

The

The Kansas City Area Grotto

Guano

Volume 20

Issue 3

November 2006

Smittle Cave

plus
Caves of Barbuda,
High Guads Restoration,
Green's Cave & Little Hamilton Cave,
Fall 2006 MVOR & Sandy Dome Cave,
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and Geronimo Springs Cave

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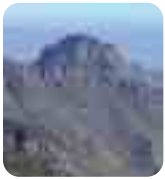
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Cover photo

Lorely Lather in the Formation Passage of Smittle Cave. This passage was part of the visitor trail when the cave was operated commercially by the Smittle family from the 1920s through the 1950s. Photo by Rick Hines.

Events

December 16

KCAG Christmas Party & Dinner — Saturday, 6:00 p.m. at the home of Rick and Kay Hines, 16525 Orchard Lane, Stilwell, KS 66085.

Directions: From 159th and Mission Rd., go south 0.7 miles to Orchard Lane. Turn left (east) on Orchard Lane. It's the second house on left. Meat and drinks provided. Bring a dish to share. RSVP Rick at 913.897.4258 or rickhines at aol.com.

January 10

KCAG monthly meeting — 7:00 p.m. at the Magg Conference Center on the UMKC campus, at the corner of Volker and Cherry.

February 10

Hunter's Cave trip — Three Creeks Conservation Area, about five miles south of Columbia, MO. We'll probably drive to Columbia in the morning, visit the cave, and then return home, all on the same day. However, if the weather cooperates, this trip could also involve visiting other caves in the vicinity (and possibly camping overnight). Details to be determined closer to the trip date. It all depends on the weather. This should be considered an experienced caver trip. The entrance passage has a watercrawl with only a few inches of air. All participants should be prepared to bring a change of clothes for the long uphill walk back to the trailhead (so a backpack is recommended). If you're interested in this trip, contact Gary Johnson by e-mail.

February 14

KCAG monthly meeting — 7:00 p.m. at the Magg Conference Center on the UMKC campus, at the corner of Volker and Cherry.

In the Next Issue

KCAG performs clean-up work on the grounds at Ozark Underground Lab and visits Tumbling Creek ... a trip with Dr.

David Ashley and Jonathan Beard to Smallin Cave in search of cave crayfish ... Jerry Cindric joins Chuck Bitting of the NPS on a visit to Corkscrew Cave in Arkansas to monitor bat usage ... Jerry Cindric visits TAG caves ... and much more. (Crayfish photo by Dr. David Ashley.)



The Guano

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The *Guano* is published on an irregular schedule as dictated by the trip reports submitted to the editor.

Submit articles via e-mail to the editor: editor@kcgrotto.org. Preferred file format for trip report attachments: Microsoft Word. Multiple photos are typically required for each trip report.

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The Kansas City Area Grotto is affiliated with the National Speleological Society and the Missouri Speleological Survey. In addition, KCAG is a founding member of the Missouri Caves & Karst Conservancy.

Meetings are held monthly. Check www.kcgrotto.org to determine the dates.

Annual Dues: \$15 for full members (three 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.

A Message *From* the Editor

In early 2006, KCAG monthly meetings were sparsely attended. Maybe a half dozen people would show up at the Magg Conference Center. The implications were discouraging. How much longer could the grotto continue when interest in grotto meetings was waning? As absurd as it might sound, I was the newest KCAG member regularly attending meetings, and I've been around since 2002. Did the grotto have a future?

Since then, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in the grotto. New people have started attending meetings, some completely new to caving, some moving to Kansas City after caving elsewhere, and even some long AWOL members have returned. And once again the grotto's future looks good. However, this resurgence of interest in the grotto is also pure happenstance. We didn't do anything to address the problem. Rather, the solution found us, which means the underlying issues contributing to diminished interest in the grotto still exist and may once again in the not-so-distant future begin eating away at meeting attendance.

The life blood of any grotto is the flow of new members. Without a flow of new members, grottos dry up and die. Unlike some grottos, where a nearby university helps supply a constant flow of new members, we have no university connection in Kansas City. So it's especially important that we encourage people who show an interest in caving. In addition, we must help foster attitudes and situations in which cavers can make contributions to the caving community. KCAG can't make any contributions to the caving community if we have no members participating in projects.

In the pages of this issue of *The Guano*, you'll see several new faces, and the trend will continue in the next issue with a work trip to Ozark Underground Laboratory. It's a trend I hope continues far into the future.

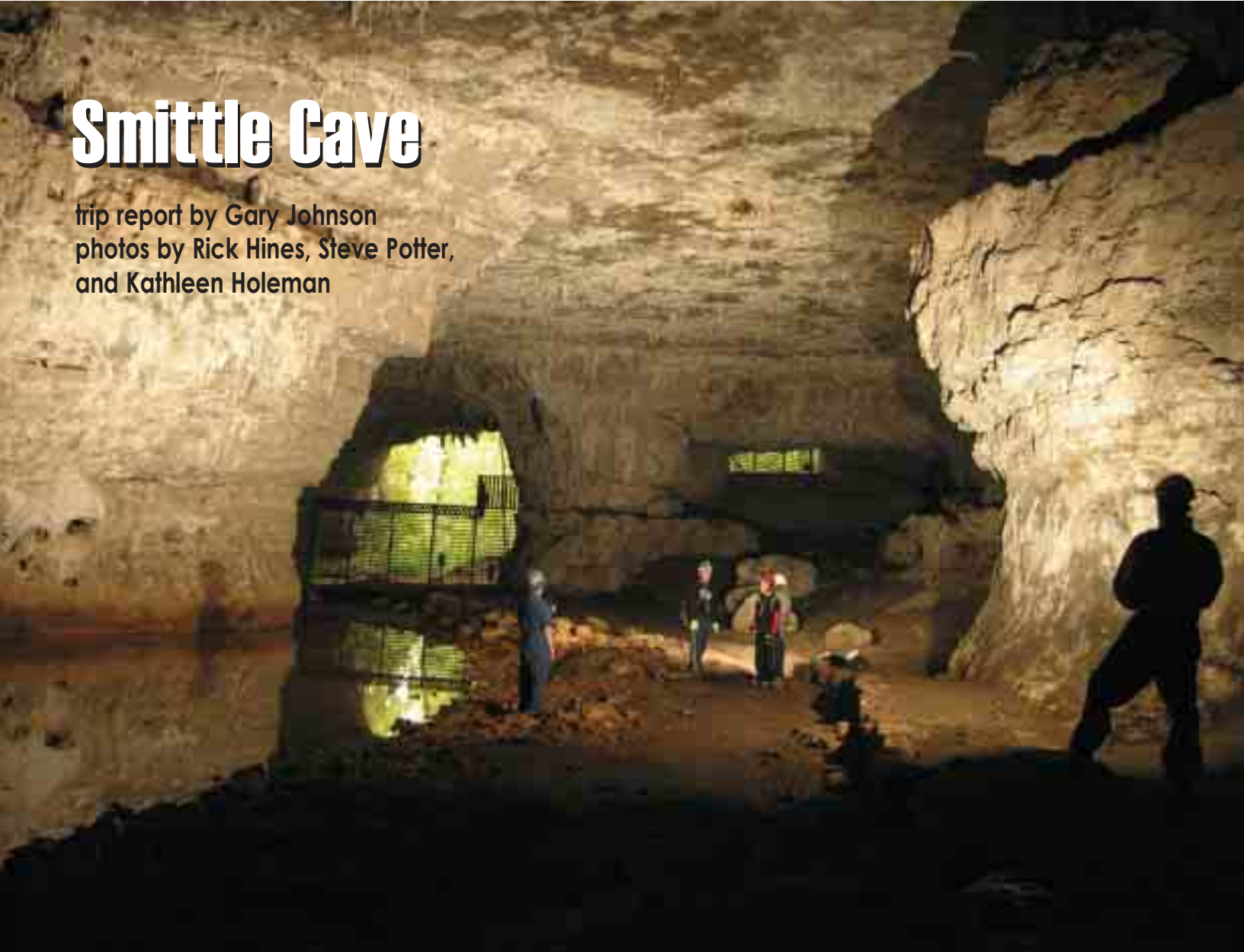
Best,

Gary Johnson

The *Guano* editor

Smittle Cave

trip report by Gary Johnson
photos by Rick Hines, Steve Potter,
and Kathleen Holeman



Ever since I started attending KCAG meetings in 2002, I'd heard stories of Smittle Cave, but over the past four years, no one had set up a trip to Smittle, until now, when both Peddgie Heinz of KCAG and Steve Potter of PEG acquired separate permits for trips just a few days apart.

Peddgie's group visited the cave on September 24th. Most of the photos accompanying this article come from Peddgie's trip (including this issue's cover), when Rick Hines brought his photo equipment.

I went to Smittle with Steve Potter's group. He had set up the Smittle trip as a warm-up before the Fall 2006 MVOR. So we met at John Alva Fuson, M.D., Conservation Area late on a Thursday afternoon. I arrived first and drove to the camping area by Little Smittle Cave and found it was already occupied by a group from a home for troubled boys. The leaders were nice guys who said

it'd be okay for us to camp there, but I thought it might be best to look elsewhere. I knew there was another camping area in the conservation area, so I went to check it out.

The second camping area wasn't as nice as the one by Little Smittle, which is more secluded and shaded. In contrast, the second camping area was out in the open, with a couple trees beside it to the east and a road in front on the west. I've seen old photos of a farmhouse sitting on this site. This may have been where the Smittle family, the cave's namesake, once lived, but most signs of the old farmhouse are gone.

Within 50 yards of the camping area is Lowell Cave. A wide trail leads to the cave's entrance. More on this cave in a minute ...

I spent most of the next hour trying to make telephone calls so the others would know where to find me, while two armadillos rummaged through the leaves and brush, making quite a racket. But I'd left word at the

Above: The double entrance at Smittle Cave combines in a large main passage (photo by Rick Hines).

other campsite where I'd be. Soon enough, the others started to arrive—first, Steve Potter and Jan Gerling, and then Eric Hertzler. Later, Dan Myatt arrived, then Kathleen (Steve's wife, who had a singing gig earlier that evening at Lake of the Ozarks) and several hours later the Dunns arrived. So our group was complete.

Before it got too late, we checked out Lowell Cave. I hadn't seen a map of the cave, but I'd read somewhere that you have to go through a long, long belly crawl not far from the entrance (and eventually, it opens up). We weren't going to do any belly crawling. We were just interested in a little look-see. The entrance is fairly large and the passage inside has a high ceiling, at least 20 feet high. We continued into the passage as the ceiling descended to stoop-walking height, but there

was a narrow ceiling channel that could be walked. This channel was interesting because entrenched meanders were apparently responsible for cutting down through the rock. The channel followed a torturous route that could be followed for a couple hundred feet. At one point it looked like it might have been possible to climb up one of the walls of the channel to a higher level of the cave.

We followed the channel as far as we could. It became intermittent and required some minor hands-and-knees crawling to find the channel sections. We soon reached the point where the channel disappeared altogether and crawling was the only way to continue. Here is where we turned around. We were probably about 300 feet into the cave. I'll have to return and investigate this cave further.

