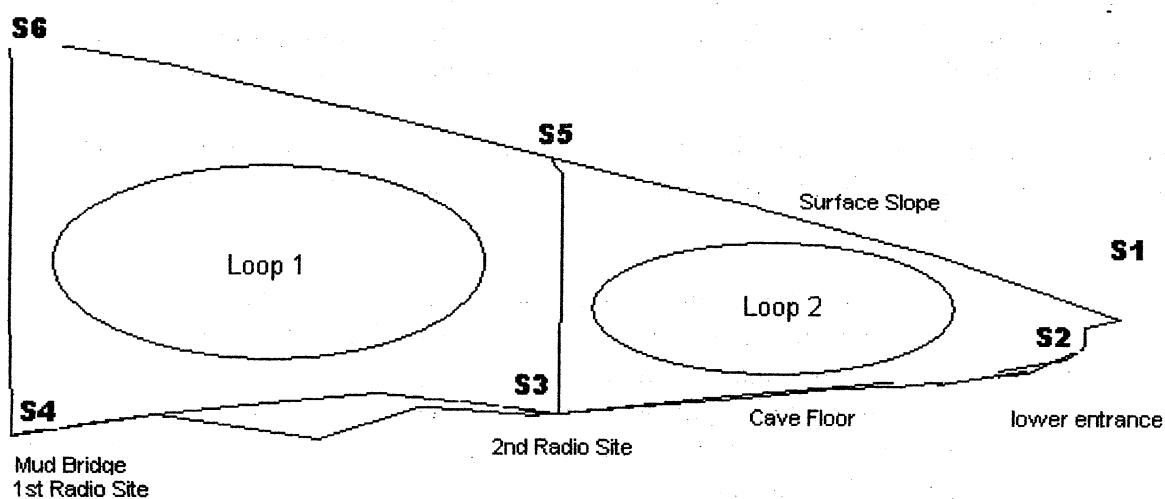


Figure 2: Line plot of survey data and radio location information

Philip fed the survey data into a survey program called Survex (<http://www.survex.com>), and it calculated vertical distance for each set of the radio location points. We now had two ways of determining the distance from points on the surface to the points in the cave.

The calculated survey distance at the Mud Bridge was 183 ft and the radio location depth by absolute signal strength was 179.6 ft. Because the depth calculated from the radio location and the depth calculated from the survey contain some errors, we do not know which one is correct. Since they are close, we are reasonably confident that if we drilled a hole 179.6 ft, we would be quite close to the station. The second station was similar, 113 ft found from the survey data and 108.75 ft. from the radio location data.

With this, we have verified the radio location equipment and equipment operator are working according to design. There are several situations where this data would be useful. With the radio location equipment it is possible to drill into the cave. This is important for; cave rescue missions, tapping into water sources, and creating new entrances. Since it is possible to accurately locate points on the surface using GPS and other survey instruments designed for accurate surface survey work (but entirely useless underground) radio location can also be used to improve the accuracy of in cave survey done with handheld compasses. Finally, Brian Pease has an excellent website at <http://radiolocation.tripod.com> that has far more detailed information about the theory and practice of cave radio location. Furthermore, the website has information about how to build your own radio location equipment.

Cavers Help Build Barn for Thompsons

By Michael Cole

Saturday April 12, 2003, eleven cavers from the club headed down to Bland County to help Jerry and Molly Thompson set supports for a new barn. The Thompsons farm field where the club holds its annual picnic, and every year we try to thank the owners by offering our help with work around their farm. A few years ago, the club tore down the old collapsed shed that was directly in front of the Thompson's home. The lumber from the shed was quickly transformed into firewood for Picnic.

This year, VPI cavers Kara Smith, Cameron Keyes, Mark Eisenbies, Steve Wells, Ray Sira, Mike Cole, Philip Balister, Scott Rapier, Sandy Knapp, Joe and Carol Zokaites arrived at the Thompson's house at ten o'clock ready to work.

No time was wasted; everyone immediately turned around and drove down the road to the site where Jerry had laid out where he wanted his new barn. The new barn is located directly across from Buddy Penley's old brick house. The first step of the project involved digging holes for the supports, which were old telephone poles. This didn't take long thanks to Jerry's auger drill attachment for one of his tractors. The auger wasn't able to dig all the holes because of large rocks in the way. Holes with rocks were hand dug. Kara and Cameron became the experts at getting the large rocks out of the holes, which made way for others to come dig the holes the rest of the way with post hole diggers. Once all the holes were ready, we began placing the poles into the holes.

Taking a break from the barn, other work was done around the Thompson farm. Molly and Carol, along with Steve and Mark, headed off for part of the day to tear down two old fences and carry remnants to the picnic site to use as firewood.

At lunch time, the whole crew headed back to the Thompson's house for chili hot dogs, chips, and cake. Molly provided the lunch for all the hard workers. As we were eating, Molly told us about the cow used to make the chili. She said the chili contained nearly no fat, because the cow they used was very lean. Carol then asked how they select which cow to eat, curious as to whether or not they raise a special cow or just take the one that looks the best. Molly said they picked this cow because she hadn't had a calf in almost two years. Ray then quickly remarked that Carol hadn't had any children in two years either.

After lunch work continued on the barn as the rest of the poles were placed. Good old brut force was used to place the poles. Some poles proved to be more of a challenge than others. Two poles were

hickory trees Jerry had just cut down because we ran out of phone poles. These two trees were the hardest, and nearly crushed the crew on the first attempt because they were so heavy. There were a total of twelve poles placed, ranging in height from fifteen to twenty feet. The poles were then set using rocks and dirt to fill in the holes to hold the poles in place. Jerry told us that rocks and dirt packed around the pole works much better than concrete. That, and Jerry had plenty of extra rocks lying around his fields to use. After all poles were set, the tops were cut off to proper height with a chainsaw. Trimming the poles was done by Scott and one of Jerry's neighbors, who would stand in Jerry's tractor bucket and then be lifted up to the top of the pole.

By four o'clock in the afternoon work for the day was pretty much complete. All that remains to be completed on the barn is to put up rafters, the roof, and siding. Jerry was so impressed by our work he would like more help to finish the project. He plans to work on it some more the Friday, and perhaps, Saturday of picnic this year.



Dangerous Chainsaw Antics



Wells and Spot supervise hole digging

The Perfect Rack:

A guide to building a rappel rack based on cave club listserv discussion

By Mark Garland

Learning the proper way to set up a rack can be difficult. Ask five people how to put one together and chances are you will get five different answers. Personal preference, intended use of the rack, the rappeller's weight, and budget are all factors that effect how a rack is built. There is no one "best" rack setup that works for everyone. You can however, build a rack that is customized to you and your needs.

Rack orientation is the first option that you need to consider when customizing your rack. Some people prefer to have the ends of the bars facing them and move their brake hand from left to right when adding or removing bars. Others have their rack in a flat position and move the rope forward and back to change bars. Both ways work but one way may be better for you than the other. Practicing on rope with both is the best way to choose what method is best for you to use. Whichever allows easier, more comfortable, and therefore, safer bar manipulation is the optimal orientation for you.

The bars on your rack can be made from stainless steel, aluminum, or titanium. I prefer stainless steel because it lasts longer, stays cooler, and is much stronger than aluminum. Stainless steel also does not turn the rope black like aluminum. The benefits of aluminum are that it creates more friction and it is lighter than stainless steel. If you are heavy in body weight or you want a lightweight rack, aluminum is an option. Titanium is both strong and light, but is not as popular because it is expensive and can be brittle. All three materials may be used together to really customize the rack to your weight and needs.

Standard bars come in several shapes. Aluminum bars are made of a solid rod. Stainless steel is available in hollow rod or u-bar form. U-bars are usually preferred because they are cheaper, provide better cooling, and are less likely to be rigged backwards than tubular bars. Use a notched bar in the second position to help

run the rope down the center of the rack. All bars should be attached on the long leg of the rack so that there is more room for unused bars to fall out of the way. The only exception is if a large first bar cannot fit over the top. The first bar should then be fitted last so that all the other bars can be properly placed.

The first bar can come in several configurations. A hyperbar is great if you need a lot of friction. It will provide the equivalent of two extra bars when used and also provides an easy place to lock off the rack. This is great for rescue applications, but for caving it is usually not needed and will get in the way when negotiating obstacles on rope. If you use a hyperbar, you must use a solid or tubular bar in the sixth position because the rope must be able to wrap back up the rack. An oversized top bar has become a popular option, but is fairly expensive. It not only helps run the rope down the center of the rack but works as a heat sink to prevent rope glazing. For a beginner or someone on a budget, a standard bar works great as a first bar. You may need to file the bar slightly to allow it to sit straight on the rack.

The use of bar spacers is a fairly controversial subject. Some people swear by them, while others believe they are unsafe. They provide a smoother rappel, but cause a substantial loss of friction by separating the first and second bar. If you are heavier in body weight, spacers are definitely not needed and could be unsafe because of the reduction in friction they cause. A lighter person who frequently jams the rope between the first and second bar and rarely uses their lower bars should consider spacers. Spacers can be made from any number of things including copper piping, stainless steel nuts and hose clamps. Spacers should be dealt with carefully and should not be experimented with until you have gained experience with a rack on rope.

The best way to decide what options work for you is to practice above ground with several racks before making a purchase. Find a friend who is willing to let you try theirs out. Not only will you get a chance to try out different rack set-ups but you will gain experience on rope. Decide what options work best for you and purchase your own rack from a caving retailer. If you don't have any friends or you are on a limited budget, a rack with six standard bars makes a great beginner rack. It is much cheaper than a rack with an expensive top bar and gives you a chance to really determine what you need for caving.

Inner Tube Battery Case

By Mark Eisenbies

Tired of loose batteries in your pack? Having trouble keeping up with which batteries are fresher or more recently purchased? This easy-to-build battery case helps keep your batteries dry and organized. Simply take a 6-inch section of a mountain bike tube and two 3-inch sections with 1 inch of their ends cemented shut. Pack new batteries in one end, and remove them from the other end (Figure 1). Slip the 3 inch covers over the end and you have an assembly that takes up no more room than the batteries themselves, and is water resistant (Figure 2).

