



The Month's Guano

August 2002

Kansas City Area Grotto

Volume 16, Issue 6-8

From the Eyes of a Beginner by Emily McClanahan

I included the whole project write-up that I used in my portfolio, so I know it may be a little much for what you need. Please include (if you do include this story in the *Guano*) some quick details about my project. I chose to spend a semester researching caving for a senior research seminar. The class included a ten-page paper, a well-documented project (the caving trip was my project), and a ten-minute presentation at the semester's end. I was also required to have a mentor for the project. Mike Fraley served as my mentor, although none of this project would've been possible without the courteous and helpful personalities in the KCAG, including yourself (Bryon Carmony). Thank you again immensely to the KCAG for all they did to make me feel welcome in the group, and for introducing me to a whole new world (literally!) Sorry I've been a bit of a delinquent attendee this summer . . . you know how it goes when you're finally free from a year of intense pressure in school. Any obligation seems like too much in comparison to the freedom of summer . . . :). Hopefully I will see all of you sometime again, but take care, and take heart to know that I'll be spreading the gospel of caving to my friends in Ohio this fall!

Emily McClanahan

Project Write-Up

4/19/2002

Because of my excessively busy schedule this week, I hadn't had a chance to pack at all. I took a couple of hours off from school to attend to all this business, piecing together my caving outfit, composing first aid kits for my dad and I, and scrounging up other miscellaneous items. Mike Fraley also called during this time and informed me that circumstances were preventing him and the other cavers from meeting up with our group until at the cave Saturday. This was a little disappointing, since he and the other cavers were the only people I really knew, and also because I was counting on some of his gear. We worked everything out though, and he coached me through some of the final details of packing. I felt like my dad and I would be right on target and ready on time. When I came home from school at 3:30, however, I realized that, in addition to all the cave gear we needed to prepare, we would need camping gear, which my dad was furiously attending to. In accordance with the McClanahan tradition, we were of course late, and to make things more frenzied, we still needed to buy batteries and kneepads.

When we arrived at Nall Baptist Church ten minutes late (which was no big deal; everybody was just milling around), I was pleasantly surprised to see a few college-age females mixed in with the group of boy scouts and troop leaders. I quickly introduced myself and then felt very positive about Julie and Elaine, Kathy Carr's daughter and friend, both long time cavers. We

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

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

NCRC Callout number Emergency use only

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

- August 4-10, 2002 **Mammoth Cave Restoration Project** See Article in the December 2001 *Guano* for details Go to <http://oldsci.eiu.edu/physics/len/mammoth/mcrp0.html> for More information.
- August 14, 2002 **Grotto Meeting.** Magg Hall on the UMKC campus.
- September 11, 2002 **Grotto Meeting.** Magg Hall on the UMKC campus.
- September 14-15, 2002 **NCRC Weekend Orientation.** Sponsored by Carroll Cave Conservancy Inc. GOTO www.carrollcave.org for more details.
- September 20-22, 2002 **Annual Beaver Lake Trip.** There will be a novice trip as well this weekend to Whippoorwill.
- October 9, 2002 **Grotto Meeting.** Magg Hall on the UMKC campus.
- October 19-20, 2002 **Fall MVOR.** MCKC is the sponsor for this one. More details as they become available.
- November 2-3, 2002 **Mammoth Cave Restoration Project** See Article in the December 2001 *Guano* for details Go to <http://oldsci.eiu.edu/physics/len/mammoth/mcrp0.html> for More information.
- November 13, 2002 **Grotto Meeting.** Magg Hall on the UMKC campus.

Our Grotto Website has changed to www.kcgrotto.com

WEBSITE CHANGES by Sam Clippinger

As a few people have noticed already, I've had a burr under my saddle lately about the KCAG website. First and foremost, if you didn't already know, the Grotto's website has moved. We're now at <http://www.kcgrotto.org> ([kgrotto.com](http://www.kcgrotto.com) also reaches us). The hosting is from a server in my office and is provided for free by my company (yes, I did ask permission).