On Friday morning, Steve, Jan, and Kathleen drove to the conservation area office to pick up the key for Smittle. Once they got back, we geared up for caving. Our party broke into two groups. Kathleen would lead a small group into Little Smittle Cave, while the rest of us planned for a more aggressive trip in Smittle. Steve had been in Smittle before, but he had not been to the Waterfall

Room. So this time the Waterfall Room was our target destination. I had talked to Jonathan Beard about this room, and it's quite notorious because this is the place that you continue further in the cave by climbing up the left wall, onto a small ledge. Then you jump across to the right wall, over about a 15-foot drop.

The group from the home for troubled boys was packing up when we arrived. Little Smittle was only about 100 yards away. The road to Smittle is gated, but the same key that opens the cave gate also opens the road gate. So everyone piled into the back of my pickup, and then we bounced down the road for about a half mile to the cave entrance.

I had read about Smittle Cave in both *Missouri: The Cave State* by Dwight Weaver and *Caves of Missouri* by J. Harlan Bretz, as well as Kenneth Thomson's description from the *Spring 1981 MVOR Handbook*. So the following is a short description of the cave culled from these sources.



Top: Gabe Dunn and Amanda Dunn at the entrance of Lowell Cave (photo by Kathleen Holeman). **Above:** Amanda Dunn and Gabe Dunn in the entrance of Little Smittle Cave (photo by Kathleen Holeman).

Smittle Cave has been known for at least 150 years. A family by the name of Smittle used to farm the land nearby. Some members of the family explored the cave and even reported that they found the bones of an Indian encased by flowstone in the Water Passage. (Bretz reported this story; however, I asked Jonathan Beard about the skeleton and he said he had never seen it and didn't know where it might be—if in fact it ever existed.)

In the 1920s, the Smittle family turned the cave into a commercial venture. They built a dam near the entrance with the intention of creating a lake in the main passage that could be navigated by way of flat-bottom boat. This plan didn't work very well and was eventually discarded in favor of building a boardwalk along the left side of

the main passage for over 1,000 into the cave. The remains of this boardwalk are still visible today. The horizontal planks are long gone, but the vertical support posts remain, blackened and rotting but still in place.

The commercial tours visited the Formation Passage (a dirt walkway lined with stones is still visible at the beginning of the passage), the Meander Canyon Passage (for a couple hundred feet, where the passage is a high canyon that can easily be walked), and the Ball Diamond (a wide, dry room with a ceiling only about five-feet high). The commercial tour went as far back as the Jumping-off Place, which is at the far side of the Ball Diamond. In addition, the commercial tour reportedly entered the Water Passage, but I find it hard to believe that the tour entered this passage: almost immediately the mud is deep

and crawling is required. Maybe there was a platform built at the entrance of this passage, but if so, all evidence is long gone. The Smittles operated the cave commercially until the 1950s, when diminishing returns forced them to concentrate on their farming operations and close the cave. Since then the cave has not reopened commercially.

The farm land was eventually purchased by the Missouri Department of Conservation and turned into the John Alva Fuson, M.D., Conservation Area. The area is relatively small as conservation areas go, only 1280 acres. It's roughly shaped like an L, with the two parts of the letter each being about a mile wide and two miles long. Park Creek cuts through the lower portion of the L. The bottom lands here are about a quarter mile wide. This area was undoubtedly farmed heavily by the Smittle family. The park map shows a hiking trail system in the western section of the conservation area (the upright part of the L), but I haven't read any descriptions of this trail so I don't



Above two photos: Before and after, at the entrance of Smittle Cave. Top photo: Rick Hines, Lorely Lather, Pedgigie Heinz, Hannah Jane Chambers, Jean-Phillipe Rey, and Matt Kuehnert (photos by Rick Hines). **Below:** Hannah Jane Chambers trudging across a guano pile in the main passage of Smittle. Note the vertical posts in the background. These are remnants of the boardwalk from the commercial trail (photo by Rick Hines).

know what to expect. From the map, it looks like the trail heads up to a ridge at a gentle incline, gaining about 150 feet in elevation from the trailhead at the Little Smittle campground.

Both Little Smittle and Smittle Cave are on the west side of the Parks Creek valley. Little Smittle is reportedly muddy, with few formations. But Kathleen and her group, including six-year-old Gabe Dunn, had fun exploring it. Gabe was excited about caving. It was fun to see someone so young who was so interested in caves.

Smittle Cave has a double entrance. The left entrance is up high on a talus slope. This entrance is protected by a heavy fence. (We didn't inspect this entrance closely, but I doubt the fence has a gate.) The right entrance is at creek level. A heavy gate with a small door protects the lower half of the entrance, allowing bats to use the upper half. A horizontal extension keeps people from simply crawling over the top. This entrance is about 30 feet high and 60 feet wide.

Everyone geared up, and Steve opened the gate. We stepped through. The entrance passage is quite large. The passages from the two entrances join to form an area about 120 feet wide. From here the passage narrows slightly, to about 70 feet wide with a 30-foot high ceiling. The cave maintains these dimen-

sions (narrowing gradually) for about 2,000 feet.

From the map, it looked like we could be encountering long stretches of standing water up to three feet deep. I'd heard stories about how nasty this passage can be. But the past several weeks had been pretty dry, so we didn't have much trouble navigating the main passage. The first 300 feet follow a dry foot path. Then remains of the boardwalk can be seen as the mud begins. We plowed forward through the mud, looking for the areas that offered firmer footing. We made a few mistakes and occasionally stumbled into knee high water and mud, but usually the mud wasn't too bad.

We passed the Formation Passage on the left. Steve wanted to focus all our energy on getting to the Waterfall Room. So we trudged forward. If we had time, we'd visit the Formation Passage later. We passed the Meander Passage on the right. Same story here. If we had time, later.

Near the Ball Diamond and a little over 2,000 feet into the cave, the character of the cave changes. Here, the creek disappears along the left side of the passage. For several hundred feet, the stream goes AWOL before again appearing beyond the Ball Diamond. Where the creek disappears, a side passage on the left is obvious. Well, it's obvious as long as you haven't climbed the slope up into the Ball Diamond, which sits on the right. We kept our attention to the far left, knowing that's where we'd find the Water Passage.

A hand-lettered sign marks this side passage and strongly suggests that anyone entering the passage should bring along a spray bottle and brush with which they can clean any formations that get splattered with mud. A bucket full of brushes and spray bottles sat by the sign. We loaded up with brushes and spray bottles and stepped forward into the infamous Water Passage mud.

Now, I've been down Lower Thunder River in Carroll Cave, but that mud ain't got nothing on Smittle's Water Passage. The mud in Lower Thunder River at least has a bottom. The Water Passage mud remains slushy far deeper. You absolutely must keep your momentum moving forward. As long as you can do that, you're okay. But if you stand in one place for more than a second ... you sink down to your thighs. And then every step forward becomes a struggle. On the way through the Water Passage, everyone did a great job of moving forward. That meant we didn't have the opportunity to really appreciate the profuse display of flowstone that frequently covers the walls of this passage.





We curved around columns and stalagmites, ducking under stalactites and other formations on the ceiling. Occasionally, we had to crawl for a few feet, but for the most part, this was walking passage. Or rather sloshing passage.

This passage continues south from the main passage for about 1,000 feet before it curves to the right (west). At this point,

you're about 150 feet away from the point where you must make a left and leave the Water Passage. I'd talked to Jonathan Beard about finding this area and he gave me some tips. I knew when to start looking up high for a way out of the water. And soon we found a twisty crawl that headed up. Peddie Heinz's group earlier in the week missed this turn and ended up in the Meander Passage,

although they eventually made a left and may have entered the Waterfall Passage for a few hundred feet before stopping short of the Waterfall Room.

We crawled up through breakdown and narrow tubes until we emerged in the Dome Room. Here, the map completely agreed with what we were seeing, so I knew we were in the right place. At this point, we were about 300 feet from the Waterfall Room. To get there, we would have to negotiate several small passages. After only about 100 feet into the Waterfall Room Passage, we had to make a choice: go to an upper passage or stay low. Most people in our group went up. Being somewhat contrary, I decided to stay low, and after a little squeeze around a nice three-foot high stalagmite in a little alcove, I found myself in walking passage. Meanwhile, the others were struggling with an upper passage that occasionally intersected the passage I was in, leaving them with no alternative than to climb back down. This passage remained walking height for 100 feet as it meandered left and right. But then we were back in a narrow crawling passage. That continued for another 100 feet and then I popped up into a room with a high ceiling.

As I stood up, I saw two thin lines against the ceiling. Ropes. This was it. This was the entrance to the Waterfall Room and I was looking at the place where you jump across from the left wall to the right. Jonathan Beard told me that ropes marked this place, but he also warned me not to rely on the ropes. They were potentially a couple decades old. This wasn't quite what I expected. I'd somehow thought we'd be jumping across a channel by the waterfall. No, the waterfall was on the other side of the room. Now the map made sense. Sometimes you have to actually be standing in a cave room in order to understand what a cave map is attempting to depict. This is one of those instances.

I stepped forward. I was in a little canyon only about 20 feet long. The ledge on the left wall was about 15 feet high. It was a small ledge with little headroom. The right ledge, where we would jump to, looked bigger. About three feet of air separated the two ledges. This little canyon led forward to a larger space, about 20 feet across that slumped down to the right. The far wall was covered in flowstone, a light beige in color.

Top: Hannah Jane Chambers beside the Queen's Throne in the Formation Passage. Note the hanging flowstone shelf above Hannah Jane (photo by Rick Hines). **Left:** Matt Kuehnert in the Formation Passage (photo by Rick Hines).

The floor slumped to a clear pool of water that looked at least a couple feet deep. With little rain in recent weeks, the waterfall was not running, but the room was still very impressive. We didn't go any further than the top of the slope that leads to the pool. We didn't want to spoil this impressive place with our footsteps. We could only see the far left portion of the pool, but the map indicated it was about 25 feet long and 15 feet wide. I think it was a little smaller than that when we were there.

Okay, now what should we do? Can we continue? Can we get across the jump? Do we dare attempt it? How's everyone feeling? We pretty much came directly to the Waterfall Room. We made no real mistakes. So we were about as fresh as we could have hoped to be. It was time to assess how we were doing physically. Eric had started the day with an impending case of the common cold threatening to sap his energy. Now, he looked drained.

Because we totally lacked someone with much experience in situations like this, it didn't seem wise to go further. I kept imagining someone missing the jump and falling 15 feet. That seemed a very realistic scenario.

Dan and Jan started looking for alternatives. They climbed into a small upper passage and took off crawling. I waited for several minutes, mulling over our choices. I decided to get a closer look at the jump, so I climbed up the left wall and slid belly first onto a shelf. There wasn't much room here, just enough to push my body in a shallow niche. I twisted to the left, and pulled myself forward. Now, I was only about six feet away from the point where I could rise onto my feet, from the place where you jump. I turned my head to the right and saw a large passage on the far side. While the ledge on the left is narrow with little headroom, on the right, the ledge was large with a good-sized passage waiting for everyone who makes the jump. Assuming everyone could make the jump across, could we make the *return* jump? Yikes! A mass of rock loomed above the ledge. Anyone jumping back would have to shrink to their knees to avoid bashing their head. This just didn't look like a good idea. It looked like an accident waiting to happen.