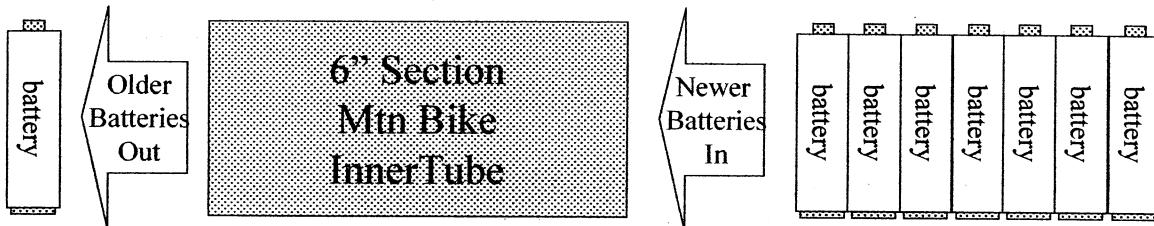


Figure 1: Pack new batteries in one end, remove older batteries from the other.

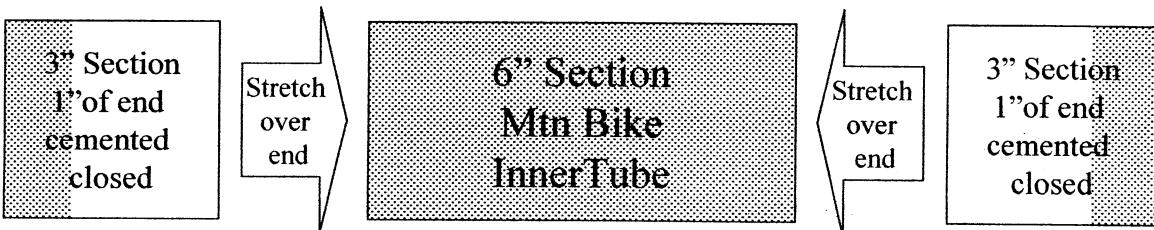


Figure 2: Slip the covers on both ends for water resistance.

Stoopid Caving Tricks

By Mark Eisenbies

Cavers come up with all sorts of bright ideas, but never really share them with each other. Perhaps they think it isn't worth tooting your own horn over something so simple. Perhaps they think it's too obvious. After polling the membership, here are some standouts (actually it's everything... people just don't want to share or something), covering everything from keeping warms to surveying hints. Anyhow, don't keep those stupid ideas to yourselves. Share your innovations with the rest of us.

1) Surveying:

- Colored LED's make good survey markers. Instruments know which is on your head and which is on the station.
- Fleece Balaclavas protect instruments and keeps your skin warm.

2) Carbide lamps

- The spark from a Peizeo electric cigarette lighter is sufficient to light a carbide lamp. Drain the fluid and cut a port so the acetylene from the lamp has access to the spark. Works when wet. I carry it strung around my neck with my tip cleaner.
- A squeeze mustard bottle makes a good water bottle. Funnel allows you to fill a carbide lamp while still on your head. If you have separate bottles for carbide and drinking water, the spout lets you suck up water from pretty insignificant pools of water without stirring up sediment.
- An old car or house key makes a good scraping implement. Keep it on a string with your tip cleaner. Use it to clean out your carbide lamp or scrape mud off of clothing.

3) Keeping Warm:

- Bring a butter knife to scrape mud off of clothes. They'll dry out faster. Nice tip for people who don't have 'modern' cave clothing.
- Falling under the 'no-cotton' concept of keeping warm, speedo bathing suits are good cave underwear...assuming you wear underwear.
- Two words, Neoprene socks

4) General Tools:

- A mallion rapide gate can double as an adjustable wrench for loosening stuck gates on other mallions, and loosening bolts.
- Bring a spoon. Big end for spoon applications, small end for digging carbide from base of lamp.
- Just bring a knife and a fork. Threaten to eat the slowest trainee.
- Webbing can be used as a strap wrench to loosen carbide lamp bases or stuck carabineer gates

5) Electric Lights

- Clear packaging tape can be used to protect electric light lenses. When it gets scratched up, just replace the tape. Tape is a lot cheaper than a new bezel and may even save you a whole light purchase.

- This may seem obvious. Have your electric lights use the same size batteries.

6) Laundry Hints:

- Whites before cave suits. Empty load after cave suits. Does not apply to Laundromats.

Thanks to J.A., P.B., R.C., M.E., E.O., P.P., A.T., and S.W.

Dracula Country

By Aaron Thomas

I leaned back, feeling all the slack being consumed by my rappel device and slowly I began the treacherous walk backward. In a moment such as this, I was thankful that I had double checked my harness and rechecked the locking of my biner. For the truth was that I was not nervous because of the apparent lack of crampons on my boots and the way my feet wanted to give way every time a step was made, but rather by the simple fact, I had no way of knowing what was truly waiting for me at the bottom of the world's second largest, underground glacier. Despite the descriptions by our eager and mildly zany guide, Bogdan Onac, my introduction into the world of ice caving left me with a feeling of unsettled anticipation. For while I was certainly excited, this was the first time I had ever been into an ice cave let alone rappel down the side of a 10,000-year-old glacier.

As excited as I was, I could not help but think back a mere two months prior when this whole trip was merely a vague outline. My tour into the heart of Dracula Country, Transylvania Romania, happened almost by sheer serendipity, but it was an experience that left a profound respect for both the universal hospitality of cavers and the exacting difference of caves and cavers in various parts of the world.

In May of 2002, I had two very fortunate circumstances move into alignment. The first was the good fortune to work for a company where I could make my own schedule and name my work availability. The second was an invitation from an old friend to go touring with her in Eastern Europe once she finished up teaching her Salsa (teaching English as a second language) classes in the Czech Republic. So like any good caver, I immediately seized the opportunity to not only take an immediate sabbatical from work but also to earn some impressive bragging points by caving in Transylvania, Romania—Dracula Country.

The arrival of my friend Anita and I in Romania was enough of an adventure once you take into account getting past customs with various scanner irritants known as caving gear and the stir we caused at the University teaching Anita how to rappel and climb rope from her dormitory balcony. But none the worse for wear, and having survived a long train ride (rumored to be frequently attacked by bandits using sleeping gas in the ventilation system to subdue their prey), we arrived in Turda, Romania early the morning of May 29th 2002. Here we met with Bogdan Onac from one of the fine Romanian Universities and began the long journey to Garda. Two months before I had looked up several caving groups in the area of Transylvania and Bogdan was one of the few to return my email. It just so happened that he was leading a group consisting of students, scientists, and friends to some classic Romania caves—such as Bear Cave and the ice cave of Ghetar—and was kind enough to invite us along.

Once we reached Garda (Gerda), the small village that would serve as our home base, we immediately checked into a bed and breakfast and were quickly served with a heavy, Romanian dinner consisting of several courses, hot peppers, and a very potent plumb brandy known as Tuica (Ts-oi-ca). Tuica is roughly 120 proof and is taken before meals as a sign of friendship and comradery. The official toast is, Narog, which was explained as meaning, "good health." Then along with the meal, a fine Romanian wine was served. Needless to say, once dinner was concluded, Anita and I were feeling sufficiently activated and the rest of the group was feeling up to a late evening stroll to a local cave known for its unique flowstone, dilapidated iron wrought stair case, and history as a living museum. The hike to the cave itself was incredible. If you can imagine the traditional picture of Romania, laden with mist, the Carpathian Mountains overgrown with thick ever-green forests, and the last rays of the sun disappearing over the mountains, you will understand how accurate that stereotype actually is. The cave itself was interesting, but not as spectacular as I had anticipated. As I recall, the flowstone was unique, but nothing that cannot be seen in the wedding room of Links or in the entrance pit of Pretty Wells in TAG. What was unique, however, was a small spring that jutted out close to the mouth of the cave that served as the water supply to several houses in the village. Bogdan offered us a taste from this spring and despite natural inclinations to preserve our health, we erred on the side of, "well, you only live once." Fortunately, sickness did not descend upon Anita and I and the water was so pure it possessed a crystalline sweetness that was simply delicious. As good as the Tuica and wine were, the water outclassed them by far.

The next morning, refreshed from a long and restorative sleep, we quickly ate and prepared for the long hike up to the cave. Our destination, Ghetar, was a hamlet located on a plateau, and proved to be quite a challenging hike—at least for us westerners. The local Romanians scrambled up the steep, winding mountains paths as if they were nothing more than a simple obstacle to overcome. And as we could not quite keep up with the locals, we finally arrived in Ghetar late in the afternoon with eager anticipation for what lay before us. Before we could enter this ice cave, however, we had to first don our caving gear and it was here that I learned a very valuable lesson: cavers from various parts of the world have differing concepts as far as gear and safety are concerned. Having been trained in the outstanding VPI tradition, I was a little taken aback by the shortage of helmets, the appearance of non-locking biners in place of locking ones, knots, undressed and jammed in the life support cordage, and the lack of tethering the top ascender to the harness in their frog systems. While this was a little hard to reconcile, I finally lightened up some as I watched Bogdan provide a bit of late minute entertainment by prepping our ceiling burners. Evidently in Romania, pebble grade carbide is hard to come by, as bulk rock is more plentiful. Thus Bogdan spent a few minutes busting huge carbide rocks into smaller pieces fit for our ceiling burners. With splinters of carbide flying through the air and sizzling upon contact with the wet earth, it did not take me long to appreciate the ever-flowing supply of carbide from the VPI storage bin.