So far, I've made numerous small changes to the site to generally clean up its appearance without changing its basic layout. I changed the fonts on all of the pages so they are now consistent and (hopefully) a little more readable. I reworked the buttons on the left side of the page so they're bigger and it's easier to change them or make more. I added comments to most of the links on the "Links" page and removed a few dead links. I added some of our own documents, such as our constitution, our Scout policy and links to nearby Grottos. I've updated and added to the "Guano" and "Events" pages to catch them up with recent events. With Rick Hines' permission, I added his digital photos from the Little Bear trip in April (totaling over 20 Megs of images).

As was discussed at a KCAG meeting quite some time ago, I even added the KCAG roster. Don't panic -- your home address is not available to everyone who visits the site. The roster is only available to KCAG members. You should visit the site to see how this works.

I have even more ideas coming:

=> I'm not very fond of some of the font colors on the site -- the green-on-brown buttons are hard to read and the dark brown links on the black background are nearly invisible. I like the dark color scheme but I plan to tweak the text colors a bit to make the site easier to read.

=> I have more photos to be published, pending the permission of their owner.

=> Since we spend so much time dealing with Boy Scouts, I'd like to create a separate page for them to list the information they should know before they contact us. Currently, most of that information is on the "Links" page.

=> I plan to create a "Jargon/FAQ" page to define some of the terms we casually throw around (NSS, MVOR, CCC, karst, speleothem, etc) and to answer basic questions.

=> As soon as my company's new mail server is online, I'll be able to create a KCAG mailing list so all the Grotto members will be reachable through one email address. That would also make it easier for Bryon to distribute the Guano every month.

Here's what I need from you: Ideas. Anything, no matter how silly it sounds. What would make the site more useful for you as an experienced caver? Imagine you're a novice caver and ask yourself that same question. According to our constitution, KCAG's purpose is "to encourage cave conservation and the responsible scientific and recreational use of caves by cavers of the Kansas City Area". I'd like to do that by making our site a great resource for everyone, even for other Grottos.

My email address is samc@kgrotto.org -- drop me a line and let me know what you think!

(Continued from page 1) **Report**

promised to caravan together, and that being set, my dad and I decided to run to the gas station and Wal-Mart before the whole group left (so we wouldn't have to stop on the way). I was only able to find the exact pair of kneepads that Mike had recommended that I try and stay away from, but I bought them anyway.

We returned to the church and presently hit the rainy road. The drive was much longer than I had anticipated, since Ha Ha Tonka is in the Ozarks and not outside of Columbia, as I had been led to believe. By the time we got into camp, it was 11:00, and my dad was not too enthusiastic to put up the tent in the rain and the dark, to say the least. The light drizzle was the best it got that night. Overnight, the downpour was torrential and our tent got wet. Dad attempted a tent rescue effort at three a.m. in which I was a less-than-active participant. I could have slept right through the whole thing, damp sleeping bag and all. I couldn't help but worry that my loss of sleep during the night would inhibit my caving abilities the next day.

4/20/2002

The morning was just as dreary as the preceding evening. We ate breakfast with all the non-boy scouts and got completely dressed. Then we began the 45-minute drive to Little Smittle and Lowell caves. It was still rainy and I of course fell asleep quickly. When we pulled into the "parking lot" near Little Smittle, I was pleased to see my caving companions Bryon, Mike, and Sam Clippinger. We did some final preparations for the journey underground, including the transfer of gear from my flimsy backpack into the gas mask army bag that Mike brought for me. I felt thoroughly prepared when Mike checked my pack and would ask things like, "Do you have matches?" and I'd whip them out of my baby bottle (a device recommended for storage by Caving Basics).