Meanwhile, Dan and Jan had returned with stories of following a crawlway passage for about 100 feet. What? How could that be? I pulled out the map and saw an upper passage heading back the direction we came. This was the upper passage that occasionally criss-crossed with the lower passage. "That just goes back toward the Water Passage," I yelled. They seemed convinced that wasn't



possible, but then I started describing the passage to them. And they had to admit the description matched the passage exactly.

So that meant we either had to make the jump or retreat. Well ... with the group we had, with no one who had been across before, with no one with much vertical experience, it just didn't seem wise to go any further. So we retreated. Now we know a

Top: Careless cavers have unfortunately marred many of the formations in the Water Passage by splashing mud (photo by Rick Hines). **Above:** Tiny rimestone dams in Smittle Cave (photo by Rick Hines).

little better what to expect, I suspect, and maybe we can plan better for our next attempt (i.e., get someone who knows something about situations like this!).

On the way out, the Water Passage just about did me in. I slid off a bank into the mud on not one but two occasions. Pulling myself out of the mud just about sapped all my energy. After falling into the mud, I was buried up to my thighs. I'd pull, pull, pull to get a foot out, and eventually I'd get a foot free and set it forward, but then the other foot was buried and another struggle ensued (repeat *ad infinitum*). I moved forward at a turtle's pace. But eventually, I did get free and across the mud. At long last, we finally emerged from the Water Passage. Eric was ready to call it a day. He wanted to use the rest of his time taking photos of the main passage. Laurel Dunn wanted to get out of the cave to see how her son Gabe did in Little Smittle. Steve agreed to head out with her.

I wanted to see more of the cave, and after a little rest, at the edge of the Ball Diamond, I was ready to continue. Dan and Jan agreed to accompany me. We had a two-part itinerary: 1) to see the first 200 feet of the Meander Canyon Passage (including some small lily pad formations) and 2) to visit the Formation Passage. Both would be very easy passages. Child's play. Somehow, the lily pads in the Meander Canyon Passage eluded us. We continued in the canyon passage until crawling was required. Did we walk past the lily pads? We walked out of the passage, and there at the very beginning, actually out in the main passage, were the lily pads. These are very small lily pads, only two



or three inches high and spreading out maybe three or four inches. Miniature versions of the more famous lily pads from Onondaga Cave. Then we headed to the Formation Passage.

Because this passage is only about 1,000 feet into the cave, and after the cave served for 30 years as a commercial cave, I was a little leery what we'd find. I expected to see lots of formation breakage and other signs of heavy visitation. However, the passage was a pleasant surprise. While yes, you'll see quite a bit of formation breakage, the passage is still extraordinary.

A built-up three-foot-wide dirt trail lined with stones leads into the passage. But soon the trail becomes irrelevant because the floor of the passage gives way to bedrock, and you continue to walk on bedrock for the remainder of the passage, which is about 500 feet long. Almost immediately, you're surrounded by white flowstone, which encases the walls. The flowstone is a little dull in luster, but occasionally you'll see damp areas where calcite deposits may still be taking place.

At first, the ceiling height is about 25 feet and the passage width is about 20 feet. Gradually those dimensions shrink. At about the midway point, the ceiling height drops to 15 feet and the width shrinks to 15 feet. As you near the end of the passage, there are places you need to duck under and squeeze around, but the passage remains walking height all the way back to the Queen's Chair, which is one of the cave's hallmark formations. Flowstone forms the seat of the chair;

Above: Rick Hines in the Formation Passage (photo by Rick Hines). **Below left, top:** Flowstone in the Waterfall Room (photo by Steve Potter). **Below left, bottom:** A clear pool sits at the bottom of the Waterfall Room, surrounded by vertical walls (photo by Steve Potter).

clay once underneath the seat has been washed away. The seat is held in place about two feet above the bedrock floor by thin columns on the right that serve as the chair's armrest and connect to additional flowstone above the chair. A very cool formation.

It's possible to squeeze underneath the Queen's Chair for about another 100 feet of passage. I think some people in Peddie Heinz's group did in fact go all the way to the end of the passage; however, Dan, Jan, and I knew the others were waiting for us, so we didn't make the final crawl. We retreated and found Eric wrapping up his photos in the main passage. Then we headed out of the cave.

Back at the Little Smittle campground, we cleaned up and listened to Gabe tell us about Little Smittle. He was still pretty excited about his first caving trip. Then we jumped in our vehicles and caravanned to the Fall 2006 MVOR site near Buckhorn, Missouri.

Thank you, Steve Potter, for putting together this pre-MVOR trip and for inviting me. I really appreciated this opportunity to see Smittle Cave. ●

Fall 2006 MVOR

trip report by Gary Johnson

photos by Steve Potter, Laurel Dunn, and Kathleen Holeman

The Fall 2006 MVOR returned to a site from just three years ago, the Shiners campground near Buckhorn, Missouri. Hosted by MSM Spelunkers, this promised to be an excellent MVOR, and we weren't disappointed. From all the MVOR events that I've attended over the past several years, this was one of the best organized. The site is great. It's so big that everyone has as much room as they want. It's hard to say how many people were there because most people set up their camps back in the trees and hollows. The central area in front of the stage was off limits for camping. So you didn't see a sea of tents and RVs. You saw a sea of green, with campsites on the far fringes.

I rolled in on Friday afternoon along with several car loads of Pony Express Grotto (PEG) cavers. I'd been caving with them earlier in the day, and because few KCAG members had voiced any interest at the last grotto meeting in coming to this MVOR, I didn't expect there to be a KCAG area. Only Bill Gee from KCAG had indicated he'd be there. So I camped with PEG. We drove around the campground and finally picked a place back near the entrance. Not exactly a good choice even though it was in the Quiet Area because heavy metal music blasted from the bandstand less than 100 yards away. When Lorin O'Daniell of PEG showed up later that day, he questioned the wisdom of our campsite choice and promptly chose to set up his camp further away, where he was sheltered from the bandstand by at least a few trees.

Some grottos reserved pavilions, which could be had for a fee, and set up elaborate decorations. Back at the PEG camp, we set up a pole tent in case it rained. But the pole tent was largely irrelevant because the weather was perfect the entire weekend.

My only complaint about the MVOR was the heavy metal music. I guess if you host an MVOR you get to pick the music, but why subject everyone to this stuff? Oh, well. I bugged some earplugs off of Kathleen Holeman and ultimately didn't really have any trouble getting to sleep.

Vendor row was a little thin this time around. Howie's Harnesses made its customary appearance, and later that evening I spent a little money on new equipment. Other vendor tents included Barnwood Bats, MSS, and several others.

On Friday night, the Howdy Party offered hot dogs and chips. Bottomless beer cups were available at registration, so many people stood close to the beer wagon, intent on getting their money's worth.

On Saturday morning, cave trip signups started early with trips leaving at 9 A.M. On the schedule were photo trips to Berry Cave and York Cave; recreational trips to Perkins, Skaggs, Rattlesnake, Sandy Dome, Kiesewetter, and Finley Cave #2; and a biology trip to Merrill Cave. In addition, Conor Watkins offered a return engagement of his geology tour.



Top two photos: Scenes from the MVOR banquet (photos by Steve Potter). **Next to bottom:** Gabe Dunn, Steve Potter, and Kathleen Holeman (photo by Laurel Dunn).

Bottom: The MVOR bonfire roared to impressive heights. Left to right: Kathleen Holeman, Dan Myatt, Steve Potter, Gabe Dunn, Jan Gerling, and Lorin O'Daniell (photo by Laurel Dunn).



Above: The entrance to Kiesewetter Cave is a crawlway. Left to right: Kathleen Holeman, Amanda Dunn, Gabe Dunn, and Lorin O'Daniell (photo by Laurel Dunn). **Middle:** Amanda Dunn, Gabe Dunn, and Kathleen Holeman in Kiesewetter Cave (photo by Laurel Dunn). **Bottom:** Jan Gerling loved the bottomless beer cups (photo by Laurel Dunn).



Bill Gee dropped by to let everyone know he'd be leading the Kiesewetter trip. He had been in the cave numerous times on survey trips. Several members of the PEG group, including Lorin O'Daniell, signed up on Bill's trip. Meanwhile, Steve Potter suggested Sandy Dome, so several of us joined Steve on a trip to this nearby cave, only 10 minutes away from the Shriners Club.

Sandy Dome Cave is on private property, at the bottom of a valley. We parked on the landowner's property (as instructed by Andy Free of MSM Spelunkers, who was running

the MVOR cave tent) and then bushwhacked down the hill. In wet weather, a stream runs through the valley. We saw no water. We followed the valley downstream for a couple hundred yards until the cave entrance became obvious on the right.

Sometimes the entrance passage of Sandy Dome Cave can become ponded, but it was dry on our trip. We geared up and ducked into the cave. The entrance is a diagonal gash in a bluff face. Only a few feet inside the entrance, we could stand up straight.

While I typically print maps of all the caves I plan to visit at MVOR, I hadn't expected Sandy Dome to be on the itinerary, so I hadn't printed a map. Luckily, though, Steve had printed a map and he gave it to me. He seemed to understand my map mania and graciously allowed me to be in charge of navigation. The map, however, wasn't the most recent one. James Corsentino remapped the cave a few years ago. I was looking at the 1963 map, which is missing several hundred feet of passage. The MVOR guidebook indicated 3,500 feet of passage, but the map showed only about half that. So we'd need to do a little exploring.

First, up, the Formation Room. It's only about 250 feet down the main passage. At this point, the passage hits a T. The Formation Room is on the right. Here, the ceiling is covered with a thick profusion of soda straws. We crawled back to the far

reaches on the room, where a three-foot-high column had formed on a clay bank, but the clay bank had been washed away, leaving the column about a foot short of the floor (and I suppose no longer technically a column). It looked like the base of the ex-column had formed underwater. It was encrusted with popcorn-like formations. We crawled into a small tube for 50 feet or so, where the floor made a hollow sound when thumped, as if there was a hollow space underneath. We didn't test it further.

Back in the main passage, we followed wide meanders that headed deeper into the cave. In this area, the passage varied from 10 to 20 feet tall and about 20 to 30 feet wide. Along the way, we passed a cluster of bats on the ceiling. I motioned for everyone to be quiet and whispered to not shine their lights up. I think this was a small cluster of grey bats, maybe 50 in number.

After about 500 feet of following the main passage meanders from the Formation Room, we ran into another caving party. I hadn't pulled the map out of my pocket since the Formation Room and had sort of forgotten how long it would take us to reach the cave's namesake location, Sandy Dome. Somehow I still had the figure 3,500 feet in my head, so my recollection of how far we had to go was way off. We looked up at a room with a large ceiling, at least 30 feet high. The other group of cavers asked how far were they from Sandy Dome. I said about 500 feet. Then I settled down to pull out the map and figure out exactly where we were. It didn't take long to figure out we were at the High Room, which meant Sandy Dome was only about 50 feet away. Oops. I pointed the direction of Sandy Dome to the other cavers.