Soon we were ready to descend into the cave. A long and multi-platformed staircase provided the main access into the cave. It was covered in ice in places but provided an excellent view of the pit on the way down. The walls of the pit were a strange mixture of deep green, peeking out from the snow, and large trees having fallen in and perched on ice-laden ledges. Between the snapping of my camera and the ice, which was now making the descent challenging, I was becoming excited with each progressing step. After all, it was my first experience with an ice cave and as far as the formations were concerned, they were truly amazing. Unlike limestone caves whose formations are not quite as sharp and jagged, an ice cave is dramatic with its formations. It is not restricted to having trace mineral deposits to compose its formations, but rather freezing water in as many shapes as water can assume: sharp, spiraling, wide, varied in color, and geyser-like. These words can only begin to describe the mountainous formations that awaited us. A white-milky color meant it was exceedingly

frigid when the formations were formed, as the CO₂ was not able to escape before the freezing. Clear formations meant there was time for the CO₂ to escape and therefore, not as cold.

As captivated as I was by all of this, Bogdan and I were soon ready to move onto the next portion of our trip and check on the lower section of the cave. At first I was not sure where the pit was located, but Bogdan quickly led the group near the entrance of the cave and pointed past the guardrail. There on the other side of the frozen lake was a mouth of pure darkness and uncertainty. What was once a cascading river was now a blanket of ice, disappearing into an abyss. We climbed over the guardrail and began looking for places to rig. And at this point, I was proud to be VPI. For I almost laughed out loud, when the rig point was identified as two rusted pitons jutting up through the icy floor (one with an eyelet, the other without—clearly having rusted away several years ago.) Here the spirit of the classic VPI asshole descended upon me as I began searching for an alternative rig point. It was Bogdan intention to tie a double eight and biner one of the loops into the complete piton and drape the other loop over the rusted stem. I could smell disaster all over that one and I could just hear the club's safety chair raising hell, so I calmly suggested we use the BFR behind us as the main rig point. I quickly tied a mountaineering bowline around the BFR and readied myself for the descent....

I leaned back feeling the slack being consumed by my rappel device and stepped as steadily backward as I could manage. This was the moment that I had been waiting for since Bogdan had first mentioned this cave two months prior. Once the icy lip was negotiated the rest of the rappel was easy. Fascinating as it was, I could see the various layers in the ice as I rappelled downward, each layer of ice representing an eon lost in time and differing water levels thousands of years before. Though the rappel was only 50 feet to the bottom, the lower section of the cave promised many other sights to behold. At the bottom was a 1,100 year old tree frozen in what was (at one time) an impressive waterfall. And by the light of my dying ceiling burner, I could make out more formations that waited in the distance. Due to their location on an icy slope and the lack of a hand-line, we decided against going to investigate. After all, I had already fallen three times and learned that without crampons, walking on ice is virtually impossible. I almost hated to leave, but as the rest of the team was freezing at the top of the pit, we headed out. Frogging on ice is an experience in itself if you have never attempted it as your knees wind up pressing against the unforgiving ice. So 10 minutes later and 600 seconds colder, we arrived topside. The rest of the group had already headed out, preferring the cold evening air to that of frigid temperatures in the cave. And as much as I hated to admit it, I was fatigued and ready to embark upon the long hike back to Garda. All the way home I thought about how fortunate I was to have experienced such a phenomenal cave and if I would ever again get a chance to visit Gharda. That night we all supped together, each becoming activated from the abundance of Tuica and strong Romanian wine, but we shared in the comradery and relived the adventures of the day. Unfortunately our group would break up the next day, as Anita and I were off to Brasov, but with us we would take with us the acquired knowledge of how far the caving community actually extends. Though different as we were, we still had much in common. Technique and protocol may have separated us, but our passion and love for caving made us part of a larger family and a greater whole.

Maxwelton Sink Cave: Persistence, Its Price, Lessons And Rewards

by Carroll Bassett

Introduction by Penelope Pooler

Carroll Bassett is the sole proprietor and developer of Bassett Metal Studios (BMS; URL is <http://www.bmsrescue.com/>), and is responsible for creating the popular Micro Rack and numerous other technical caving and cave rescue devices. Carroll is one of the foremost authorities in the U.S on technical rescue riging. Although it was awful that he was involved in this accident, it was very fortunate that he wasn't unjured further and even more fortunate that he has provided some really valuable insights based on his experience.

Foreword

I began thinking about this report soon after the event described herein. Feeling that a brief history leading up to the event was important to understand the circumstances, I have included an extremely abbreviated version. The conclusions on the events are mostly my own. Discussion and responses are encouraged and important to this community. My goal is to in some small way make digging safer.

A Short History

The original entrance to this cave was at the end of a blind karst valley fed by a small stream which had been dug open in the late 60's only to be permanently flooded shut in 1971 by hurricane Agnes. Before this unfortunate event however, over 10 miles of passage had been surveyed and mapped with many more going leads left to explore.

With the sale of the property at auction in the late 90's the West Virginia Cave Conservancy (WVCC) began a difficult and frustrating series of negotiations with the new owners, an investment group who planned to develop the remaining property. After a verbal agreement was arrived at with the new owners, a survey was completed on the approximately 5-acre piece comprising the bottom of the karst valley, most of which had been designated as flood plain and is undevelopable under FEMA regulations. Upon entering into an agreement with the Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Corporation (GVEDC), a state-funded entity created to bring industry into the area, the new owners abandoned on their agreement with WVCC.

A new round of negotiations with the GVEDC produced another verbal agreement but this time the surveyed property was to be donated to the WVCC in return for public acknowledgment of their generosity and environmental concern. The amount that the GVEDC agreed to pay to the new owners, which was essentially state money, was more than three times what they had paid at the original auction less than six months earlier.

The jubilation of the new owners at their windfall was to be short lived however. Apparently state law dictates that any development with public money requires environmental impact studies before transactions can be finalized. The results of the study indicated that development might directly threaten at least two endangered species. It is suspected at this point that this gave the GVEDC a way out of the deal which they might have wanted for political reasons. It however had the very negative effect of severely alienating the owners from the caving community; they mistakenly arrived at the

conclusion that we had played some kind of environmental trump card to ruin their very profitable deal. This of course was not the case and destroyed our chances to acquire access to the old entrance property.

With no chance of gaining access to the original entrance and with most of the original survey data either lost or of questionable accuracy, hope to gain an entrance to the cave seemed unlikely until Dr. Dave Scott purchased property he believed overlaid sections of the cave. He expressed an interest in trying to gain access to the cave below and digs were undertaken both manually and with mechanized equipment (i.e. track hoe, financed by Dr. Scott). These digs were frustratingly unsuccessful and hope of opening the cave waned until Jeff Bray started studying the area for microgravity anomalies. His work indicated passage at a number of locations and a 6-inch test well was drilled at one of the most promising spots. A modified black-and-white surveillance camera was lowered into the well and voids encountered at 30 and 105 feet were remotely video taped. The 30-foot void did not seem particularly promising but the 105-foot void contained larger passage and a stream flowing almost due north. This corresponded with the existing map of the cave to indicate we had probably drilled into the Heaven passage of Maxwelton Sink Cave.

One hundred and five feet straight down is a very long way to dig especially when it is mostly solid limestone so it was decided to try a second dig with the track hoe. A spot about 100 feet south and downhill from our drilled hole, which had indicated passage in the previous microgravity study, was chosen. Digging proceeded well and at 38 feet down from the upper edge of the hole we found breakdown with good air flow. Being at the limit of the reach of the track hoe we began digging by hand in a mostly horizontal direction following the air.

Over the next several weekends an extremely dedicated dig team, of which I was a member, made excellent progress. Traditional digging techniques were used to remove small rock and dirt and micro-blasting was used to open spaces between the large breakdown blocks or reduce rock blocking our progress to manageable sizes. By the end of September we had dug our way approximately 70 feet to the top of relatively large passage with a stream running through it.

In the Blink of an Eye

On the evening of Oct. 1, Dr. Dave Scott, Jeff Bray, and myself, in a state of high expectation, prepared to enter for the first time in 30 years what we believed to be MAXWELTON Sink Cave. I took the lead and on our way in disturbed something which unleashed an avalanche of rock upon myself. After kicking a number of smaller rocks off my legs I realized that my right arm and knee were pinned by what I was soon to realize was a 1,000-pound-plus slab of breakdown. Pressure on my right knee was not severe but I was unable to move it; pressure on my right arm between my elbow and shoulder was extreme. My disbelief at the predicament very soon gave way to the harsh reality of my situation. No amount of effort that I made even began to move the rock pinning me and although I could move my right forearm and fingers my entire right arm was becoming progressively and ominously numb. Luckily I remained conscious and Jeff went outside to call for help while Dave stayed with me. My arm being subjected to so much pressure became the priority and we called for the screw jack and handle from my Toyota pickup to be brought in. It soon arrived and with my free left hand I placed it just above my right shoulder while Dave cranked the handle from his position in the tight passage about three feet above me. Positioned horizontally between the wall of the passage and the rock pinning my arm, the jack now shifted the rock slightly putting greater pressure on my

right knee. Backing off the jack returned the rock to its original position relieving the added pressure on my knee but my arm was still badly pinned. We realized that to free my arm we would have to chock the slab somewhere down by my ankles but to access them Dave would have to pass over me and the slab on top of me. Four feet directly above the slab was another 200-pound slab hanging vertically and held in place at its upper end by the breakdown that made up the ceiling, not an easy choice but at this point seemingly the only option. Summoning up a good deal of courage as well as the aid of the appropriate spirits Dave made his move and made it across the slab without further deterioration of the situation. My arm now was completely numb and yet extremely painful. It seemed to be dying and I deeply mourned its apparent passing.

Having made it across the slab, Dave became energized with optimism. I think this was a turning point for both of us. Even though I was not yet free the problem and its dangers seemed suddenly more defined and the solution seemed within our grasp. Dave placed the jack under the slab and raised it slightly. Attempts to chock up the slab did not work however: the available rocks and the geometry of the space he attempted to fill with them were incompatible; the rocks slid out from under the slab as he lowered the weight of the slab onto them. We realized we would need a second jack, one for raising the slab by my feet and holding it up and the second to slide it off my arm. A second jack quickly arrived. By this time the call for more cavers to help had been answered, and Mike Corbet took up the position above my head where Dave had previously been.

