



The Month's Guano

April 2002

Kansas City Area Grotto

Volume 16, Issue 4

Devil's Icebox Bill Pfantz - March 2002

Silently my canoe slipped through the dark cave as the light on my helmet lit the wall and ceiling. Water that dripped off my paddle was the only sound I heard. My mind raced back in time remembering stories of two men who had drowned in this passage! There is a precarious low spot where I need to lie on the bottom of the canoe. Then I see it, a spot where the cave ceiling dropped almost to the water. Cautiously I slipped off the seat and the cold water seeped into my pants. I dropped my head lower as the rock ceiling scraped the lens of my light and carefully my hands pushed the cool, limestone ceiling behind me as I slid once again safely back into the darkness. I raised to the seat rocking the canoe as the water dripped off my pants. My helmet light searched the darkness as the swirl of the paddle kept the canoe in the center of the passage.

My body seemed limp as the silence reminded me that my dream has been fulfilled. For years I've heard stories of the Devil's Icebox, a six mile long cave south of Columbia, MO. Each time I had heard of a planned trip there I had absorbed my disappointment because my work schedule would not grant me freedom. Now that I retired I have no responsibilities and the Caves of Missouri lure me into their darkness.

"Why do you go caving?" a friend asks.

"Because it's there." I reply.

What kind of sickness possessed me that started when in 1946 I went with my parents and sister to Carlsbad Caverns. I had followed the guide closely not understanding what he was saying, but longing to explore the dark passages that beckoned off the trail. "Why can't I go there?" my mind screamed, but I couldn't ask. It would be impolite.

History of Devil's Icebox

I'm sure that Native Americans explored Devil's Icebox as I know they have other caves nearby. How did I know? They had left their marks on the walls. According to Dwight Weaver, recent history states that D. M. Emmet and a friend were the first explorers. In 1893 they said they had traveled two miles into the

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Kansas City Area Grotto is affiliated with the National Speleological Society, The Missouri Speleological Survey, and a Founding Member of Missouri Caves & Karst Conservancy.

Meetings held every second Wednesday at 7 p.m. (**alternate site in May**), Magg Hall, behind Spencer Laboratories, Volker Blvd. & Cherry, Kansas City, Missouri. Annual Dues: \$ 15 for Full Members (3 caving trips with KCAG, nomination and vote of membership required.)

NCRC Callout number Emergency use only

Central Region 502-564-7815. This number may be used for cave rescue emergencies in the states of, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, **Missouri**, Ohio and Wisconsin.

UPCOMING EVENTS

REMEMBER OHG HAS AGGREGATED TO LETS US CAVE WITH THEM. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN A TRIP YOU MUST CONTACT THE TRIP LEADER.

- April 19-21 2002 **Scout Trip** with Kathy Carr. See Kathy for details
- May 4-5, 2002 **Mammoth Cave Restoration Project** See Article in the December 2001 *Guano* for details Go to <http://oldsci.eiu.edu/physics/len/mammoth/mcrp0.html> for More information
- May 18-19, 2002 **Spring MVOR.** This one is being sponsored by CCC. If interested in helping give Rick Hines a call. <http://www.mvor.org/>
- June 8, 2002 **MCKC annual picnic** See Article in April *Guano* pg. 6 or contact Jeff Page. jpage2@kc.rr.com
- July 4, 2002 **PARTY TIME.** As usually Michelle and I are having our annual 4th of July party at our home at 3:00 pm. **Everyone is invited!!!** All we ask is this you bring your own drinks and a dish to pass. I will provide the meat. I will have the rope up if anyone wants to do vertical work. This year we are going to try something different. Everyone Bring a 1/4 pound of fresh shrimp. We will have a shrimp boil and if you want you can put yours on the BBQ. Fireworks are permitted except for bottle rockets so bring your best show. Grotto Guests are also welcome. Please RSVP.
- August 4-10, 2002 **Mammoth Cave Restoration Project** See Article in the December 2001 *Guano* for details Go to <http://oldsci.eiu.edu/physics/len/mammoth/mcrp0.html> for More information
- November 2-3, 2002 **Mammoth Cave Restoration Project** See Article in the December 2001 *Guano* for details Go to <http://oldsci.eiu.edu/physics/len/mammoth/mcrp0.html> for More information.