Sandy Dome is only about 30 feet high, but it's a very interesting dome because it's floored with polished sand/pebbles. The force of water dropping from the dome ceiling must be fairly great to create such a distinct polishing of the floor sand. This dome is also interesting because several side passages sprout near its base. On the map I was carrying, these side passage weren't mapped. A map showed dotted lines for less than 20 feet, indicating an unmapped passage continued. We crawled forward.

The crawlway curved and presented several possibilities. Steve, Dan, and Jan each tried a different direction. Steve came up with the most promising alternative. We followed Steve and soon found we were standing in another dome. This one could be climbed. I climbed up over some ominous looking breakdown blocks that were suspended a few feet above the floor and

found myself looking at claw marks on the walls of the dome. At some time in the far past, a large animal had been in the cave and had reached far up the walls. This animal must have been either a bobcat or a bear. The claw marks were big. Dan climbed up and looked for a way higher yet. We could look through holes in the rock layer above, so there was a higher cavity, if we could just find a path up. Dan tried to squeeze up through a hole but he didn't quite fit. After spending several more minutes inspecting this dome, we headed back to Sandy Dome and then to the main passage.

From here, the map showed about 250 feet of crawlway passage before the map terminated with "Unmapped Continuation." We headed forward. The story soon became sort of repetitive: we encountered meanders that curved left and right, carving beyond the original passage's width, leaving dry clay banks that could be crawled over. Each crawl had 1 to 2 feet of vertical space. Then the crawls intersected the stream passage (which was typically bone dry), and at these points we'd have 3 or 4 feet of vertical space (occasionally even more). We went far off the map, at least 300 feet, and the passage gave no signs of changing in character. Just more and more of the same. So without any prospects that the passage would open up, we decided to call it a day.

On the way out, we looked for the grey bats, but they had apparently moved. I suppose they didn't like all the activity in the cave. The entire cluster was gone. We trudged out of the entrance and back up the stream valley. On the way, I noticed an area on the west side of the valley that looked like it might contain a cave. Andy Free had told us there was another cave in the vicinity. Steve and I climbed up the bank and sure enough. We were looking at a cave. Steven stepped inside and checked it out. He said it didn't amount to much (and later Andy confirmed this report).

We bushwhacked back to the top of the hill. While we were packing up, the landowner arrived home. We waved and said thanks for letting us visit the cave. Then we headed back to camp. The Kiesewetter group



got back about an hour after us. They said Bill Gee led a good trip.

That evening was reserved for the banquet. I'd heard too many stories about poor recent MVOR banquets, so I skipped it. You'll have to ask someone else for a report on the food, but I hear it was a big improvement over other recent efforts. After the banquet, there were many door prizes and a raffle, in which someone won over 300 feet of rope. As Mark Andrich took time to recognize the many people who chipped in their time and effort to make MVOR happen, the evening's entertainment, a local blues band, filled the aural space with some spare, tasty guitar licks; however, once the band actually grabbed center stage, all the promise deteriorated. The lead singer murdered every song he attempted to sing and the drummer didn't have the foggiest idea how to keep time. It was painful to listen to. Most everyone retreated from the stage, choosing to hang out at the bonfire instead.

While the band was atrocious, the bonfire roared to impressive heights. This was one of the largest bonfires that I've ever seen. Flames shot up 50 feet high. MSM Spelunkers had apparently spent some time and effort engineering this bonfire. This was no hastily thrown together pile of discarded lumber. It looked sturdy and designed for maximum flame potential.

This was an excellent MVOR. I much appreciated the opportunity to camp with PEG. But I did learn this: don't ever fall asleep in your camp chair at the PEG camp. I saw two members of PEG fall asleep and get duct taped to their chairs. Consider yourself warned! ●



Top: The entrance of Sandy Dome Cave (photo by Steve Potter). **Right, top:** Checking out a crawlway in Sandy Dome Cave's Formation Room (photo by Steve Potter). **Right, middle:** Dan Myatt checks out a hole in the ceiling of a dome (photo by Steve Potter). **Right, bottom:** Falling asleep at the PEG campfire can be risky, as Jan Gerling found out, courtesy of duct tape by Dan Myatt, Lorin O'Daniell, and Steve Potter (photo by Kathleen Holeman).



High Guads Restoration

trip report and
photos by
Jerry Cindric

There is a long standing project in New Mexico named the High Guads Restoration Project (HGRP).

Interested cavers meet the last weekend of most every month for restoration of some of the many caves in the High Guadalupe Mountains. I had previously attended one of these resto weekends a few years back with Terry DeFraities and MVG. I enjoyed the experience and chose to return someday. Also I had attended several trips to the area—including a KCAG trip in 2003. Suffering from “house sickness,” I decided mid-January to attend the late January restoration trip, hoping the weather would be respectable. I decided to take a week away and also do some hiking at Big Bend National Park after the High Guad action.

I left Thursday to arrive on Saturday morning. I decided to take a slower but more scenic route through southwest Kansas, Oklahoma panhandle, NE New Mexico down to Carlsbad and then to Texas Camp in the

High Guads. Along the way I saw large numbers of Pronghorn and some interesting country. By Friday night I arrived near Texas Camp but stopped short and stayed in the parking area of the Ranger Station near Queen, NM. It was after sunset and the wind was blowing very hard. I was sleeping in the van and it shook like a wet dog all night. It would not let up all weekend.

I got up early for the last hour drive. It was cloudy and windy, maybe 50-60 degrees but no snow or rain. I met some of the other cavers and we assembled at the Ranger shack near the camp to get our assignments. I accompanied a group that visited the “Pinks,” which is a group of caves located close together. The name comes from the tint of the limestone in the area. The caves we visited were Pink Damn, Pink Panther, and Pink Dragon. Besides myself, the group included Jennifer Foote, John Langevin, Heather Thormahlen and Phyllis Boneau. I had previously met Phyllis. She was the trip leader to

Above: Looking from the entrance of Pink Panther Cave (photo by Jerry Cindric).

Hell Below Cave on a trip a year earlier. As before, she was a treat to cave with. A second group was composed of Michael Flores, Allen Wright, Tom Kaler, Russell McCallister, Marc Italiano, and Robert Flores. They were to work at a couple of caves on the next ridge: Andy’s Cave and Ain’t Dean’s Cave.

We hiked for an hour to the turn that would head down the ridge toward the Pinks. We stopped at the top of the hill and made radio contact with the other team. Before we could be blown off the ridge, we headed down to Pink Panther and changed its lock. We did not enter Pink Panther. It is a vertical cave. I’d like to visit it on a future trip. We continued to Pink Damn Cave, changed its lock, and checked out the entrance passage. An old rope was rigged inside. We saw five bats. A pool near the entrance, which usually holds water, was almost dry. A deer-sized

skeleton was tucked in a niche in the wall. There was also some old-looking charcoal in the entrance outside the gate.

Next we hiked to Pink Dragon. This cave has a large entrance, but unless you approach it correctly, the cave can be very difficult to find. Here, our task was to reflag part of the walking passage; however, we only had three rolls of flagging, which probably wasn't enough. So we decided to see how much flagging was already in the cave before we committed to reflagging. There were seven bats in the front section of Pink Dragon. We were as quiet as we could be going through a slab-happy crawl so as not to disturb the bats. On the other side, we could feel occasional gusts of wind from the front of the cave. We decided that we had enough orange flagging to do the back portion of the cave, so we proceeded to mark or remark much of the walking passage to help future visitors from trashing the pretties. Pink Dragon has some outstanding formations. It is much longer than Pink Damn. It also has a deep in-cave pit which we did not drop. The register has been full since 1999. We also passed a small cave called Pink Pallett.

We returned in time to have dinner in the warmth of the ranger cabin before getting some sleep.

Six of us stayed around to work on Sunday. We all took the short hike from the cabin to Cottonwood Cave. Cottonwood has some of the biggest formations around and photos have been featured in many publications, including *NSS News*. A couple sections of the cave are gated, including the Wonderland Section. Our plan was to add a little more concrete to the base of the Wonderland gate and to check the other end of a blow hole that Deanna Younger was concerned might be dug open. At the Wonderland gate, the left bar had fallen out of the hole in the ceiling. Luckily the lock on the right bar was not closed and we were able to get to the other side to maneuver the bar back into place. We placed some concrete in the small hole/crawlway above the gate so it wouldn't look like you could get through. We ended up concreting the left bar into the top hole so it wouldn't fall out again. The other part of the group crawled into the blow hole and communicated with people inside Wonderland. It was determined that there



Top: Fried Egg formation in Pink Dragon Cave (photo by Jerry Cindric). **Right, above:** A javelina in Big Bend National Park (photo by Jerry Cindric). **Right, bottom:** Agave flowering stalk (photo by Jerry Cindric). **Far right:** The Fried Egg formation is at the top of this stalagmite (photo by Jerry Cindric).



Top, left: A druse canopy in Pink Dragon Cave (photo by Jerry Cindric). **Top, right:** Jerry Cindric at the top of Emory Peak (photo by Jerry Cindric). **Left:** Flowstone in Pink Dragon Cave (photo by Jerry Cindric). **Above:** A skull is encased by flowstone in Pink Damn Cave (photo by Jerry Cindric). **Right:** Looking out of "The Window" in Big Bend National Park (photo by Jerry Cindric).

wasn't much rock removal left to get into the cave, but that no one had been through yet. We placed a big rock over the hole. Another 1/2 bag of concrete could be used to cement some rocks in place on a future trip. We hiked back to the cabin and headed to the Queen store for a good lunch and separated.

I will get back again to the HGRP when I can. I enjoy the area, the caves, and the people. It is, however, a long haul from Olathe, Kansas, and takes some commitment. I would encourage any caver to join a restoration trip for a rewarding experience.

I drove back towards Carlsbad and on to Big Bend National Park. I got there well after dark and slept. I had last been to the park

when I was in college so it was all new in my little mind. The weather was sweet, sunny, no wind, and 60-70 degrees. I hiked 19 miles in a day and a half, saw some neat plants (Octillo, Lechuguilla, Mexican Pinyon Pine, Madrone Tree, Mexican Drooping Juniper, Nolina, Pitaya Cactus, to name a few), neat animals (Javelinas, deer, misc. rodents, and a mule team carrying supplies), neat sights, neat birds (Cactus Wren, Rock Wren, Rufous Sided Towhee, Mexican Jay, Acorn Woodpeckers, and Dark Eyed Juncos).