I positioned the second jack with my left hand as in the previous attempt to free my arm. Mike cranked the handle until the jack made solid contact with the passage wall and the slab. Dave then started cranking up the slab at my ankles and within a minute or two I was able to move my right knee from the space it was trapped in. Mike then carefully began to crank more on his end and within another minute I was able to drag my arm from the constriction.

I had been pinned for an hour and a half but it felt more like a week as I pushed myself up from the semi prone position I had been in. At the point when I was again standing the chilled blood trapped in my arm and now circulating through me lowered my body temperature to the point that I began to shiver uncontrollably and I could barely catch my breath: instant hypothermia. The shivering subsided after about a minute and I crawled another 10 feet and rested as Daryl Trusty, caver/paramedic, checked me out. I got the "good to go" and mostly under my own power crawled the last 40 feet to the entrance where a helpful boost popped me out. I had made it out but the struggle was far from over. Almost four months later nerve function has returned to my right hand to allow simple grasping motions and slow typing (definitely faster than one-hand typing). To get to this point I have undergone painful nerve studies, acupuncture, osteopathic manipulation, STEMS treatments and masses of physical therapy. I list these things only to give an idea of the repercussions of this incident. Although a serious situation, it could have been a lot worse. I consider myself lucky not to have been hurt any more than I was. Initial projections by my doctors for recovery agreed on about six months. Given the rate of recovery thus far I would say they were right on target and I am very grateful. As a result of this incident I have had a fair amount of time to consider many of the aspects of it and have come to some conclusions I hope might be useful to others.

The Scary Truth?

Dig long enough and something is going to fall on you! If you are VERY LUCKY you will simply crawl out from under it or push it off of you with no ill effects other than a bad moment. If you are JUST LUCKY, someone will be able to help get you out and you will recover EVENTUALLY..... If you are NOT SO LUCKY, you will be rescued but will sustain permanent injury to one degree or another, possibly after a long and miserable struggle involving many others. If you are UNLUCKY you will DIE, maybe after a long and miserable struggle by yourself or with others trying to help you but you will be dead and your rescuers, friends and family will suffer. Would a quick death help here? Not anyone else but you.

I wouldn't deny this before the accident if asked but I wouldn't have written this then either. So if this is the truth, and it is for me now, was I in denial or just ignorant? Will this be true for you after an incident or is it true for you now after reading this? If not true to you now, are you in denial and if so why would anyone want to cave or dig with you? These questions are rhetorical and need to be answered privately first and then maybe discussed with others. At this point I believe that these are the facts and they need to be faced.

In my mind facing these facts has not eliminated digging for me but it has convinced me that we need to be prepared as best as we can to deal with these incidents quickly. We need to have some plan in place before an emergency.

So It Happens and Someone is not VERY LUCKY

In any dig if there is a collapse, shift, etc. and someone is trapped, time will be of the essence especially if they are pinned or otherwise in close contact with the passage. "Self rescue" should start immediately by your party as well as alerting others outside the cave/dig to a possible callout. If you have been digging for any length of time you have probably already performed some small self rescue but do you have available equipment for the probable inevitability of a more serious event? Nearby? Prudence would put some thought into what you might do well before an incident and have ready at least some gear and expertise to deal with the problem quickly.

Besides the normal tools of the trade, i.e. dig bars, buckets, shovels, hammers etc., I would have nearby what I am calling a "Crunch Pack." This would consist of a durable bag containing at least but not limited to the following:

- A) Two small mechanical screw jacks with handles found in small cars and light trucks. Small hydraulic jacks do not operate well in all positions so they should be avoided. An exception to this would be a "port-a-power" set which uses a remote pump. These tend to be large and not as dependable as mechanical jacks but they can do some amazing things in a small space.
- B) Twenty wooden wedges. A good size would be 3 inches wide by 8 inches long by 1 inch thick and made from oak*. These wedges will allow shimming and wedging rock that may be unstable. They also can back up progress made with jacks and be used to favorably position jacks when jacking surfaces are slightly out of parallel. They can be used as cribbing when stacked in "opposition" to themselves (thin end on fat end).

I would encourage the reader to play with these tools and feel free to add any other equipment they think important to this short list. This is meant as only a minimum but bear in mind that if the "Crunch Pack" gets too big it may not always make it to the dig where it may be needed quickly. If you need something quickly you'll need it that much more.

These tools are for dealing with rock and in the case of an engulfment buried by loose materials, the victim is more likely to suffocate from lack of air or an inability to breathe because of compression from the engulfing materials. Obviously in these situations you will only have at most a few minutes to act before the incident becomes fatal. Engulfment should be carefully guarded against as it is most often fatal. Commercial excavators are bound by many safety rules as a result of hundreds of fatalities from engulfment incidents.

Since diggers have higher risk than the general caving population (excluding divers) it would also seem reasonable that they should gain some cave rescue knowledge and certainly some practical first-aid training to offset this risk. If you find yourself needing to call for help in a dig accident the combination of rescue training and digging skills seems far more likely to lead to a good outcome. Besides the rescue community will gain from your participation and I believe you will too. I know that the people that responded to my incident were far better diggers than rescuers and had I not been able to direct my own rescue the outcome might not have been as favorable. If nothing else it would have taken much longer, which in my case might have led to further damage to my right arm. This is debatable of course and by no means meant as criticism. I was really glad they were there.

This leads me to the last big point I want to make in this paper and that is what cave rescue circles refer to as "psychological considerations." After I realized just how serious a situation I was in, I became extremely focused on figuring out how to solve my dilemma. In retrospect this seems like a defense mechanism and a good one at that. The greatest threat to that focus was the look of fear in the eyes of my rescuers in the early stages. When I encountered this I could feel my resolve weaken quite noticeably and only through sheer stubbornness was able to maintain my commitment to free myself. Conversations about how bad things look are counterproductive to someone who needs help obviously but your patient may pick up on your fear in ways that are more subtle. If possible this should be guarded against. What is required is a kind of professional "can do" attitude grounded in competence and the confidence experience yields. Fear has no place in rescue only because it tends to degrade I.Q. and erode the necessary confidence a patient needs; concern on the other hand is the reason anyone gets rescued, a thin and difficult line to walk.

I hope this has been of some use to you; my apologies for stating the obvious if it has seemed that way. My intent was to share my experience and conclusions with you in the hope that my words might spare someone this ordeal. DIG SAFELY!

Afterword

Since the events of 10/1/02, there have been two trips into what is indeed Maxwelton Sink Cave so all our efforts have not been in vain. We are working on a new, more stable entrance at which time, hopefully later this year, the cave will at last be open.

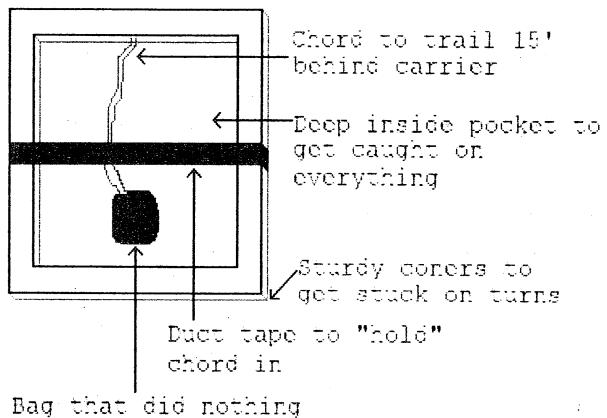
*Larry Fisher has made up 100 of these oak wedges which are available as a service to the digging and cave rescue community at cost from BMS for \$1 each plus shipping. Call 304-497-4311 for details.

Starnes Radiolocation

By Matthew Burnett

If you go to the back of Starnes, you have come to Lost Promise. There is no mistaking that Lost Promise comes extremely close to the surface. You can see surface debris all over the place, there is a temperature change and you can actually smell the surface air. Since Philip's cave radio proved successful, he now wanted someone else to carry that damned thing to the back of Starnes and see exactly how close to the surface Lost Promise is.

The radio consisted of coil of wire contained in a wooden rectangular box that measured 16 x 19.5 x 2 (see diagram) that was the antenna, a battery and a switching box. I sought reassurance that these items could be beaten soundly and still work. Philip said everything but the switching box could. Well, we would see exactly how much abuse that switching box could take.



On Saturday, March 15, Kevin Rock, Kara Smith, Kathy Despain and I set off for Starnes. The plan was that we would get underground at 10 AM, get to the Plinkerboing at 1 PM and Lost Promise an hour later. The Plinkerboing shot was to be an orienting shot so the surface crew would know roughly where we were and when to expect us at Lost Promise.

As expected we did not get underground until somewhere around 10:30 (and no, it was not because I was watching Mystery Science Theater 3000). We decided to travel relatively light that day: each person would be responsible for their own food, water and vertical gear but we would share lamp equipment and extra gear, like webbing. Faced with the Humble Pie crawl, I decided to strip my gear down further and ditch my usual steel rack in favor of an eight and my frog in favor of a more compact knots system.

I had even cut a new piece of rope for the 30ft drop. My usual rig is a 50ft piece and, if you rig it just right, you get the thrill of rappelling off the end of it and dropping to the floor. If you rig it wrong, then you get the thrill of rappelling off the end of it and falling to the floor. No such adventure today.

We entered the Humble Pie with the usual high amount of regret for going to the back of Starnes. Kathy and Kara had never been to through the Humble Pie so Kevin and I briefed them on what to expect and how to carry their equipment. Because I have what is known in medical circles as weak little girly arms, I generally attach my gear to a quick link in my shoelaces and drag it through the crawl. With my pack and all of Philip's junk attached to my right foot I found I could barely move it. Kathy wrapped her pack strap around her ankle while Kara and Kevin were manlier than I and decided to largely push their packs.