Our Grotto Website has changed to www.kcgrotto.com

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Icebox darkness. In 1898 Luella Agnes Owens wrote of the Devils Ice Box in *Cave Regions of the Ozarks* and reported that the cave was eight miles long. In 1924 Ben Yates and friends spent 24 hours in Devil's Icebox and their experiences were recorded in a local newspaper. (Weaver/Johnson, 1980 *Missouri the Cave State*)

Earlier this winter Jeff Page announced at the Kansas City Area Grotto meeting that he was planning another trip into the Icebox and wanted interested people to sign-up. On March 22, 2002, at 8:30am I met Jeff, Bill Gee, Regan Youngman, Gary Charles, and Barry Godsey in the parking lot near the trail head that leads to the cave. We carried four canoes over the quarter mile blacktop trail and down the wooden steps into the 25 foot deep sink that shelters the cave entrance.

I slid the canoe off my shoulders and dragged it gently over some rocks and into the water. I stepped into the water pushing the canoe forward, spread my legs and pulled it back and sat down. Paddling forward I gradually entered the darkness. The four canoes slipped upstream rejecting the downstream passage that goes for several hundred feet and ends in a room with a deep lake. We reached the first portage, pulled the canoes up the 4 foot bank sliding them over hard mud 50 feet to the water. The first of four portages had been completed.

We paddled past the low spot, the Twins, the Crossarms, and the Tooth on the right, and the Bat Room and Devils Graveyard on the left. After a half hour and 1/2 mile of paddling we finally arrived at the Boat Landing. The mud bank was steep and Jeff helped me pull my canoe out of the water and up the bank. We rested briefly. I removed unwanted items from my pack and left them in the canoe.

The Exploration begins

The six of us sloshed through the water and mud in a passage 50-100 feet wide and 20-40 feet high. After an hour of carefree hiking we turned left into a side passage, bent low into the water and were refreshed by its cold as it seeped into our clothing. We climbed a mud bank and jammed our arms and legs against the cave wall as we chimneyed through a shaft over a deep hole, discovered a dead-end, retraced our path and again crawled through the water.

Earlier Regan and Jeff had searched the stream for a pink worm found only in the Devil's Icebox. They had not found any. My light revealed a lonely salamander who remained motionless as we waded past. Occasionally a bat would be seen hanging from the ceiling and we circled carefully to avoid it. Two miles into the cave, I was surprised by a frog swimming between my boots. "How did this little fellow end up so far from the entrance?" I mused as I realized the frequent flooding would drag a lot of outside life along with it.

Seven Hours of Caving Is Enough!

We finally found the Mountain Room and stopped for lunch. After a 15 minute break we entered the water again and continued exploring the cave. Jeff climbed a steep bank and sucked himself through a tight hole. I don't like tight spots, so I elected to lay in the water, circle around for 200 feet, and meet the group on the other side. Jeff led us easily through a stream passage into a room with dark formations hanging from the ceiling. We rested below the largest formation and Jeff took a group picture. Regan shined her light through some "bacon rind" and then we agreed that it was time to end our adventure. Jeff led us at a fast pace back to the main passage. We slogged for an hour through the water and mud and arrived at the canoes at 3:30pm.

Jeff had cautioned us earlier that the more dangerous part of the trip would be on the way out, when we would be tired, and in a hurry. To my misfortune I proved him right. Canoeing through a tight, shallow area I pushed and leaned too far to the right, tipping the canoe edge into the water. As the water surged over the side, the cold reminded me of his warning and I jumped out, grabbing my gear with my right hand and steadying the canoe with my left. My embarrassment urged me to quickly throw my gear onto the mud

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bank, slide the end of the canoe out of the water, tip it over to drain, replace the gear, and continue over the water to the entrance.