I took the direct route back, got my slow tire leak fixed in Oklahoma, and made it home. ●



Jerry's
Barbuda Chronicles
trip report and photos by Jerry Cindric

Since retiring in late 2005, I had some frequent flyer points burning a hole in my pocket. I worked hard on my wife for a family Caribbean vacation, but she was not excited by the idea. So I decided to do something on my own. Why not combine caving with some island fun? I checked the places in the Caribbean where US Air travels to see if they contained caves. One destination was Antigua, but the island seemed pretty void of caves. I checked Antigua's sister island Barbuda and got a few cave hits. I learned that Barbuda has less than 2,000 inhabitants and is lightly visited. At this point, how was I going to worm my way into some caving action? I sent an e-mail message to Ray Keeler, an Arizona caver who worked in KC a few years back. Did he know a caver who

frequents Caribbean caves? He led me to Dr. Donald McFarlane. Don is from California and is the Chair of the NSS Research Advisory Committee. Don had done a bit of caving in both Antigua and Barbuda and had a good contact. One small issue: his contact had recently died. Don had another name for me; however, he did not know much about the fellow. After some persistence, I got a phone number for a contact on Barbuda. E-mails followed and I had myself a trip.

Saturday

I arrive in Antigua on Saturday, April 29, having lost a piece of luggage that contains most of my caving supplies. From Antigua, I catch a short flight to Barbuda, landing at dusk just south of the village of

Above: Looking into Darby Sink (photo by Jerry Cindric).

Codrington. My contact, John _____ has arranged a taxi to meet me. It is a two-minute ride to the guesthouse. Driving is on the left, steering wheel on the right, British style. My guesthouse is above what would best be described as a drugstore run by the owner, Mr. Hartford John, who lives behind the store and under the guesthouse. The store and guesthouse are a block from village center. I settle in with a little TV and NBA basketball. My contact stops by for a discussion. I tell him the bad news concerning the lost luggage. He informs me that because it is a holiday weekend I will need to wait some time to rent a vehicle. John _____ is very amiable. We



Top, left: Barbuda Airport (photo by Jerry Cindric) **Left:** Downtown Codrington (photo by Jerry Cindric). **Above:** The ocean at Two Feet Bay (photo by Jerry Cindric).

discuss my activities for the week. I am missing my binoculars, GPS, snorkeling stuff, and much more. If the bag is not found in a day or two, it will really dampen my visit. I need to make the best of it. I pull out my 1:10,000 Barbuda topographical maps. John discusses the locations of the caves and the sinks. I had entered the coordinates of about 45 depressions/sinks in my GPS unit.

We will go to Darby Sink Cave, which is connected to a very large sink east of Codrington; Dark Cave, which contains blind cave shrimp; and another cave near Dark Cave of special interest. John says he has not been to this last cave in several years. The entrance is a small crack in a sinkhole. He describes entering the cave and feeling much heat inside. He went into a large room with a huge bat population, which he said provided the excessive heat (wow!). I hope we can find it (and histoplasmosis isn't a problem). We walk to the local grocery. There are interesting things at the market: banana milk, local bananas, and fruit that I could not pronounce. I get a few things to eat, and we say goodnight. The bed is hard and the fan noisy, but I easily fall asleep.

Sunday

I am up at about 7:00 A.M. and my back is slightly sore. I finish reading *Into the Wild* on the porch, where it's shady and there is a warm, light breeze. An Anglican church is holding service nearby. I can hear the singing and the preaching. I see little birds I don't recognize in the trees. I take a walk to the small lagoon pier where I will later head to the Frigate Bird Sanctuary. The people are polite and speak with a great accent. I have a bit of a problem understanding some of them. The houses are small, mostly well-kept with tin roofs. Because it is Sunday morning, I hear many religious shows from the radios. Chickens, lizards, and goats have a free reign of the village. There are only a few cars and a few asphalt streets. Other roads are crushed stone. Bicycles far outnumber cars. The water in the lagoon is a brilliant blue. The locals collect rain water in 200 gallon tanks for washing clothes and whatever else. I have not seen an open restaurant, so I eat a banana and some sardines for breakfast and drink banana milk (great). (I also have a Red Bull to help kill my caffeine headache.) I had foresight to pack my alcohol stove, with coffee bags, oatmeal, and KASHI bars.

Unfortunately, it is all in the missing bag! Can I cave in sandals? John is supposed to lend me a cell phone. I can buy a phone card to call home and the airline. There is no hot water in the guesthouse, but it is not needed. The cold water is not cold. It's also quite salty tasting. I remember John discussing the island terrain. He said it's pretty flat (the highest point is about 130 feet above sea level). This makes it easy to get lost while walking. Without the GPS, I will need to be careful. I had been warned by Don McFarlane that a hiker got lost and died on the island.

Monday

No luggage and no vehicle yet. I'll need to make more phone calls. I walk to the Codrington pier in hope that I can get a ride to Frigate Bird Sanctuary. I have a nice talk with a few locals at the pier. Some of the people are pretty easy to understand while others are almost impossible. I find out there was a large hurricane in 1995. Some of the decrepit buildings in the village are due to this hurricane. There is lots of bantering about fish, lobster, turtles, and the sea.

I wait about an hour and eventually get a ride with a guy named Jerome. The lagoon is quite shallow (3-4 feet). Mangrove islands grow in some places. I am not allowed to leave the boat. Many Frigate Birds fly around the mangroves. The mating season was last November, so there are now many young birds (full size but not flying). The mothers come in to feed the noisy babies. We are at the edge of the Sanctuary. Jerome says it goes on for about a mile. There are many jellyfish in the lagoon. I see a couple of boats with guys diving for lobster. It's a neat trip although we only stay at the Sanctuary for about 15 minutes.

Monday is May Day, a holiday. There is loads of music in the village center and some local food. I have some "seasoned rice," which includes various meats of unknown origin (yummy). I spend a few hours hanging around, hoping for the rental vehicle. Then I spend two hours at the airport, hoping for my luggage (a bust). I spend 30 minutes at the airport talking to a couple of guys born in Spain who have been to the sanctuary. They are staying at the exclusive "K Club"; \$900 per night, cash only. One guy says he owns an Internet bingo game company located in Antigua. He says most of his business is from the US, and the US government is beginning to make life tough for him. I suspect he is probably a crooked dude.

Tuesday

I just got some good news: the car will be here in about one hour (11:00 A.M.). I spend another hour and a half at the airport this morning and still no luggage. I suspect, if I get it at all, it will be stripped of anything valuable. I am relearning patience. Time here is measured in half-day increments instead of minutes; no one is in a hurry. They will probably live forever. I expect the three posh resorts bring in some money. I hope some of the \$900/night trickles down to the locals. I will need a beer tonight; I deserve it.

John should be available this afternoon for caving; however, we will have to go without helmets. Upper 80's, usually nice



Above: A skylight illuminates Jerry Cindric in Indian Cave, near Two Feet Bay (photo by Jerry Cindric).

breeze and sultry. Good sleeping weather even without AC. After the first night, I have used 95% DEET to repel the mosquitoes. Add donkeys to the list of free running animals.

I get the vehicle at 11:45 A.M. today. It is a 4-wheel drive Suzuki "Helly Hansen." I call US Air and they swear they will turn the bag over to Carib Aviation today. I will check again later. I head out for Spanish Point, which is at the south end of the island. It takes about 40 minutes over some pretty ugly roads. This is the only road south. I just need to keep from hitting the goats and the burros and stay on the left side. What a gorgeous place, just wish I had the snorkel stuff. To the east (left) is the Atlantic. Waves crash on the shore. To the right, is a placid cove (Grovenor Bay) that stretches from Spanish Point to Coco Point. The cove is empty except for a yacht.

On the Atlantic side, the waves crash into limestone. There are hundreds of trilobites fossils, each several inches long; also many crabs and little fish. I wade out into the cove and it looks like you can walk out a half mile. I will come back after my luggage shows up. The water is azure blue and the sand is pink. I stay for about an hour and then call John.

He wants to go to Darby Cave. I quickly drive back, and he shows about 30 minutes later at 4:00 P.M. We drive northeast. After

4.4 km we turn off the main road. The road goes up to the "highlands." On top are ruins of the Codrington highland home. John tells me in the 1700s Mr. Codrington would build a fire to lure in ships. They would wreck and Codrington would perform salvage (nice guy). A path heads to the Darby Sink. The walk takes about 30-40 minutes. Without the path, it is an easy walk. Without, it would be hell. There are Agaves thirty feet tall and cacti about the same. John shows me a native orchid. He knows all the birds and most of the plants. John has brought his two older children, a boy about 7 to 8 years old and a girl 5 to 6. We eventually come to a karst area. There is a small depression to the right of the path, but it has a large Ficus tree coming out of it and can't be explored. All of a sudden the sink is in front of us. It reminds me of a small version of Neversink that can be entered by walking. There are huge palm trees, deciduous trees, and Ficus trees in the sink. It is maybe 150 feet in diameter about half of which can be walked. We see White Pated Pigeons and many crested hummingbirds. At the bottom I see hermit crabs and bat guano. I also hear some bats above me. John says these are fruit bats in crevices in



Above: Jerry Cindric in Darby Sink (photo by Jerry Cindric).

the limestone. He says Barbuda also has insectivorous bats and fish bats. A huge bee hive is on the wall. What a neat place! There is a deciduous tree in the sink. John says it is the only one of its kind on the island. This type of tree is normally found in the mountains on Antigua. We also see five land tortoises. John says the land tortoise is a delicacy served as thick stew. Darby Sink would be a neat place for a rappelling photo. We head back and John's wife calls. She says my luggage has arrived.

On the walk back, I ask John many questions. He says the K Club does little to help the island, although the Cocoa Beach Club is pretty supportive. Some villas are being built across the harbor from Codrington. These will be sold at high dollar. He says they will be gone with the first major hurricane. There were hurricanes for five consecutive years 1995-1999, the first and the last being the worst. He said the first had very high winds and the last much rainfall. John has hopes for the island to develop economy from its ecology. He uses Guiana as an example of what he would like to accomplish. The Barbuda Council will listen to him if there is money to be brought in. We get back and my luggage is in my room. Nothing is

missing. Hallelujah! I get some fresh bread, cheese, and two Jamaican beers. It is time to celebrate.

Wednesday

Today I head to the east side of the island. First, I go back to Darby Cave for some pictures. It is a very warm morning. I then go to the northeast coast, Atlantic side, to "Two Feet" Bay. It is a decent road. Just past a gravel pit, I see two shelter caves on the right. There are supposed to be some faded drawings done by the Arawaks (long-gone indigenous people) in some of these caves. I will try to get there this week. Two Feet Bay is kind of rough. John warned me about rip tides and undertows. I find the most placid area and do some snorkeling.