I cannot offer much detail about the crawl as the view is fairly limited for most of it. I went first and Kara volunteered to go behind me and free up my equipment when it would get stuck. The antenna box was brilliantly designed with a large square cut out of the middle of it that catches on any little

extrusion beautifully so I managed to keep her busy. Kathy followed her and Kevin took up the rear. As much as possible we would point out the sights of the crawl like the Mr. Yuck dig (Casket Crawl), the Humble Pie marker, Dave C.'s and Kirk's mark and mini Stonehenge. Almost every feature of that passage has a name.

We were moving at a good pace through the crawl but we could not overcome our late start. We were halfway through the crawl when we should have been at the Plinkerboing. Stupid radio antenna. Stupid Philip. Once we made it through to the Andrews Dice and Clay room we pushed ahead to the Plinkerboing and started to work. Kevin set up the radio antenna while I messed with rigging the Plinkerboing. Kathy and Kara were kind enough to recharge everyone's lamps and grabbed something to eat while we were waiting. Someone also made a really cool frog-looking clay formation to mark the spot of the radio.

The Plinkerboing had taken on a lot of water recently so the entire slope was extremely slick. That also meant that my nice new rope was now a solid rod of mud. Blegh! I am of the opinion that new bolts need to be set at the drop higher so you do not have to slide in the mud to rappel. That sentiment was echoed later as everyone climbed out. For the first time that I remember you dropped more mud off the Plinkerboing drop than rocks.

The Plinkerboing drop has a midline bolt in it to avoid padding the lip of the drop. I warned Kara and Kathy not to get confused with the ropes but did not feel the need to warn Kevin since he had done it before. Silly me. We got to watch him do some pretty cool rope acrobatics as his leg got caught in the bight. It was good for a few minutes amusement at least. Once he was through screwing around I asked how much time we had to get to Lost Promise. He said we had something like fifteen minutes to make it up the breakdown slope and be in position. Damn Philip.

All of us started sprinting up the breakdown in a feeble attempt to make it to the top in time. There really isn't too much horizontal distance from the Plinkerboing to Lost Promise, but you have to go up this rather steep breakdown pile. The breakdown pile is usually slick, but with the recent rains it was almost impossible to climb up. I made it a quarter of the way up before getting stuck. Kara and Kathy wisely decided to wait at the bottom and probably laugh at Kevin and I while we fell.

I would try and dig out footholds but the mud was too soft to really support my weight and would give way sending me sliding down the slope. Lucky for me there was a rock that I could always catch myself on so I would not lose all my progress. It is a sick thing to consider repeatedly taking a large rock to the groin, but such is my experience in Starnes.

Getting up that breakdown the traditional way was just not going to work so I called Kevin over and we made our own trail up the right wall. You might be thinking to yourself, "I love scurrying over breakdown." I did as well until I went to Starnes. This isn't nice happy Tawney's breakdown—these are really big rocks that you have to extend yourself fully and expose yourself to face plants to get up. Throw some very slimy mud into the mix and it just sucks. The radio sucked as well. As did Philip.

We finally made our way to level ground and up to Lost Promise. I found survey point SQ 20 and I was all ready to use that but it was about a hundred feet or more from the end of the cave and there are points in Lost Promise that were much closer to the surface. I collapsed into a heap while Kevin looked around for another point. When he could not quickly find one, we decided to set up at the given point because it was already recorded and close enough to get a rough idea of where everything should be on the surface.

We left the radio on for thirty minutes while looking around the room. Kevin spotted some hay in the puddles and looked around for some daylight. It is so close to the surface, but it just will not open a second entrance for us. I blame Philip.

Getting down the breakdown was much easier than getting up, let me tell you. All you had to do was position yourself just right and make sure you did not slide too far too fast. As we were climbing up the free climb above the Plinkerboing, Kevin noted a large crash and lots of rolling noises from the breakdown area. Apparently something big had fallen in the breakdown area not too long after we had left. Damn Philip and his radio antenna.

As we headed back into the crawl, Kathy had the unenviable job of fixing the radio antenna every time it got stuck. Look at the map—the Pennsylvania Borehole it quite twisty. The stupid thing got stuck every few feet. I bet Kathy regretted the decision to follow me almost immediately because dealing with that antenna sucked almost as much as Philip does. I tried my best to splinter that thing, but Wells made it too well. He earned many curses back there as well.

As I went through this funky downward pinch just past the Pennsylvania Borehole, Kathy called up to me to tell me one of my steel toes fell out. Woohoo! My boots finally died and it was an honorable death! I made them carry my steel toe up to me as the antenna was stuck behind me and there was no hope of me freeing it by myself. I still have my steel toe in my cave gear as an odd trophy.

It was about seven or eight hours into the trip at that point and everyone was starting to get worn down. We redistributed the gear to the pack mules (why do you think we invited Kathy and Kara anyway?) and split up to save time. Kevin and Kara crawled ahead to the 30ft drop while Kathy and I took our time wrestling with the

radio gear. Philip sucks as does his cursed radio equipment!

We made it out after around eleven hours underground. None of us were all that lively, but we all made it out under our own power. Unfortunately, the radio equipment made it out as well. We had seriously contemplated leaving it in there for Philip to take out, but we knew that he would just make us get it. Talking with Philip later he seemed quite happy with the points we set and it was a successful trip above ground as well. The only bad aspect was he was happy that the equipment was in as good a shape as it was. We tried really hard to break it because Philip sucks, but I guess we failed in that respect.

The next day Kevin, Philip and I started talking about taking another trip to the back to mark the “fingers” of Lost Promise. Sick, sick, sick.

Adopt-a-Trainee

By John Booker

Blacksburg offered some interesting caving trips during spring break. During a trip to Clover Hollow, Aaron inspired a great new idea for moving trainees through their requirements faster: steal their stuff.

The impetus comes from Aaron turning around and leaving a trip early due to prior engagements and driving off with Brian McCarter's and my own personal belongings, such as house keys. Left homeless, we were subjected to a horrible night of only cavers for company! Luckily we realized that we actually enjoyed it. A good time was had by all, and since we were homeless, we stayed at Kirk's and did some vertical practice the next day. Sadly, Aaron's true mistake was not when he pilfered our gear, but instead that he returned it too soon. Had he not, Brian and I would have been members long before you read this article. Kidnapping trainees and putting them through a rigorous boot camp is a surefire way to have them secure their membership in a matter of weeks, minus the minimum week requirement. I humbly propose the implementation of a new program I call, "Adopt-a-Trainee."

Enrollment is simple. At least two members take a trainee on a trip, with one of them arranging to leave early with the trainee's belongings. What if the trainee drives themselves? Well, part of this program is to ensure that this does not happen. Some ways to avoid this scenario are to carpool under the excuses that either the trainee doesn't know the location, or that the trainee's vehicle cannot make it to the cave. Do not allow the trainee to drive lest you grant them an avenue of escape! Once the trainee is secured, commence the transfer of caver knowledge immediately. Do not allow them time to ask such questions as, "Is this legal?" "Where did my money go?" or "Did you eat my medication?" They are only trying to distract you from completing your mission. And so it begins...

Day One-Vertical Work

Climbing and rappelling basics should be covered in the first two hours. Next comes advanced underground condition simulation. Tell the trainee the complications involved in rigging near a waterfall, then show him with a garden hose (Which brings me to a side point, the club should purchase a hose that can reach to the quarry). Next allow time for lunch. Again, don't let them deceive you, one bowl of gruel is plenty enough. Then it's back for changeovers and rebelay's.

Day Two-Indoctrination

Clockwork Orange Style. A video encompassing safety techniques, caving etiquette, landowner relations, and all around caver values will be shown. To be absolutely sure the trainee is paying attention, the methods that proved so effective in A Clockwork Orange will be employed.

Day Three-Caving

This is where the trainee will show if foregoing sleep for the previous two days was worth it. Everything they learned in the past two days must be demonstrated. Rigging, rope climbing, rappelling, change-overs, and elementary climbing will be a breeze. Actual caving experience is nice, but it's no match for 48 continuous hours of demonstrations and lectures!

Day Four- Regurgitation

Knowledge is power, and today will be the day to see if the trainee is weak or strong. All the various tests will start at dawn. There will be no breakfast before the carbide lamp is assembled.

Individual mouthfuls of food will be awarded for each knot passed.

Days Five through Seventy- Anticipation

Sit tight and wait for your ten weeks to be up! Oh, and go caving.

And just think! A Trog article will be easy for the trainee to write after this! Besides, the Trog needs more threats and notices of class-action lawsuits. On a more serious note, I think we, the trainees, would benefit from a little more structure in the training program. Kidnappings are probably not the best way to achieve this goal, nor is some sort of boot camp. More events like quarry sessions and knot-tying parties would go a long way towards reducing the time taken to obtain membership.

Club Members Attend 5th Annual YTR

By Michael Cole

This year marked the 5th Annual Young Timers Reunion which was held in April at the WVACS field station in Greenbrier County, WV. Several cavers from VPI attended and, once again, had a great time hanging out and meeting cavers from other student grottos. Everyone from VPI went caving on Saturday. Members broke up into several groups or joined other groups leading trips. Some of the caves visited by members included McClung's, Benedict's, Bone-Norman, and Cass.



Friday night, everyone spent some time by the campfire listening to Kirk, Chris Michie, and Dave Colatosti play guitar. Later in the evening, several members joined in a wild game of Janga. The Janga game was made more interesting by writing embarrassing tasks on each piece, which had to be done when the piece was selected. The game was a lot of fun and lasted for a long time, but was finally brought to an end when Kirk knocked over the Janga tower.

Saturday night there was a live band from Radford who played inside the field station. During the band's break, there was a raffle for a large assortment of prizes. Many VPI members won Nalgene bottles, hats or shirts. Chris won a Kong carabiner and Kirk won a caving pack from Howie's Harnesses.