I had not been uncomfortable with the cold in the cave, even though I was completely soaked, but the 40 degree sunlight made me shiver. Quickly I lifted the canoe onto my shoulders, climbed the wooden steps, traversed the 1/4 mile trail to the parking lot, changed into dry clothes, and met the others at the park office to finish the cleanup of canoes, paddles, and life preservers.

While driving from Rockbridge State Park to Columbia I started to shiver again. My clothes were dry, but my skin was cold and clammy. I couldn't get warm! I knew the required remedy. I headed to Wendy's, ate two bowls of chili, a cheeseburger and fries, and drank three cups of Sanka. Comforted by warm food, I drove along I 70 towards Kansas City recalling what an exciting day this had been, another trip into the dark underground wilderness of Missouri.

Tales from the dark side

By COLLEEN M. DORSEY , coldor@npgco.com

3/31/2002 1:59:00 AM

They enter like astronauts on the threshold of an uncharted planet.

Geared up in bulky, water-repellant coveralls, hard hats, protective kneepads and stashes of water, flashlights and non-perishables, the group of seven men and women take their first steps into the cavernous and rocky terrain of a different world.

This world, the inside of a cave, is one of the few remaining frontiers left in modern times.

Thousands of caves already have been explored in Missouri and across the United States, but scientists say there may be just as many yet to be discovered.

And it's exactly that serendipitous sense of adventure that appeals to cavers, those bold and brave enough to probe the depths of the underground.

Caves are a virtual subterranean maze of musty passages, rooms, crawl spaces and chambers. Some in Missouri – with the second most densely concentrated area of caves in the country -- twist and turn for up to 20 miles.

As the Pony Express Grotto caving group ventured farther into Skaggs Cave in Waynesville, Mo., last Saturday, the scant light – their only connection to the outer world – faltered and faded until nothing was left but utter darkness, save for the tiny rings of light coming from each of the “headlamps” affixed

to their helmets.

Cavers call the point where they can't see light spilling from the entrance any longer the “twilight zone.”

This is a quiet, black world, too, with only the soft ping, ping, ping of water droplets resonating from the cave's rocky ceilings as a backdrop.

Pony Express Grotto comprises about 15 to 20 members who travel across the state in search of new caves to explore.

Mary Beth Crouch, a part of the group since last summer, recalls the apprehension she felt on her first caving expedition:

“If I could see the end of the passage, even crawling on my stomach, I felt better,” says Ms. Crouch of St. Joseph, a 51-year-old library administrator.

Claustrophobia is a common fear. So are fears of a cave literally “caving in” or of getting hurt or killed in navigating through underground passages. Caving accidents, fatal or otherwise, are relatively rare, but they do occur.

The rewards, though, are great.

St. Joseph's Susanne Mrkvicka, a PEG member, loves “seeing things that took millions of years to

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produce, that most people will never see. Some of the most beautiful things I've seen have been underground."

Caves are a parallel underground universe, and that's what keeps these cavers going. It's the continually unfolding suspense of belly-crawling through a passage and, once there's enough space to poke their heads through, to look up and around.

What's around that next corner could be a natural formation with such beauty it makes your jaw drop, a curious cave critter, or a 7-foot waterfall.

Not everyone has to go into every crevice of every grotto. But for most, the pushing forward is contagious.

Says Kathleen Holeman, a local jazz singer who's been a member of PEG since last fall, "I decided if I'm gonna do this, I'm not gonna be a wimp. I'm going to go into the farthest corners where everyone else goes."

Many people, either on a family vacation or a school field trip, have walked through a public or "commercial" cave, been corralled down steps with guard railings by a tour guide and into a well-lit cave, like Meremac Caverns. But far fewer have ventured into a "wild" cave, meaning one that is off the beaten track, and where explorers may have to traipse through sludge like quicksand a few feet deep to discover its wonders.

St. Joseph's only caving group was formed out of a core group of caving enthusiasts who met while taking a Beginning Cave Exploring class through Missouri Western State College's physical education department. The course, begun by biology professor Dr. David Ashley in 1991, is still offered at the college.

Founding members Lorin O'Daniell, Kathi Vandergriff and Ms. Mrkvicka found they were so hooked by the sport and adventure of caving that, after the class ended, they formed the MWSC Student Grotto to continue their shared interest. By 1993, most of the core members had graduated so the group

changed its name.