I meet John at 6:00 P.M. We are going to Bryant Cave and Deep Cave. Bryant is really just a sink. This is a longer, nastier drive and a longer walk. I did not mark the route on the GPS as I should have done. We head almost directly east from Codrington. Eventually we come to a small intersection where we park and walk the smaller road to the left. I carry too much stuff. Besides the basic cave gear, I have photo stuff, two ropes, and vertical equipment. The trail is pretty overgrown. By the time we get to Bryant, I am soaked with

perspiration and feeling a bit dehydrated. I bring 1.5 Liters of water, but this is not enough. Bryant is a smaller version of Darby with a brackish pool of water at the bottom. We spend only a short time there as it is getting dark outside. Dark Cave is only five minutes away, also not far off the trail to the right. It is marked by two large palm trees. This is truly a cave. When we get there, we see huge numbers of bats exiting. The entrance is a 45 degree down slope in the rocks. There are already two old ropes rigged, but these are not needed. I add my 107 foot rope to the group to make John feel better. My hardware is not needed. The bats are many and noisy, fairly large, and somewhat bigger than grey bats. Further back, we see even larger bats, which are probably twice the size of grey bats. It was a pretty awesome sight. There looks to be an upper level to the right with a makeshift rope ladder. Past some breakdown, we see some water. There is water both on the right, left, and straight ahead. It looks to be pretty deep. We see the blind cave shrimp that make the cave known. Looking forward, I see a large passage. John says as far as he knows no one has gone forward into the water (hard to believe). The part I can see can be easily mapped, and John would like this done. This would be a good project. He said there is no problem entering the water, although I would recommend aqua socks and clean clothes and perhaps some floatation device. The cave I saw was maybe 300-400 feet long and was big passage. We exit, I pick up the rope, and we hike back. It is now dark and we travel slowly, taking care not to tear our skin up with the thorny bushes along the path. We make it back to the vehicle about 8:30 P.M. I enter both caves and the parking spots in my GPS unit. The two caves match perfectly with two sinks on the topo. I get back and try to re-hydrate. I eat a tasty "current roll," much water combined with orange concentrate and a banana.

Thursday

I head to Spanish Point with snorkel stuff and camera. I mainly use the video

feature of the camera for underwater photos and the results are fair at best. I get back to the village about noon and go to the Plaza Terrace Restaurant for lunch. I have a great meal of white flat dumplings with a large helping of conch and sliced tomatoes. The conch is tender in a spicy sauce with onion. The meal cost \$7.00. I will be back tomorrow. I go to the only place where you can buy gifts, the “art café.” It’s actually someone’s front porch. Local artist, Claire Frank lives there with her husband, McKenzie. I buy a small picture and some coral. We have a nice discussion about the island. Everyone is nice on Barbuda and I feel quite safe. The island does not even have a jail. I talk to John and he wants to go to Bat Cave today. It is supposed to be just beyond Dark Cave, if he can find it. He was last there about 10 years ago. It is now getting darker out and beginning to rain. With the morning rain, the road is likely impassable. We will not get out today because of the rain. John drops by and we discuss the maps and GPS locations. We should be able to find Bat Cave tomorrow.

Friday

It rained a bit last night and more again this morning. It looks like it is raining less to the south, so I will drive towards Spanish Point and then up the east side of the island on Castle Hill road. I drive south and the road is very sloppy, but it gets better near Spanish Point. As I turn back north on the east side of the island, it begins to rain again. The road is better than the Dark Cave road; however, it is muddy. I go towards a depression or sinkhole that I marked with my GPS unit, about 2.5 miles north of Spanish Point, but I turn around before I get stuck. I take a couple of flower pictures and see a shell graveyard. I grab a couple of big conch shells for my son. The drive back is worse because of the rain. I hope caving isn’t a bust today because of the roads. I go to the Two Feet Bay area and go up to the cliffs. There are some small caves with skylights that make a good photo op. I believe the main cave is called Indian Cave. The limestone is very nasty.

One false move and it could cut you to the bone. I see a group of tourists here today. A taxi has brought them and they look rich. I see one smoking and realize that I have not seen one islander smoke or curse; just polite wholesome people.

I call John and he is reluctant to go out on the bad roads. I finally convince him and pick him up at 5:00 P.M. He brings the family along. Dark Cave road is a bad option so we go up Castle Hill road to a GPS point and turn left. On the way, a couple of wild pigs speed past the Helly Hansen. We can drive to within 0.5 mile of three sinks. John and I leave the family behind. Following the GPS and the trail, we get to the first sink pretty quickly. I have little gear, the weather is cooler, and the walk is pretty easy. The first sink has no cave and goes down about 20 feet. On one end is a small man-made well that has likely been there for hundreds of years. I see no cave opportunity here. The next sink is quite near by and has a name, Round Sink or Round Cave. John says there is water in the sink, but I can see none because it’s choked with huge ferns. We don’t venture in. I have mis-marked the third sink so we don’t find it. It is beginning to get dark, so we head back to the vehicle. We drive back, I bid farewell to John, and head to dinner.

Saturday

Today is the day I head home. I weigh my baggage at the airport and it is 99 lbs in total. No wonder it feels heavy. I talk to a woman at the airport who happens to be a physician from New Jersey. She is also on her way home. She stayed at Cocoa Point for a week at \$750/night (meals included). For over \$5,000 you should get some food. She is interested in caving so I spout off a few stories. I came to Barbuda in the dark but I am leaving in the day. It is much different. The island is breathtaking from above. We fly over Spanish Point with the vibrant blue water and the coral reefs. I see one boat anchored. I would like to return with a small group to hike and map all the caves on the island. John believes it will help his cause to develop ecological tourism for the island. ●



Top: After the dry entrance passage, Dark Cave becomes wet (photo by Jerry Cindric).
Above: Looking into Bryant Cave (photo by Jerry Cindric).



Floating the Meramec

and a Trip to Little Hamilton Cave

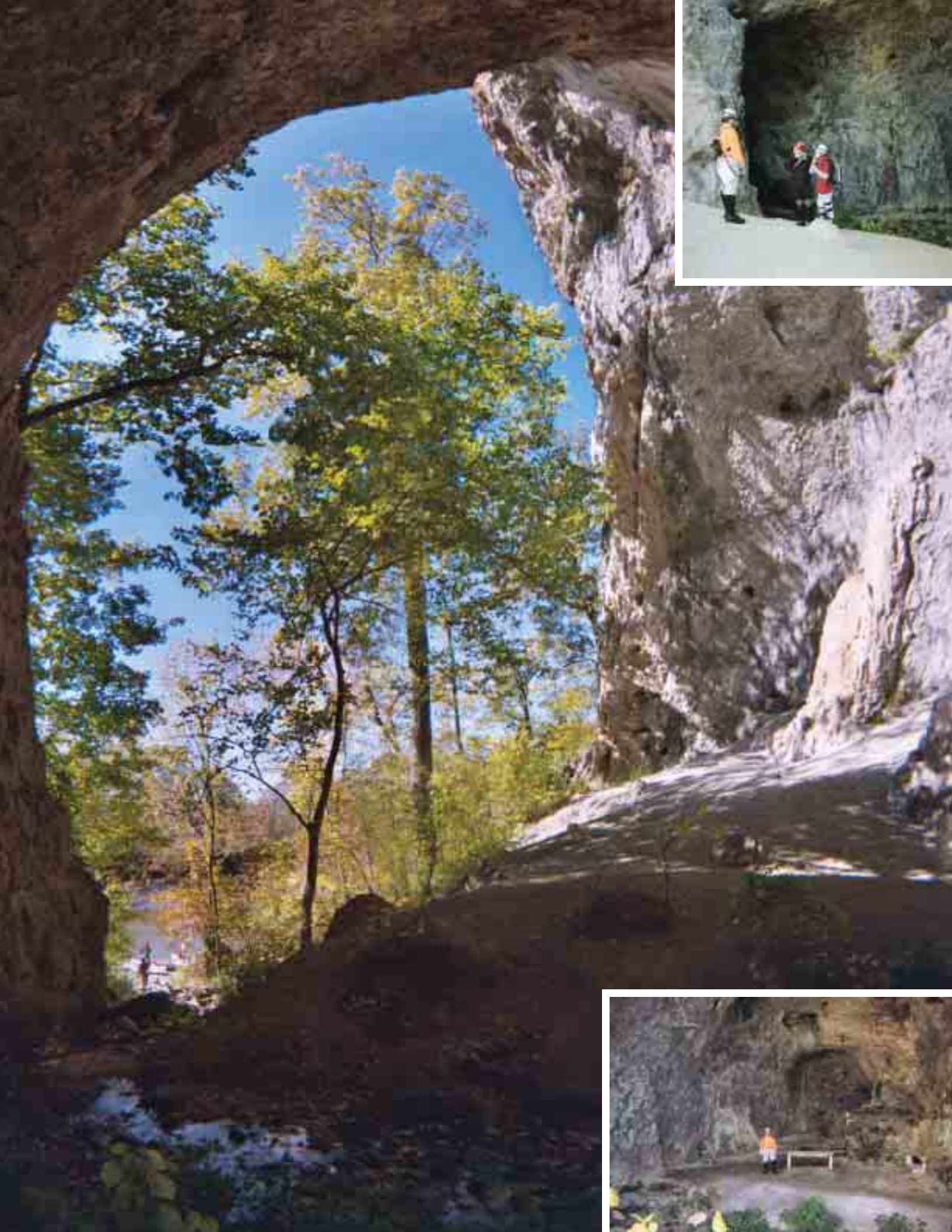
trip report by Gary Johnson
photos by Gary Johnson and
Jean-Philippe Rey

Meramec State Park contains so many interesting caves that it isn't always easy deciding which caves to visit. During the MSS 50th Anniversary Celebration in June 2006, I had visited Mushroom Cave and Hamilton Cave, and on a trip when I first started caving several years ago, I had visited Sheep Cave, Camp Cave, Lone Hill Onyx, and Indian Cave. But I had long wanted to visit Green's Cave on the Meramec River. I'd read about its half mile of highly decorated main passage and its huge entrance. So this October 2006 float trip was designed with the main purpose of visiting Green's Cave. I also researched several other caves along the river so that we'd have a full day of floating and caving. In addition, I secured a permit for the following day to one of the outstanding caves in the vicinity, Little Hamilton Cave.

This trip almost never happened. Interest was initially high, with nearly 10 people voicing interest. But other than Sam Clippinger and me, no one else was definitely committed to the trip. Everyone else wanted to wait and decide at a later date.



Top: Bluffs tower above the Meramec River at Green's Cave (photo by Gary Johnson). **Left:** Sam Clippinger and Matthew Krumlauf paddling downstream from Green's Cave (photo by Jean-Philippe Rey).





Well, starting a week before the trip, people started dropping out. Soon virtually all the tentative “yes” responses became “Sorry, but I can’t make it.” One of the grotto’s newest cavers, Jean-Philippe Rey, said he was going on the trip, but that left us one short

Previous page: The huge entrance of Green’s Cave (photo by Gary Johnson). **Inset, upper right:** Gearing up to enter Green’s Cave (photo by Jean-Philippe Rey). **Inset, lower right:** A picnic table sits in the far right shelter-cave-like section of the Green’s Cave entrance (photo by Jean-Philippe Rey).

of a minimum group of four. So Sam put out a call to his scout troop to see if anyone was interested: we got one taker, Matt Krumlauf, leaving us right at the minimum. This situation made me a little uneasy: if just one person now dropped out, the trip would have to be scuttled.