This year's YTR marked one of the largest ever. The WVACS site is reaching its capacity, and so alternative sites may be considered next year. Wherever it ends up, it is an event not to miss next year.

Editor's Note: I merely attempted at shortening this journal by chopping away paragraphs. I did no content-tinkering or punctuation editing whatsoever (to keep its authenticity). Readers beware. Some parts may be quite graphic.

El Tripo de los Quatro Barrachos 2002-2003

By Alison Williams, Chris Rourke, Brian Ekey, and Eric Stanley

=PRE-TRIP=

12/26/02 Evening, odo: 0

Pack the van? Or drink and play darts? Not hard to guess which side of this dilemma won. There will be plenty of time tomorrow to pack and recover from our hangovers.

-Alison

12/27/02 1200 hrs, odo: 0, Bowel Status: Like Clockwork

T -5 hours till 'imaginary' departure. Well, today started with John's clutch blowing out and the trip being delayed slightly. All I can say is it's a damn good thing. The car never would have been ready for the trip if we really had to leave in 5 hours. I think it's all a big scam and everyone just told me we were leaving today so I'd be ready when we really leave tomorrow.

-Ekey

=DEPARTURE AND ACTUAL TRIP=

Starting Mileage: 116388; Starting Time: 12/28/02, 1418 hrs; Starting Cavers: 10

12/28/02 1418 hrs, odo: 0, Bowel Status: Normal

We're finally off. Departing Wal-Mart with a minivan equipped with all the latest in barracho technology. Johnny Cash is playing on the stereo, the gps's are tracking, and the hula girl is doing her little dashboard dance. Life is good.

Chris

12/28/2002 1924 hrs, odo: 288? (390), Bowel Status: normal

Ekey status- as good as it gets

I find myself in almost the same spot I was last year. Sitting in the car with 2 smelly people I call friends, but alas, this year there is another. With this journey to the land of caves and cheep beer the Alison has earned her spot as a true buracho. Yet I have not decided if her presence will be a help or a hindrance. But this late start did afford me an extra night of drinking in the burg and a really nice headache to start my trip with. Given that the truth of the matter is that I really don't have anyone but myself to blame for my hangover, and that I don't want to accept the truth, I will blame her. Since we inducted a new buracho, we had to have more room in the car. To accomplish this task we stole Ekey's sister's minivan. And since we had to out-do our trip from last year we had to equip it with more toys. This years Mexico wagon sport 2 captops (laptops), 2 dash mounted GPS units, 2 AC power inverters, 2 digital cameras, a mini-fridge, a dash mounted hula girl and of course, a stuffed squirrel. As the hash marks on the road pass by and I reflect of last year's trip I can see that many things have not changed. Road trips with friends are the greatest thing ever, playing solitaire on the way to Mexico is still fun, and even a "clean Ekey" still smells bad.

—EKS

12/28/02 2100 err no... 2000 hrs, odo: 437, Bowel Status: Still Normal

State numero tres: Ala-stupid-bama. The best thing about this state is the time zone change so I get another hour of sleep. We've rotated drivers once now and had dinner. All the gear in the car has already exploded and taken up all the spare space. There is no beer at all in the car. At least Hula Girl looks happy. Time for me to snooze so I can get up tomorrow morning and take another shift.

-Ekey

12/29/02 0100 hrs, odo: 760, Bowel Status: Pressurized

Still cruising through Alamissippiana, the giant dark state between Tennessee and Texas. Seems like the drivers are getting more worse, though Enrique is holding steady for now. Meanwhile, bastard Ekey sits in the back oblivious. I hate Ekey. Wait, now bastard Ekey is talking. I wish he'd go back to sleep. Bastard. Bastardress Alison also sleeps. Semi-bastard (not entirely unsure of his paternity) Enrique smokes cigarette while following erratic deighanette. We've also reached the sectiono bumpity-bump interstate, which is hard on the passengers, but hula girl seems to be enjoying it. We are incidentally taking a new and semi-planned detour on this trip through New Orleans. We may be stopping for gas as we pass through, and its my understanding that we'll have to pay with beads. (Note that the "we" would have been the "me", but fortunately they accepted Deighan's credit card instead...okay so they insisted on it...-Alison)

-Chris

12/29/02 0605 hrs

Detour Ahead. Maybe Mexico is closed...check back soon.

-Alison

12/29/02 1055 hrs, odo: 1164, Bowel Status: Regular

I hate Te-has. At least it's 75 Deg F outside and the AC works. Stupid flat state. It's a good thing they outlawed snow, because the kids would have no place to sled. With the mini-van repaired and 1/2 the barrachos asleep we are in a power saving mode in preparation for Bar-B-Q and a border cross. I can see to the horizon in every direction. Forecast: 100% chance of flat. Would you like flat with that? Paper or flat? Someone should buy me an airplane.

-Ekey

12/29/02 2100 hrs, odo: 1578, Bowel status: Respectably equal and reactive x 4

Finally here and on the road to Victoria. The first beer is now opened along with a resounding chorus of OYTFAB. A relatively slight delay at the border is now only a memory as we are out of Matamoros and speeding along a fine Mexican road. Where else can you drive along with a beer and an open sliding door in the minivan while traveling along the highway? Spirits are high, the tres barrachos have been waiting to be back all year and the quattro barracho has fallen in love with this place already. Can't wait to see the place in the daylight.

Ekey says Tommy the Canexican and damn I love Mexico.

-Alison

12/31/02 2025 hrs, odo: 1942, Bowel Status: Solid Plastic

Wobble Wobble Shimmy Shake Wobble Shimmy Wobble Jiggle Wobble Bob Wobble.

-Hula Girl

01/01/03 1433 hrs, odo: 2037, Bowel Status: I'm invincible!

Wow, a New Year in Mexico, and the rest of the world too I assume. I've been doing most of the Mexico driving because I love the lack of traffic laws/rules/regulations. The two and a half lane roads almost allow for a passing lane. You sort of request space from oncoming traffic with your high beams and then pray. Whoops, time to go, write more later... OK Back in style. The car is turned around and we are ready to go, waiting on the other cars. I would explain why we are waiting, but it will probably get me in trouble. So here's the deal: I'll write it down here, but if it is missing in the final edit, you'll know it was too bad to print. Aaron found a local girl last night in the middle of the new year's bash. He went home with her, and now doesn't want to leave her. Now he is negotiating so that she can come spend the night with us at 'drinas. OK we're leaving. I can't type as much as I want because I'm driving. Oh well. Was the middle of my entry deleted? Probably. [editor's note: yes indeed it was]

-Ekey

01/04/03 odo: 2028, Bowel Ststus: Still oh so much better than the USA

In the time since I last found the motovation to type, quite a bit has happened that is worth making fun of people for. Our drop into Golindrinas was 100% successful. All cavers made it to the bottom of the pit, and during my short stay I decided bird pictures would be really nice to have. As if to tell me how they felt about this idea, as soon as I rased my camera a bird took a huge SHIT on my face. While I saw this as the low point of my trip, Chris saw it as the high point and took my picture. After a nice dinner in the pit and Chris and I's climb out of 56 min most people past right out. In the morning I took down the rig Ekey had made. By far the biggest pit I have ever rigged without someone I percive as knowing lots more than I do around to tell my if I was fucking up. But we all seem to be alive. Now we are off to the Bird House, and best of all a shower.

-EKS

01/04/03 odo: 2048, Bowel Status: not disgruntled, but not entirely gruntled either

Well that's the caving part of the trip. The drive up to 'drinas was thrilling, with a number of prayers said to the god of Chryslers when the transmission started transmitting intermitted. Met a fascinating guy from Mexico City who teaches english. His english was good and his knowledge of American literature and cinema put me to shame. Cepilla remains a fantastic cave, with a rappel just big enough to really enjoy the trip down, but not as big as to make the climb out any more than a minor pain in the ass. Golondrinas was a good time. While I rappelled, 3 Texas cavers were frogging out (at the same time). As I passed by, not going too fast, I noticed that they were rocketing up rope at amazing speed. Fun with perspective, and good to get a better idea how fast the bottom is coming up at me. Played around in the bottom for a bit waiting for 2 pairs of climbers to go up. Lots of picture taking. Barrachos had a nice in pit dinner of MRE's. For the first time on this trip I had a chance to read the book I bought, though only for about 5 minutes. Then it was time to gear up and get out of the pit. Eric did a good job of keeping me climbing and therefore unhappy. Climb out in the dark is pretty odd, nice, but in a nauseating way. Didn't vomit on the rope though. Finally reached the top, enjoyed half a beer then let the bottle slip from my hands, committing a grande Mexico foul.

Chris

01/06/03 odo: 2073, Bowel Status: The eye of the storm?

After aquismon we headed off to xilitla, reputed to be a paradise of beds and showers. It did not disappoint, and by dinner time we were looking and smelling better. We had dinner in the snootiest restaurante in town. Alison and I split a pizza with sausage, bacon, and fire on it. My bowels laughed

at my feeble attempts to lull them back to sleep with pepto and by our 'party on the roof' they were in full rebellion. Still, as having the bad bano disease goes, this wasn't too bad. Personally, I felt fine, like a normal healthy person who happens to occasionally spray burning shit out his ass. I managed to timed things well enough that these little bano breaks didn't interrupt seeing the market on Sunday or visiting Las Pozas. Las Pozas was more or less the same, ie still amazing. I decided this year I would take a lot of tripod shots as some of my photographs from last year had ended up being pretty soft. Lugging a tripod around wasn't thrilling, but hopefully I'll end up with some nice shots.