New cavers mostly join up by word of mouth. They're a diverse crew: men and women of different ages and occupations, from blue-collar workers to dentists, chemists to motorcyclists. What they share in common is a love of adventure.

Not for the faint-hearted

"We're doing a belly crawl through here," Mr. O'Daniell, at the helm of the cavers making their way through Skaggs Cave, yells back to the group.

Caving is not for the faint of heart, nor of body. Those who doubt the truth of that need only hear the sound of helmets scraping through a tunnel or the groans of someone going through more bodily contortions than an acrobat to get through a space smaller than the width of their shoulders to believe it.

"You end up with bruises in places you didn't even know you could get them," Ms. Holeman says.

Caving is a high-adrenaline cardio challenge, too. "Your heart is pumping and your breath is coming fast and furious," says Dr. Ashley, who leads his MWSC students through a cave at the end of each semester.

Cavers differentiate between a "pusher" and a "sightseer." The former wants to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible, while the latter wants to take it all in slowly.

And there is a lot to take in.

Illuminated by the light of their headlamps, cavers get a visual feast of the natural formations built into the red and brown interiors of the cave: stalactites like ice cream dripping from the ceilings, cathedral-like "rooms" and stalagmites coming up from the ground like sharp beds of nails.

The formations are given names like soda straws, drapery and bacon.

Says Ms. Vandergriff, "You can put me in a room

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with beautiful stuff and I'll stay there all day."

The spectacular marvels of this surreal world look almost frozen in time, but it is actually a world that's continually evolving.

Salamanders and frogs and bats – Oh, my!

Contrary to popular belief, there is life in caves: reptiles, mammals (yes, bats, hanging from ceilings) and a host of microorganisms thrive in the total darkness of the atmosphere.

And then there's the water – in reservoirs of cave ponds, rivulets and muddy swamps. Slipping is among the hazards for cavers.

Ms. Vandergriff recalls the time she had to climb up a 30-foot "chimney passage" and began to lose her footing. "I started hyperventilating and I thought I was a goner." A fellow caver ahead of her grabbed her wrists and pulled her up.

"It's a team sport," Dr. Ashley says. "You're responsible for the person ahead of and behind you."

Cavers are supposed to warn others behind them of an upcoming obstacle or lend a helping hand (or

knee or shoulder) to those who are having trouble in a rough spot. Less than four people in a caving group is considered dangerous because if someone were to get hurt, it would take two people to get help, and one to stay with the injured caver.

For serious cavers like those in Pony Express Grotto, caving is an adventure that continually challenges them. Especially, the thrill of exploring a new cave: to see where this hole in the earth will lead. A phrase familiar among cavers is: "Does it go?" –shouted to whoever is leading the group to see if a particular passage goes anywhere. Usually, it does.

And as the cavers emerge from their underground labyrinth, the light of day smacking them in the face, swimming in muddy clothes, it's another feat under their belts.

"I love mud," Mr. O'Daniell says. And, in every sense of the word, still reeling from his cave high, he means it.

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To KCAG members,

We've just received an acknowledgement of our gift to the Kate Johnson Memorial Fund from Hal Baker, President, MCKC. He expressed gratitude for the gift and asked me to extend an invitation to KCAG to attend the MCKC annual picnic on June 8 at his farm on the Jacks Fork River. "There are plenty of good campsites available. This would be a great time to learn about ongoing projects and offer your ideas on how we can improve the organization." More details will be available soon.

Troop 50 Caving Trip
Lead by Mike Fraley
Assisted by Kashya Fraley, Bryon Carmoney, Michelle Carmoney
April 6, 2002

It's no secret that I originally started attending Grotto meetings to arrange a caving trip for my Scout Troop. I had discussed the idea several times with Bryon and the recurring theme was that I should become a caver myself and lead the trip on my own. I'm interested in caving, so this didn't sound like a bad plan at all. Unfortunately, becoming skilled enough to lead a trip can take quite a while. At the February meeting, Mike Fraley pulled me aside and said, "I'm free the weekend of April 5-7; let's go caving!" We were off.