On Friday evening, everyone arrived at the campground, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Everybody made it. The trip would indeed take place. The Meramec State Park campground is a madhouse in the summer,



Left: Entering Green’s Cave (photo by Gary Johnson). **Above:** Sam Clippinger in Green’s Cave (photo by Gary Johnson).

with some of the worst-behaved campers that I’ve ever encountered. However, when the weather turns a little chilly, most tent campers stay away. We were surrounded by RVs. Very few tents dotted the campground. As a result, most noise was muffled inside the RVs. Sure, dogs still barked, and various kids acted like rabid squirrels, but overall it wasn’t too bad. The campground quieted down nicely after dark.

On Saturday morning, temperatures dropped to freezing. J.P.’s first words as he staggered from his tent in the morning: “That was awful!” So I guess he got a little cold. When we dropped by the canoe outfitter, I got my first disappointment of the weekend: we couldn’t float all the way to the campground. We could only float from Sappington Bridge to the park’s canoe takeout point by the concessionaire building. We couldn’t float the final two miles to the campground and that’s where six of the seven caves were located that I was hoping to visit. AARRGGGGHHHHHHH! But the one cave remaining on our schedule was Green’s Cave, and it was bigger than all the others combined.



The guy who would be driving us to the put-in point said we could visit the other caves by hiking upstream from the campground. We'd have to wade across the river. I knew the caves in questions were all relatively short, with several in the 50-100 foot long range. If we could've floated right to their entrances ... maybe they would've been worth visiting. But if we had to bushwhack and wade for these little caves ... well, I suspected it wouldn't be time well spent.

Anyway, we set off for Sappington Bridge in the shuttle bus, with the driver providing non-stop narration. Sam and J.P. seemed to enjoy the narration, which largely consisted of the driver playing the role of Santa Claus (and yes, he did sort of look like Santa Claus), but after 15 minutes of this, I was about ready to scream. However, the driver did provide one tasty bit of trivia: along Hwy. D, you'll see some huge homes, with price tags of over \$1,000,000, and these homes are arranged to have a great

Top, left: Jean-Philippe Rey and Matthew Krumlau with a terraced stalagmite (photo by Gary Johnson). **Top, right:** Flowstone coats the walls in Green's Cave (photo by Gary Johnson). **Left:** Sam Clippinger in Green's Cave (photo by Gary Johnson).

view over ... a lake that never happened! Yes, the homes were built in anticipation of Meramec Dam being built near Hamilton Hollow, but of course, opposition arose and the project was eventually abandoned. So now the stately homes look out over ... cattle pasture!

Sappington Bridge Access has a fair-sized parking lot (that might hold 20 cars) and a long concrete ramp to the river. I suspect things get sort of crazy in the summer, when several hundred people float the Meramec each weekend day, but on this Saturday morning, there were just five canoes sitting on the bank. And as we floated down the river, we didn't encounter many other canoes, maybe a dozen. So it was a fairly pleasant float.

The Meramec is an easy river to float, with no rapids or constrictions or large obstructions. Frequently, J.P. and I ended up choosing the tricky routes on purpose because the wide, easy alternatives looked plain boring. The river doesn't help you much with your float speed. It frequently looks like a pond, so any downstream velocity you acquire is strictly based on paddling. Having said this, though, there were a few places where snags presented some minor problems, and overall, I saw more snags on the Meramec than on the Eleven Point, where the water runs wide, deep, and fast.

Green's Cave sits about two miles down river from the access point. I suppose an inattentive paddler could possibly float right past the cave without realizing it's there. While the entrance dimensions at the dripline are approximately 100 wide by 90 feet high, a line of trees does a middling job of obscuring the entrance. As we floated down the river, I noticed a light shadow behind the trees, on the face of the bluff, forming a large arc in the background. My GPS unit said we were within a couple hundred feet of the cave, so we paddled for the river's east bank and pulled our canoes out of the water.

The wide entrance of Green's Cave resembles a shelter cave. The cave stream bisects the entrance area. On the right, the remains of a concrete picnic table sits in a depression in the bluff. On the left, the entrance area looks like an undercut bluff. Sunlight hit this area full force.

Unlike, Jam Up Cave on the Jacks Fork River, where the huge entrance dimensions are maintained for about 300 feet back into the ridge, here at Green's Cave, the main



Above: The entrance of Little Hamilton Cave sits at the base of a rock outcrop. Left to right: Matthew Krumlau, Sam Clippinger, and Jean-Philippe Rey (photo by Gary Johnson).

passage immediately narrows beyond the shelter-cave-like entrance area to about 35 feet high by 30 feet wide. The passage maintains these dimensions for only about 100 feet before narrowing again. At a small two-foot-high waterfall, the passage drops to about 20 feet high by 8 feet wide. These are the dimensions that the cave maintains for much of the remainder of its length, until the final 300 feet when the passage finally pinches.

Immediately beyond the little waterfall near the entrance, the passage is highly decorated with white flowstone that coats the walls. This flowstone is dry and deteriorating, but it's impressive nonetheless. From here on, you're frequently sloshing through water, but you can remain standing. This is easy walking passage, and I'm sure it gets visited many times every day in the summer by flashlight cavers.

This is a remarkable cave. Once you're at least 200 feet into the cave, the formations are moist and shiny. We kept pulling out our cameras every few feet. I was only packing a one-time-use camera, which has a flash that is only good for about 15 feet. But that was just about the right flash-to-subject distance.

You don't enter any large rooms. The passage is sinuous, curving left, then right (repeat numerous times). Long sight lines are rare. So there is always limited distance to work with when taking photographs.

The main passage is typically coated on both sides with flowstone. Sometimes modest columns form on ledges. Sometimes large columns several feet thick stand in the passage. I suspect many of the finer, more-delicate formations have been vandalized. For example, you typically just see soda-straw stubs. But there are plenty of impressive formations still remaining in this cave.

After a half mile of walking passage, the ceiling finally descended. We crawled on hands and knees for a while. I pulled out the cave map and guessed we were near the end, but I wasn't sure because I hadn't really looked at the map until this point. Sam took the duties of belly crawling forward. He crawled about 50 feet and encountered a little place where he could sit up. From here, he said the remaining passage looked small. His findings agreed with what the map showed for the final few feet of passage. I called him back. The walk back out presented us with a new perspective on



Above: Matt Krumlauf views a wide column in Little Hamilton Cave (photo by Gary Johnson).
Bottom, right: Gary Johnson, Matthew Krumlauf, and Sam Clippinger in Lone Hill Onyx. Careless cavers have left muddy handprints on this impressive display of flowstone (photo by Jean-Philippe Rey).

several formations, so we took several more photos along the way.

Back at the entrance, we set up lunch at the concrete picnic table. Sam built a fire in the remains of a stone grill, and we cooked hot dogs. While we ate lunch, we received several curious visitors wanting to know about the cave. We shared information, but only with the caveat that they need to be properly equipped to visit the cave. We didn't see anyone venture beyond the waterfall. None of the floaters were really prepared to go any further in the cave.

The rest of the float was easy. You can't really miss the take-out point. You can see its parking lot from the river. It will probably hold a couple hundred cars. This place must be a real circus in the summer.

What would we do next? Go bushwhacking/wading for the small caves downstream? No, I couldn't see any sense in that. I was the only one in the group who had been to the back of Lone Hill Onyx Cave. I thought Sam, Matt, and J.P. would enjoy that trip more. And I was interested in going into the cave again, this time with a map. At the MSS 50th Anniversary Celebration, I had visited the cave, but we'd just sort of stum-

bled around, navigating with vague memories of the cave map, and after the trip I looked at a map and had noticed a couple areas that we had missed. So on this trip, I wanted to find those additional areas.

I voiced my preference for Lone Hill Onyx and no one objected, so we headed for the cave. On past visits, I had always seen lots of salamanders (both cave salamanders and slimy salamanders) along the tiny stream that runs through the cave's entrance passage. But this time, we saw exactly zero salamanders; however, the pools were filled with the most bugs that I've ever seen in a cave. After the trip, I asked Scott House about the absence of salamanders, and he said this happens frequently. After a long, hot summer and frequent visitation, salamanders typically make themselves scarce.

Sam wanted to get back to camp before nightfall, so I moved through the cave much faster than normal. We passed a group of flashlight cavers (who had neither helmets nor backup light sources) that were on their way back out of the cave. They said they had turned around after running into a long spell of crawlway passage. Little did they know what they missed ...

Eventually the passage becomes quite large. We checked out the right-hand side passage, where you can find three very large formations in a wide passage with a hard-packed dirt floor. Then we retraced our steps to the main passage and headed

deeper into the cave. Here the passage becomes subway big. I led the way to the big room at the back at the cave, and we marveled over the large column at the top of the mound of breakdown. This room is very impressive, with a 40 foot dome beside the column and a nice forest of soda straws covering the ceiling to the left.

Matt led the trip out. He stumbled around a little bit, but he eventually got us out of the cave. Along the way, I led us on a quick sidetrip down a short side passage that leads to a circular room that is marred by signatures. This was a fast trip, and we were back at the campsite with plenty of time to take showers and start a campfire before it got dark.

On Sunday, we headed for Little Hamilton. We had turned in the permit application on Saturday at the park office. So we drove for Hamilton Hollow and parked at Old Hamilton Ironworks. I had talked a little about the location of the cave with Brian Wilcox, who oversees the cave permit program at the state park office, but for the most part, I was depending on a GPS location. This location was included in the cave information handouts at the MSS 50th Anniversary Celebration. I quickly learned it was a bad move relying on the MSS location. Using my GPS unit, I guided us directly to the location, where we looked for a three-foot-wide by one-foot-high hole ... but the area didn't look right at all. Nonetheless, we started bushwhacking. And we bushwhacked. And we bushwhacked....



And we bushwhacked. Finally, J.P. asked to see the cave map. I pulled it out of my pocket and realized the cave heads west ... and that was impossible in the location we were searching. The cave would've hovered in mid air above a side hollow. That meant the GPS location was totally wrong. We needed to be on the west side of a side hollow. So we backtracked to the east until encountering a major side hollow, and then we bushwhacked some more. At least here we found large rock outcrops and boulders—which Brian told me look for.

After looking for at least another half hour (two hours altogether), I was ready to give up. If the GPS position was wrong, we had no idea if we were even close. The cave could be high. It could be low. I frantically searched some more bluff area, and then Sam and I agreed we were done. I yelled for J.P. to tell him we were giving up. He was downstream with Matt, somewhere along Hamilton Creek. I decided to walk in his direction while waiting for him, and as I walked toward him ... I ran smack dab into the cave.

The cave entrance is at the base of a rock outcropping, a small bluff maybe six or seven feet tall. The entrance was a little bigger than I was expecting. I had somehow envisioned a tight bellycrawl, but I could see far down the entrance passage, which quickly increased in size. Easy stuff. We geared up and crawled in.

The first area in the cave had a hard-packed floor with about a four-foot-high ceiling. This would be the last time we could see a firm floor in the entire cave. From here on, we would be walking on a sticky mixture of clay and mud. No stream runs through this cave, so any water that seeps into the cave system has nowhere to go other than continue the slow journey down. The floor is relatively level with little change in elevation from the entrance to the cave's far reaches. As a result, the floor is sort of soupy. But the soup isn't very deep. Just a few inches. So it's easy to walk through the cave. Clay balled up around my boots till I was probably carrying ten pounds extra on each foot.