Chris

01/06/02

Okay, had to stop because minivan became super unhappy. After all of the promising not to take her on bad roads, we convinced her to take us on a horribly bad road to the waterfalls at Tamul. So, after a few miles or so into the trip, the barrachos were walking. At least the three barrachos with the exception of Ekey, who was driving... Eventually, the barrachos decide that it is best to do as Mexicans do and avoid walking the 10 miles to the waterfalls. So, Chris gets on the back tire of the Deighan mobile, Eric rides the crap on top of Travis' vehicle like a horse (complete with webbing reigns and lots of hat waving), and I climb onto the back bumper of Travis' vehicle and hold onto the roof rack. An exciting way to ride 8 miles of bad Mexican roads, especially when holding onto the car with one hand and trying to drink a beer with the other. After 4 beers I either got better at holding on with one hand or I stopped caring if I got thrown off the bumper.

-Alison

01/07/03 odo: 2113, Bowel Status: Steady as she goes...

After a longer than planned stay in Xilitia due to the need for sleep, we set off to see Tamul's waterfalls. After giving the minivan another beating we reached our river side camp site. We had a nice camp Mexican meal, shot off some Mexican fireworks and sat around the fire. Right as I had about all the beer there was to be had, and all the rest of the van was asleep, I started to make my way too the tent. As soon as I arrived a light rain had picked up to become a hard shower. And as I opened the tent door I heard the cry to "ABANDON SHIP". As it turns out, our nice new Sears tent was not very water proof AT ALL. So Ekey and I opted to sleep in the trusty minivan and Chris and Alison decided to set up another tent drunk in the rain. As morning and the Mexicans who were to take us to the falls came, we were of course way behind. But we did make it to the falls, and they did really kick ass. And then they took us to a cave that was good for swimming and jumping off of the walls into. As we left we once again pushed the minivan to its very limits trying to leave. Now we are heading toward the coast and to see the pyramids.

-EKS

01/08/03 1115 hrs, odo: 2343, Bowel Status: What the hell? I should start drinking the water.

Tuxpan is icky...I am looking forward to heading back towards small towns. And apparently no one really knows the name of this town either. Half of the signs, posters, and t-shirts say Tuxpan and the other half say Tuxpam. Maybe that is how they distinguish the tourists from the locals. We paddled 2 wooden boats upriver and stopped at a convenient rock in the middle of the river that had a gorgeous view of the 300' cascades de Tamul. Maybe next year we will rappel from the top. Even more fun was the stop on he paddle back which had a short walk up a hill to a cave entrance. The cave was filled with water (supposedly 120' deep according to the guides) and made for a nice swimming hole. We also found the highest point possible to jump off of into the water. Not being one for jumping off high places and falling for long distances, I took a little convincing. I finally jumped, fell

into the water, survived, and was glad that I did it. Okay, finally out of the city now after hours of trying to get the group moving and on the road to El Tajin. Can't wait to see the pyramids and hopefully the weather will clear up or at least not rain. We are now on the Mexican superhighway that just cost us 21 pesos but it is actually a divided 4 lane highway with a speed limit of 110 km/hr. Amazing. Of course it would have been even more amazing if we had gotten on the road hours ago...at least our car wasn't the girls of the trip this morning. And it gave us time to yet again see Mexico from the rooftop. What a great country...

-Alison

01/08/03 odo: 2358

Bowel Status: Extremely non-constipated

Leaving tamipux now for the pyramids on a Mexican interstate. The road is reasonably smooth, but Mexicans still haven't quite grasped the concept of a limited access highway. There are numerous right angle turns off the road, vehicles parked on the shoulder, and as I write this we have just passed two improvised fruit stands. All this on a road that cuts dead straight across the country at 75 MPH. The weather looks like its lifting now, which will hopefully make for a nice afternoon at the pyramids. The group has once again gotten a late start, though thankfully not due to our car dragging ass. My bowels feel a bit better today, though much of that is due to skipping breakfast. But apart from the occasional need to repaint a toilet, I'm doing alright.

01/08/03 Bowel Status: I am the king of well formed shit

Ok, so i saw some old stuff. It didn't really look as good as new stuff, so I don't really know what the big deal is. But Alison did find her dogs long lost brother. It even had a really nice prance. Then I bought some hippie shit. Even better than old shit was the kick ass food we got in what ever the hell town this is. Other than the good food, the coast of Mexico is dirty, crowed and lame. I met some hippies from the land up north at dinner. They made me feel dumb because they could speak french, english and spanish. Once again, the sun is setting, we have no place to camp and I need more beer. The mini van found Travis, so that's good. Ekey still looks silly, Chris still has the bad shits, Alison has my hat, and I have nothing more to say.

-EKS

I am Ekye's feral facial hair. I am Chris's rageing bowels. I am Alison's undying optimism. I am Eric's enduring negativity. I am MEXICO.

01/08/03

LOST all has gone to shit in the last 30 min. We lost Travis, lost John, found Travis, lost Travis again, found John and now are looking for Travis, again. As Alison put it, "even a 5 year old can make it back to the point they last saw their parents". The same does not at all seem to be true of cars of 20 somethings in Mexico.

God save the king!

-The Minivan

01/09/03 odo: 2593, Bowel Status: No news is good news

Pounding down the road for Victoria. Trying to keep Ekey's wild driving in check, but today he is feeling chuffed. It doesn't help that deighan is setting a terrible example making numerous crazy passes. The best was when he tried to pass a sedan, a truck, and a military check point in one go. Apparently when you consider crossing against the solid line AND the cones, it angers the soldiers. Luckily he swerved back just in time to have an animated chat with a gentleman in olive drab and get

searched. The mini-vini was waved through after Ekey's brief but expert impression of a dumb tourista for the soldier. The mexi-taxi (Travis's car) also got a brief search, but with time, both of our companion vehicles cleared the checkpoint. Anyway, we're hoping to get to the cenotes (like pits, only wet) today, but as usual we got a late start from the beach, so we'll have to see. The beach was a trip with the only downer being that we ran out of alcohol before I was sufficiently drunk and before Aaron was on his knees praying for the stream of vomit to stop. Which reminds me, we must not forget to hit up a deposito for tonight.

Chris

01/09/03 odo: 2610, Bowel Status: Rusted and fatigued

I hate them. Giant sacks of blood and bone, so heavy. They bring so much gear. They tell so many lies. "This road won't be as bad", "There shouldn't be any more bumps", "I'll try and avoid that sharp rock". I tell you I am about seven topos away from losing my temper. What? I have to change gears again?? God damnit, ok, ok, but you'll have to wait a minute.

-Minivan

01/10/03 odo: 2806, Bowel Status: still offline

Well we're making our final run for the border. Spent a night in Victoria, had an absolutely lousy dinner. I think they picked the place based on Aaron's conclusion that they served both corona and vampiro there. This conclusion was in turn based on Aaron's Spanish, which also led him to order a hotdog when he meant to get soup. So my last Mexican beer will be a modelo in a can. Oh well. I'll make it up to myself by stocking up on liquor at the El Walmarto we're going to hit before the border. For now I'll be content with a high speed bouncy Mexican road, and a reoccurring cover of 'Lime in the Coconut' by the Muppets that keeps running through my head.

Chris

01/10/03 odo: 2902, Bowel Status: I have traded my MADE IN THE USA stamp for a PRODUCT OF MEXICO stamp.

As we leave Mexico, it looks the same, burning and poor. But now I know I have to go back to school and the sudo-real world of college. Why we ever leave Mexico, I dont know, but i think it has something to do with being poor. I have learned this year that the lime is the best fruit in Mexico. The mexican have Lime everything. It is in the chips, on the meat they cook, they put it in all the beer, the even sell it in the mayonaise. From here on out, i will cook everthing with lime. I think the van breaks, we will put lime on it and it will be just fine again.

-EKS

1/10/03 odo: 3000, Bowel Status: I'm in the land of the free and the nation of toilets with seats. I fear nothing.

We're back in the states. The minivinnie luck of avoiding searches ran out though. We alone got pulled by US customs. But, aside from checking our ID's and having us pull a few bags out, they searched nothing. A guy asked us a few questions about caving, decided we were genuine, and passed us through. On the bright side, we had a few stray minutes to repack the car, plus, they forgot to charge us the tariff on our 6.75 liters of alcohol. Anyway, we're heading north now on Texas 77 with the Deighan car behind us and the Mexican taxi.. well, we're not quite sure where they are now. But they should catch up when the minivan finally gives up the ghost and drops it tranny.

Chris

01/10/03 odo: 3090

LOST...Travis is gone again. I think we realized about 30 miles down the road. He even thought we were going to come back to find him. The minivini is racing for home...there is no turning back now....

-Alison

01/10/03 odo: 3142

Ha Ha! I am finally back in the US after hauling around 4 smelly, dirty gringos for days on end in the minivan-unfriendly country of Mexico. They even gave me a black eye by running over a stupid retread on the road and breaking my pretty turn signal and fog light. That is definitely going to leave a mark. Even my friendly blue rescue squad plate decided to jump ship and become Mexican roadside trash than travel with these stupid people. Wanna know the secret for getting silly gringos to take you home? I turned on my "check engine" light and it totally freaked them out. They finally stopped and gave me some more oil. I guess that made me happy for a while, but they still hadn't gotten me out of this tope-ridden country. Turned it on one more time and they finally took the hint and took me back to my native soil. I am in Texas, but am now at least hopeful for a return to Blacksburg and my owner who treats me like the dainty vehicle I am.

-The Minivan

01/10/03 1935 hrs, odo: 3156

I continue to drive, but now I have found typist. Alison will type whatever I say, even if I go on and on and on and on and on and on. I can't believe she typed that. I can't believe she typed that either. Wow, Alison is so nice (stupidhead). I can't believe she typed that either. Do not type that part. Ok, um, no stop typing. I hate Chris. Travis' car is fixed. Minivini is very happy. Only day and a half til Blacksburg. Dinner soon all is well. Only thing better than flat Texas is, well, everything.