I gave several presentations to my Troop and finally arranged the trip so that a small group, led by Mike, would visit a couple of wild caves. This group I decided to call the "muddy cavers". The rest of the Troop would take a guided tour through a public or commercial cave. This group I called the "clean cavers".

The Troop plus Mike Fraley, Kashya Fraley, Bryon Carmoney and Michelle Carmoney camped at Meramec State Park after a long drive Friday night. During the day on Saturday, most of the Troop drove to Onandoga State Park to tour Onandoga Cave. The rest of us (Mike, Kashya, Bryon, Michelle, myself, Gabriel Parkison (Troop 50 Eagle Scout), Pat Bliven (Troop 50 Eagle Scout) and Ian Cummings (Troop 50 Eagle Scout)) headed to some wild caves.

Our first stop was Lone Hill Onyx, just outside of Meramec State Park. It had been universally described as "boring" by everyone who'd visited it before and it didn't disappoint. However, as Pat's and Ian's first cave, it was interesting as a warm-up. Especially eye-opening was Mike's presentation of a photo of the interior of the cave, taken during the 1960's before it had been vandalized. The formations in the picture were impressive and, sadly, completely missing from the cave around us. The comparison was sobering as we inspected the ceiling for signs of the original formations and only found their attachment points where they had been broken. As Kashya put it, the cave had suffered badly due to its "proximity to stupidity".

Bryon and Michelle did not go into Lone Hill Onyx with us, instead hitting Wal-Mart for some emergency supplies and giving Bryon's poor abused shoulder a chance to heal. I understand Michelle kicked him off the mattress in the middle of the night and left him to shiver alone all night -- hence the sore shoulder.

Eventually, Mike mentioned that Bryon was waiting for us in the parking lot and we should "hurry back". We all agreed that we had seen about as much of the cave as we cared to and turned around. Mike then put on the afterburners and showed us just how novice we really were. If you haven't seen Mike do that before, let me put it this way: his caving suit doesn't resemble Spiderman's costume by accident! As we emerged from the cave, he asked "Is everyone ready for Little Scott?" We were all too out of breath to respond.

After meeting up with Bryon and Michelle and having some lunch, we headed for Little Scott. Much to our surprise, there were cars already parked alongside the road where we intended to park. We squeezed in as best we could (Saturns are not 4x4 vehicles) and headed to the cave. Once inside, we surprised a novice group on its way out. After exchanging some pleasantries, we had the cave to ourselves.

Little Scott was just as amazing as everyone had said it was. It was quite mazelike -- much more so than any cave I'd visited so far. We had a lot of fun trying different paths through the passages; at one point the

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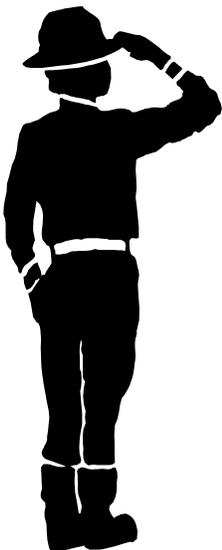
group was split into three teams: one on the "high road", one on the "middle road" and one on the "low road". We were continually in communication and climbing up and down from the different "roads" to bypass obstacles or to see interesting formations. At one point Mike asked me, "Who's in the tail position?" I laughed and told him he'd have to think more three-dimensionally. Eventually, we all met up again and realized that we were near the end of our water and our energy. After one quick exploration of a side passage, we decided to head back.

All along, Bryon had been regaling us with a tale of getting lost with a group inside Little Scott and passing the same spot of mold three times. Eventually, his story goes, he stopped the group saying "Wait, I've seen this mold before!" He took great delight in telling us how easy it was to get out of Little Scott; you only have to follow the stream. When it was time to leave, Mike asked Bryon to lead us out and he set off with confidence. Unfortunately, twenty minutes and two dead-ends later, we found ourselves back in the same room in which we'd made the decision to turn around. With a grin, I had to turn to Bryon and say, "Bryon, I've seen this mold before!" He growled "Shaddup", consulted the map once more and lead us straight out from there.