The first view of the gaping mouth of the cave was thrilling. The mystery of its dark recesses just beckoned me and I couldn't wait to get inside. We had a quick tutorial before we went in very deep, and then we started off in a single file line. There were 19 people in our group, so the progress was rather slow. Although I saw a few neat formations on the walls, I was not too impressed, and found myself hoping that there would be more to the cave than just walking along on a muddy cave floor. I had no trouble with falling or fatigue, as some in our entourage did. When we reached the back of the cave, we sat down for a food and water break, which I didn't think I needed because I was not even winded, but I followed the wisdom of my more experienced companions. At this point, they also had us turn off our headlamps, and we were plunged into total darkness. "You may even think you can see your neighbor," Bryon said, "but your brain is inventing the light." He instructed us to reach out and touch our neighbor's helmet, which was harder than I expected. The sensation of the complete void of light was chilling. After these "lessons," we were permitted to explore a little, and I headed up a crawl space. The climbing was fun, but I found nothing of interest, which furthered my disappointment with the caving experience. Kathy Carr pointed out a red salamander, which is apparently a pretty rare sight. We started back, and when we rounded the corner and saw the opening to the outside, I was awed. The imbalance of cool cave air with the humid, hot rainy air of the outside resulted in a foggy blurring of the light around the mouth's edges, making quite a surreal picture. "This is always my favorite part," one woman said. (Joan)

My first cave experience was followed by lunch, where we compared the amount of mud on each other's pants, took bathroom breaks, and adjusted any equipment that had not worked well in Little Smittle. My headlamp had popped off my helmet when I was climbing through the crawl space, so I knew that needed fixing. I duct taped it. I also removed my silk undershirt, because I had found that constant movement in a 56-degree environment didn't require the winter weather gear I'd worn. Before entering the next cave, which was a mile down the road from the first, we split into smaller groups, each led by two experienced cavers. Mike and Sam were designated the leaders of my dad, two boy scouts, and myself.

We were the last group of the three to start off on Lowell, allowing the other groups to get a head start on us. This cave proved more satisfying to my expectations from the start. After rounding the first corner, we were immediately on our hands and knees, dodging the small bats that hung from the ceiling. The ground was rather dry here compared to Little Smittle. After 15 or 20 minutes in the cave, we stopped for water and Mike decided to go exploring. He set his pack on a ledge and set off upwards. A few minutes later, I took him up on his invitation, relayed through Sam, who was the only one who could hear his muffled voice, to join him. I contorted my body around the jutting rocks in the narrow shaft, pushing off my elbows, knees, shoulders, and thighs in addition to the expected hands and feet. Mike had warned me that "caving uses three dimensions," meaning that every body part is used, sometimes in bizarre ways. I reached the point where Mike was waiting, and he told me he thought the passage would maybe "go" in another direction, and he gave me the option of leading. I went ahead, and came up against a rather small hole I'd have to crawl through to get to the other side. "Wow, this is tiny!" I exclaimed, almost prepared to forgo my lead. But in my mind, I remembered how long I'd prepared for this trip, and knowing that squeezes were a part of caving, I proceeded through, pushing off with my feet. Mike met me on the other side with a big grin. "Looks like you're a real caver!" he said. "When I hear, 'Wow, this is tiny!' and then the scraping of your feet going through." After that, we climbed back down

Report *(Continued on page 5)*

(Continued from page 4)**Report**
and joined the rest of the group.

The path started getting muddier. We encountered one of the other groups heading back our direction. They were going back out because one of their group members was feeling very fatigued and was ready to stop for the day. It's much easier to turn around before you're completely spent, because you've got to exert as much energy to get out of the cave as you did to get in. Nobody appreciates carrying out a fatigued group member, so we were encouraged to speak up when we got too tired. As the group passed us, they told us to keep an eye out for the entrance into the "Awesome Opossum" passage, because they weren't sure where it was. We thought we had found it immediately, but after a little exploration, we discovered it didn't "go."

It didn't take long to find the real Opossum, though. I had been hearing about it the whole trip, so I was very excited to crawl into the dark, wet, clay-packed passage. I was second in line, behind Mike, and kept up with him well. The passage was rather small and required us to crawl on our stomachs as we wound around rock walls. We hadn't made it very far, when one of the boy scouts began having problems with the constrictive nature of the passage. We stopped so Mike could squeeze by me and offer him encouragement as well as the option to stop. I was left in the front and since we could hear Bryon's group up ahead, I shouted to him what was going on with our group and the uncomfortable Boy Scout. Bryon came back to where we were so he could do some emergency cave psychology. He helped get everything resolved, Mike joined me at the front of the group, and we made our way out of the Opossum (whose name I discovered the root of when Mike pointed out an opossum skeleton). The rest of the cave was extremely muddy, and we were rather slow moving because by then, all three groups were caught up with each other. We encountered some of the most fascinating speleothems in this part of the cave that I'd seen: bacon, helectites, and others. My dad's favorite was when the ceiling was composed of multi-colored bits of sediment, like some kind of weird cement was poured there. Mike guessed that forceful water had once run through this cave and had smashed the sediment forever in the ceiling, a chilling thought in light of how helpless we would've been if any kind of forceful water had entered the cave (we would've made nice additions to the ceiling!).