-Ekey

01/11/03 1815 hrs odo: 4422

Back in VA! 110 miles left to go and the minivan is getting mad. Ekey thinks the check engine light is getting redder. No sooner than getting back to VA did we manage to find a worse driver than almost anyone other than Ekey in Mexico. After at least 5 unsuccessful attempts to pass our mean-looking minivini on the right, this girl finally gave up and left the interstate. We are preparing for a DBOS since the Deighanettes are excited to be close to the burg. Yet again we have lost Travis. Actually we lost him within the first mile or two after leaving our last gas stop in TN, but we are just now feeling guilty enough to make some feeble attempts to contact them on the radio and now figure they will turn up in Blacksburg sometime. The minivan will revolt at any attempt to turn back south. And it is equally likely that Travis and Amanda let Aaron drive while they slept and he turned the rocket ship back towards Huichiyan. I am looking forward to getting out of the car in Blacksburg, but am not looking forward to the cold temperature and the return to real life. I miss Mexico already. Time for a the-trip-is-not-really-over-yet drinking fest at the Ton...just like drinking in Mexico only more expensive, not outside, and quite a few more dirty gringo cavers. End of log for me...

-Alison

How bout you just record some of our wittier statements. Hey stupid. No tu. No tu. Punch equals punch. Asshat. My asshat is bigger than your asshat. I imagine that it is at least it is a couple of sizes larger. At least mine smells better. Bet you washed it in your dainty mcdainty. Ekey is the sexual gratification built into Kristi's dainty mcdainty. That is why the sent me, I am an expert. Ekey is a

rocket with a short stick and fuse. No wait, Ekey is one of those rockets you put water in and pump up. Everyone is just jealous of Ekey. No, that seemed to inspire laughter. Finally. Silence.

1/11/03 2020 hrs, odo: 4504

The last 20 miles from home seem so slow. Each mile seems longer than the last. We are heading to the Ton for darts and the end of the trip. It is time to reflect on the things I learned this year:

1) In Mexico when you use the bathroom your friends ask, "how did it go?" when you are done. If it wen well you are proud, if not you hsng your head in shame. In the US this is just not normal.

2)In Mexico, if you are not drinking a beer in the car, you must be sick. In the US if you drink a beer you must have a sick jail wish.

3) TO live dangerous in Mexico you eat your veggies, in the US you cant live dangouously while having dinner.

4)In Mexico I am a rich rich man. In the US I am a poor college student.

-EKS

1/11/03 2100 hrs, odo: 4522, Bowel Status: As good as new

Exit 118B, and it looks like the minnie vinnie may make it after all. We're settling on "Huichyan again? (almost 110% return rate)" for the signout quote. I'm tired, foul smelling, sore and ready to get a few beers at the ton. Just enough time now to play ring of fire one last time and sign this entry.

Chris

--End of trip--

Ending Mileage: 120922; Ending Time: 01/11/03, 2118 hrs; Ending Cavers: 10 (100%) - almost 11 (110%)

Well, that's the happy ending to another Barracho trip to Mexico. All in all:

Total Miles: 4534

Total Time: 14 days, 7 hours

Total Photos: >2,000 (that's right, more than two thousand)

Total Car Problems: 7

- 1) Pathfinder Check Engine light comes on, then goes out
- 2) Two new tires for Minivan @ Wal-Mart
- 3) Minor Minivan VS drunken Mexican driver parking mishap
- 4) Minivan refuses to shift out of neutral en route to Golandrinias
- 5) All the cars smash a re-tread on Mexican superhighway; Minivan suffers broken fog light & turn signal
- 6) Minivan says check engine, requires a quart of oil
- 7) 4-Runner fan stops, radiator splits a seam
- 8) Pathfinder runs over metal something and blows a tire

Beef--It's what's for Dinner

Photos by Christina Lee

I just have one thing to say: I did not touch the cow. I did not touch the cow. I did not touch the cow.



Aaron knows his bondage knots



Kevin Rock, Mike Horne and Aaron Thomas haul up yet another misplaced calf corpse from a sink hole.



Somebody's finger ended up in the eye socket.



One Shake 'n Bake Calf with lime

Grotto Grapevine

By A.I. Cartwright

Merry Couplings

After a relatively quiet fall, several new bonding pairs have emerged. Joe Thompson & Kelly Rose are getting married this May. Kristen Matak and her boyfriend are talking marriage. And after a brief courtship, Kenny married a girl he met after calling the Victoria's Secret Customer Service credit card helpline.

Meanwhile

Aarron Thomas brings Felicia to Banquet, meets Esperanzana in Mexico, brings Sarah to Dave C's garage warming party and has since been seen with Julie, Bonnie, Jessica, Laura and Mother Theresa. Speaking of Dave C., he has a new garage complete with rope-running capabilities. However, he and Patricia didn't have a chance to "christen" it because another couple got it on--I mean, got on it, first.

Moving On and Moving In

Have Amanda Stiles & Travis Coad have broken up again? Wait, I thought was she moving in with him. Is she? Is he? Are they? Samantha Lambert is moving into the shack with Chris. Their bridge seems stable enough. It won't collapse anytime soon. AND Sam got her membership after four years of hanging around. Just in time for her graduation from Radford. Congratulations Sam! In addition, Kevin Rock is graduating from VPI this spring. However, it seems the townie population is growing. He says he's staying around next year. Lucky for Kara Smith. Katherine Ferguson is back in town on maternity leave. There are speculations of her willingness to quit her 60K job and stay here. If she does, everybody can look forward to having Craig being less crabby. Nikky LaBranche and Brad Atkinson are moving back into town and out of the Doe Creek House. There are numerous speculations on the real reason why.

Weekly Programming

Chip Clark returned to VPI to do a program on cave photography techniques. VPI did a very nice job behaving itself, asking numerous questions. Chip Clark seemed very pleased with VPI this year. The horrendous antics of a few cavers at the Banquet of Spring 2002 has not scarred his memory of VPI. However, could these past antics be one of the many reasons why we had a new location for banquet this year? Banquet was held at Custom Catering Center, without much disturbance. VPI Cavers braved a horrid icestorm to attend. No accidents were reported.

More Calender Events

A big thanks to Chris Michie for taking over Picnic Chairman from Eric Stanley. (Stanley said he would not be attending this year due to prior engagements). He will be missed. Or will he? Another member was missed during a weekend cave club event. One ex-presidente who, "has no responsibilites anymore" did not participate in Road Clean up, although I remember his presence at Easterbeer. Road Clean up went off without a hitch and was completed in less than two hours. Isn't it amazing what can happen when cavers see the beer at the end of the tunnel? Easterbeer was a great success--everyone was nice to each other and the super-cliques did not dominate. Cheers to good times!

Things-a-Changing

Douglas Peterson is alive and well and a freshman at Virginia Tech. But we still haven't seen hide nor hair of him. When will little Dougie show up? Philip Balister has found a new way to make himself useful around the club. He caves without being underground. The development of his cave radiolocation equipment has allowed for other cavers to take grueling trips (see article by Matt Burnet) while Philip remains aboveground. Oh, he also has begun production of LEDs. Our good friend Doug Cole is heading out to San Diego, CA to participate in Project Walk, a clinical program during which we hope he regains more use of his legs. Good luck, Doug!

Club Quotables

Submitted by your “friends”

SW to group: “If *my* ass was sore and there was a half inch gap behind it....”

KD to SW: “That’s gotta be a heart attack in a three inch thing.”

PB to AS: “You think of nothing but alcohol.”

AS to PB: “I like cigarettes, too!”

KC to group: “Well we have about 12 inches so far and it’s still coming. Wheeee!”

SL to group: “Go Dan...wheee!”

SR: “I spilled a doubleshot all over the car.”

KR to group: “I got a big wood.”

JB: “I am not an idiot.”

ME: “Some people need the meanness. Without the meanness, they would not know that they are stupid.”

JB: “She’s got crotchless corduroys.”

KF to KR: “Where’s that finger been?”

From Signout

Compiled by Christina Lee

VPI Cavers and their guests logged 978.5 underground hours from 12/7/02 to 4/13/03.

12/14/02	Starnes	Matt Burnett, Rance Edwards, Dave C., Kevin Rock	Duct Tape: variation on a theme
12/17/02	Links	Chris Michie, Corey Wilkes Zach Harrison	"Dammit stop litin shit on fire!"
01/18/03	Tawneys	Sam Lambert, Chris Garguilo, Carrie Blankenship, Kara Smith	Wow, Chris and three girls.
02/01/03	Tawneys	Matt Burnett, Kathy Despain, Marc Pappers, Dan Saunders	I want to thank you for taking me on my two cave trips: my first and last.
02/02/03	Tawneys	Mike Cole, Dorothy Edwards, Faisal Minhas, Yasir Ahhed, Minh-chau Huynh, Valerie Viti Michael Hofmann, David Spinello	The bat is making noise, maybe it's waking up... —maybe he is just having a bad dream
02/08/03	Links	Kevin Rock, Sam Lambert, Kara Smith, Chris Gargulio, Carrie B.	I have a generator in my crotch. And it doesn't require batteries.
02/22/03	Starnes	Chris Michie, Zach Harrison, Kirk Digby, Mark Garland, Jeff Leach	Waterfall at Cloverhollow. Time passes... *Kirk shudders* Time passes... *Kirk vibrates*
02/28/03	Pig Hole	Kirk Digby, Pam Mohr, Mark Garland	Don't try to understand 'em. Just tie 'em off and land 'em.
03/05/03	TAG	Aaron Thomas, Jen Albanes, Chris Michie	—MISSED SIGNOUT—
03/08/03	James	Brian McCarter, Zach Harrison Travis Coad, John Booker, Christina Lee, Kasey Hopkins, Chris & Shiela Van Londingham	Silence...this is fucking miserable.
03/17/03	Smoke Hole	Matt Burnett, Rance Edwards	C'mon Boxer shorts, work your magic!
03/01/03	Links	Brian Ekey, Paul Santos, Josh Wolfekotte, Jason Mcalinden	I got to level 30 and that makes me the CHAMPION!
04/13/03	Dig near Starnes	Steve Wells, Mark Eisenbees, Sue Setzler, Dave C.	Sue digs almost as well as Matt and Deighan combined.

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