Overall, it was a fantastic trip. Gabe, Pat, Ian and I had a great time and learned a lot about caves and caving. The other Troop adult leaders commented about how much they enjoyed hearing the caving stories in the evening and getting answers to some of their basic caving questions (e.g. "What's the difference between a spelunker and a caver?"). Gabe took it upon himself as a point of pride to overwhelm the cavers with food -- he seemed to do a pretty good job.

The younger kids who visited Onandoga Cave reported that it was interesting but still pretty boring. When I asked them to be more specific about the boring parts, it turns out that they didn't like walking the paved path through the cave. They had listened to me talk so much about the mud in wild caves that they had wanted to get muddy! Needless to say, they're eagerly awaiting being old enough to participate in a "real" caving trip!

-- Sam Clippinger



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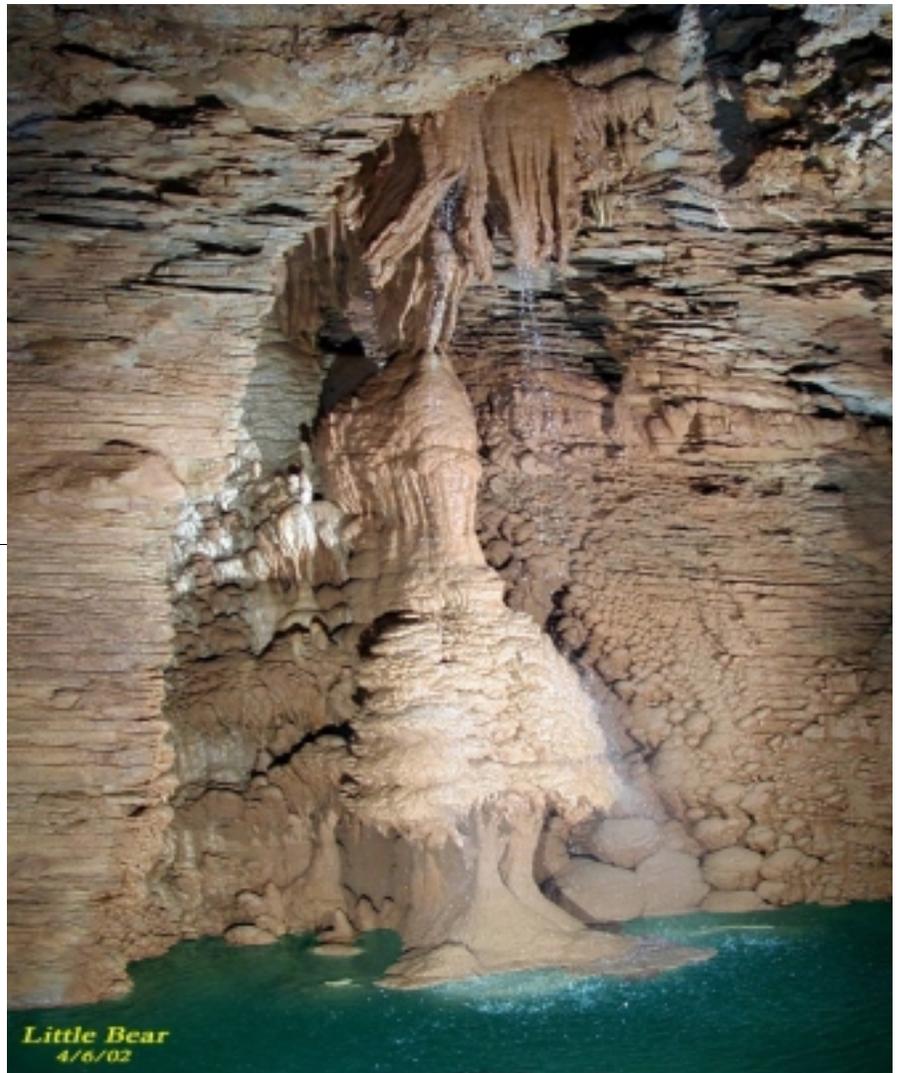
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Little Bear Cave
By Rick Hines