We worked our way back in the cave. At first, a little crawling is required. To get beyond the entrance room, you must crawl to the left past some formations. Part of the crawl is somewhat tight and you can get sort of slimed in the process. But after only about 40 feet of crawling, the passage opens



Above: Several large formations occupy the main passage at Little Hamilton Cave (photo by Gary Johnson).

up to walking height and the cave stays that way for most of its length. Soon after the crawl, we were looking at multiple large formations. Here, fat columns of somewhat awkward shape filled large parts of the passage. The ceiling along the left had many soda straws and helectites. As we continued further back in Little Hamilton, we continued seeing more large formations. The ceiling height isn't huge. Averaging 8 to 12 feet. So the vertical space is somewhat restricted. As a result, the plentiful calcite deposits tend to be large in girth.

The cave map indicated several areas where it looked like flowstone covered the floor. However, we didn't see any areas like that. Like Green's Cave and Lone Hill Onyx, this cave has been highly visited. Almost every bit of floor space has been disturbed with shoe prints. So I suspect, over the years, muddy feet have tracked over the flowstone and left several inches of debris. The same thing has happened at Mushroom Cave.

Many formations show signs of breakage. Nonetheless, this is still a very impressive cave. Unlike, nearby Hamilton Cave, where formations are relatively rare except for a side passage near the entrance, Little Hamilton is one of the most highly decorated caves in the park, ranking with Green's Cave and Mushroom Cave and Fisher Cave.

The cave is only a little over 1,000 feet long and it has no side passages. I wasn't paying much attention to the cave map. That meant I wasn't sure where we were in the cave when the ceiling descended to crawling height. We crawled on hands and knees to an area that looked like the end of the cave. A squat mud sculpture that resembled a cave troll sat in front of the low continuation. I pulled out the map and determined we were probably only about 30 feet from the point where the passage terminated. I crawled forward to make sure we were at the end of the passage. This was a messy final crawl. I had to slide on my belly underneath small formations on the ceiling, so I got slimed pretty bad in the process. This was indeed the end of the cave.

We retraced our steps back out of the cave and were soon back at the Old Hamilton Ironworks parking lot. We were running short on time. We needed to break camp by 2 P.M., so we headed straight back to the campground, broke down our tents, and loaded up for the drive home.

Overall, this was a very enjoyable trip. We didn't get to float a section of the Meramec River that I had hoped to visit. That will have to wait for another time. It gives me a reason to return to this area in the future. ●

Seven-Year Itch

trip report and photos by John McGuire

Everyone has a vice of some sort. A crutch, so to speak. Well, have you ever had that certain pleasure withheld for so long that it feels like you're experiencing withdrawal symptoms? For me, "the shakes" had already passed, but I felt like I needed to be in front of a support group telling them, "Hello. My name is John McGuire and I have a caving addiction."

The last time I was on a KCAG-sanctioned caving trip was 1999. Almost seven years have passed since that infamous "Millennium Trip" into Ennis Cave with fellow club members Rick Hines and Peddie Heinz. We entered the cave December 31st, 1999, and came out the next year. The next day, actually, but nonetheless we toasted in the new century underground. Thanks Rick, for the bottle of bubbly and champagne glasses. There are those who would like to specify that, technically, the 20th Century didn't end until December 31st, 2000, but don't spoil the fun.

So, nearly seven years had elapsed. My determination was mounting. I would not be denied any longer. There was only one thing I could do. That itch was going down! You understand. Hell, even if it had only been seven months that's still too long. Once I decided to go, things started happening fast. I threw my gear, GPS unit, digital camera, and my mountain bike in the back of my Suburban and took off.

I was so eager to hit the highway I almost didn't want to take the 60 seconds to leave a note detailing exactly where I'd

be and for how long. Only responsible people do that, right? With my old travel partners Giddiness and Adrenaline, I headed eastbound toward Columbia. I wanted to return to an area I had visited with KCAG friends Bob Younger, Mike Kirch, and Lance Miller in the mid 1990s. I had a mental image of the landmarks and where to turn to get there. That's all I needed. Checking a map, well, that falls under "responsible," and I'd already visited there once that morning. Besides, I had a map in the door pocket if I needed to consult it after a few wrong turns. It's a guy thing.

A quick glance at my watch revealed 10:00 A.M. Saturday 9/16. I reset the trip meter on the dash to zero. I figured if I pushed the speed limit 5 over, and managed to get there in 2 hours, the short travel time would sound more attractive to anyone who wants to go with me next time. This was a recon tour and I was bent on bringing back valuable intel!

I headed for Three Creeks Conservation Area. My watch read 11:52 A.M. when I exited I-70 onto 63 Hwy. South in Columbia. 30 minutes later I pulled into the south parking lot of the conservation area. There I took one of the free topo maps from the welcome sign and wrote down my GPS position. I pulled on my pack, threw my camera bag strap over my shoulder, and headed off-trail through the woods to inspect some bluffs that I remembered from a trip several years ago. If I encountered a cave, I'd record the coordinates so I



Above: The small entrance of a Three Creeks Conservation Area cave (photo by John McGuire).

could return with fellow cavers to investigate further.

Once I started hiking I was in my element. I can never get enough one-on-one time with nature. Within 3 minutes, literally, from the time I left the parking lot, I was standing atop one of the most beautiful bluffs imaginable. I said to myself, "Has to be 300 feet down to the stream," but the topo map put it right at 200 feet. A respectable pucker factor. After photographing some owl pellets and an unidentified snake, I found a narrow drainage channel through which dirt and loose rock had formed a tallis slope down. Finding good footing and tree roots to hold on to was fairly easy, so I started my descent to the base of the upper-level out-cropping of bluff faces. This took me down maybe 30 feet or so to where I could navigate left or right along the base of these upper rock faces and start poking around for cave mouths. I went right (south) at first, finding nothing in over an hour.

Turning around in hopes of success in the other direction, I returned to my original point of descent and continued on North. Good footing and hand-holds were essential. A quote from my old caving partner, Mike Jones, came to mind: “Don’t walk and gawk. If you’re walking, don’t gawk, and if you’re gawking, don’t walk.” Good advice, and it applied here. A few more steps along the rock face and immediately I encountered a horizontal slot in the bluff face.



I estimated the slot to be about 12 to 14 inches high by 36 inches wide. I snapped a photo of it, using my fanny pack for scale. I tried to get a GPS reading outside but bluffs and tree cover prevented satellite acquisition. I decided to stick my head in the slot and find out if it was really a cave, so I donned my helmet and headlamp.

I squeezed my torso into the tight slot and found it was indeed a cave. There was just one room. The floor of the cave was about three feet below the little window that I peeked through. I decided to squeeze through onto the floor. At most, the room was 8 feet by 14 feet, but it was very high and seemed to have been formed by dripping action from two different chimneys high above. Without climbing, I could only guess the height of the taller chimney to be 30 feet. That in itself is a curiosity because the floor of the cave is no more than 35 to 40 feet down from the top of the bluff.

The south side of the room had plenty of white flowstone and a few small

serrated curtains, all emitting from one dry (dead) chimney source. These speleothems were dry and chalky. However, the formations on the north side were live and included more serrated curtains, flowstone, and soda straws. Because there’s some natural daylight entering the room, there was a little bit of green algae growth on the speleothems, and what appeared to be a purple algae. Have you ever seen or heard of purple algae? At first I thought it made the formations less than desirable to photograph because it reminded me of cheap tour caves where they leave the trail lights on too long and cause algae growth. But then I noticed that one soda straw had a little bit of green algae growth inside, and it was magnified by the water drop at the tip. I wondered if the magnification aided the algae growth. I decided that its rarity was worth capturing in a photo. Thankfully my camera has a macro lens which allowed me to get within an inch or two of the subject and snap a photo.

After the photo-shoot, I took my camera back to the car so I could concentrate on hunting for more caves. I did a little rock climbing and found two more caves that deserve closer inspection later. One of them looked like an easy crawl. I found lots of scat just outside the entrance. I can’t identify what kind of animal left it, but it reminded me of how coyotes keep their cave clean and teach their pups to use one area for the latrine. The cave went back further than my light could shine. I could see more scat along the tunnel. All of it was dry, suggesting that the animal was not using this cave any more. I’d like to return and investigate this cave with some caver friends.

While in the vicinity, I also checked out a cave called Crabb’s Crack. The story on that, so I’m told, is that Richard Crabb led a group looking for caves in the area.



Left: Moss growing in the tip of a soda straw (photo by John McGuire). **Top:** Serrated ceiling decorations (photo by John McGuire). **Above:** A view from the inside of a small conservation area cave (photo by John McGuire).

He found a small little entrance at ground level. Now, I was looking at a hole not much larger than about 15 inches tall by 24 inches wide. I investigated it with friends back in the mid ‘90s and it went maybe 100 feet or so. All belly crawling. Well, now there’s a large rock right in the middle of the entrance. It appears to have been placed there and not just a natural occurrence.

It is my hopes to return soon with friends during leaf-off when GPS units are more likely to acquire satellite readings at the various cave entrances. If this interests you, it’s a short day trip or we could make a weekend of it. The conservation area’s mountain bike trails are excellent, too. You can download a map of the area from the MDC Web site. Hope to see you there. ●

Geronimo Springs Cave

trip report by Andy Isbell
photos by Bill Gee

Geronimo Springs Cave was once used as a water source. Probably to water horses. Inside the cave is a short dam. A pipe once led from the dam to the entrance. The dam is still there, but the pipe has been removed. The entrance has been walled off except for a rectangular hole 16" W x 14" H x 6 1/2" thick.

The entrance passage is low and wide, requiring belly crawling for maybe 140 feet. The locals say the first room is large enough to turn an 18 wheeler around in. This is way off. There are several areas that might be Carroll Cave size, but only in short spurts. This cave has a lot of breakdown in the main passage. An 18 wheeler would be a tight fit if you could get the breakdown out of the way.

I have been in this cave twice and have not seen it all yet. In the first big room on the left is a stream drain. We think it connects to a sinkhole outside. We found coon tracks and leaves in this room. It might be easier to enter this cave through the sink rather than the entrance we used.

Just a quick inventory of the critters we found: 1 Grotto Salamander, several Amphipods (*Bactrurus Brachycaudus*), and several bats.

I don't know if this cave has been surveyed. It seems to have mutable streams but that is yet to be determined.

Trip leader: Andy Isbell. Other participants: Bill Gee (KCAG) and Shawn Williams (MVG).

The owners are caver friendly. If you are interested in this cave contact Andy Isbell. This cave is DIFFICULT. The entrance is low and long. Pam Rader went to this cave but did not cave with us. She wants to get a trip together to go back to this cave. Good luck, Pam. ●

Top: Andy Isbell in the entrance crawlway (photo by Bill Gee). **Middle:** Can Andy Isbell squeeze through the entrance window? (photo by Bill Gee). **Right:** Yes, he can. This concrete structure once probably led to a water sluice (photo by Bill Gee).