Soon after this point, members of our group, which was the only one still moving forward, began growing tired and asked to turn back. My dad was a little resistant since he believed we were seeing the best stuff yet, but he knew the safety of the need to go back. So after using my pee jar (nothing can be left behind in the caves), we started out. It went much faster, especially since we crawled over the top of the Opossum. Once all three groups had caught up with each other again, they asked if a new caver wanted to lead the way out and someone suggested me. I thought I could do it, so we started off with nothing in front of me except total darkness. The difference between having Mike's light illuminating the path ahead of where my light reached, and having only my little light beam stretching ahead was substantial. I recognized a lot of landmarks from the trip in, but I was terrified that I was leading everyone the wrong way. I didn't know what was going to be around each corner or even 20 feet ahead of me. We made it out fine and all alive, though, and the outside light was never so welcome. Total time in cave: 3.5 hours.

The rain still fell when we stepped out, but it felt nice for the moment. As we speculated where to change clothes before getting in our cars, the rain was falling harder and lightning had begun to appear in the sky. The three cavers, my dad, and I were left in the parking lot, and as the sky exploded with hail and torrential rains, I tore off my muddy pants and pulled on my jeans, tossing all modesty aside. I learned later that most cavers lose their modesty in front of each other in no time at all. The five of us in our two cars got out of those low lands as soon as we could, hoping that the rest of our group had already left and wasn't having any problems. For the first twenty minutes of our car ride, I didn't want to move, feeling stiff, wet, muddy, and cold. As the heater warmed me up, I revived myself and figured out how I could get my kneepads off from under my wet and tight jeans. The kneepads, having done exactly as Mike had predicted (bunching up in back behind my knee), had rubbed painfully and provided me the most discomfort I had encountered in the cave. When I got them off in the car, I found welts behind my knee, and it felt wonderful to have my leg rid of them.

On the way home, we all stopped at a gas station, and in the bathroom I used the hand dryer about eight cycles through all over my body, which was still wet and cold. We got back into camp before the rest of our group, although the younger boy scouts were already there. It had been a pretty boring day for them and the troop leaders were buzzing about wanting to go home that night instead of the next morning. At this, Dad got to work on taking down the tent. We joined everyone for taco dinner and stood around talking about the day's events. We talked about my project for awhile, and all three cavers expressed interest in coming to my presentation. The trip served as a needed rejuvenation of my excitement for this project, and, although it would be easier to say for a certainty that I would go caving again if my friends were into it, I think I would like to do it again sometime.**

Editor's Note: Great report Emily!!!! I hope you got an 'A' on your project. I enjoyed the trip with you and your Father and I know that Mike and Sam did also. Good luck to you and may you reach your dreams. You have 'Mud In Your Blood' and you will be back I just know it...

To: Missouri grottos and cave conservationists

Hi,

I wanted to contact you folks to ask if you'd like to receive a package of our two latest cave conservation publications, for your members as well as your work with youth groups or the public. Recently the Missouri Department of Conservation published:

1. "Missouri's Natural Communities: Karst" This is a nice, fold-out brochure on karst and caves, well-illustrated with photos by Rick Walk and me. The back unfolds into a nice poster of a cave scene, one of Rick's best photos. We recommend giving this brochure/poster to anyone who might read it. It is intended to acquaint people with the values of karst resources, whether they ever go in a cave or not.

2. "Conserving Missouri's Caves and Karst" is the newly revised and expanded booklet, based on our "cave issue" of the Missouri Conservationist magazine a couple of years ago. We have a new cover by Rick Walk, we updated the articles, removed non-cave material, added the Oct. 2000 "Cave Restoration" article by Jonathan Beard and me, and there are new articles on "Speleothems" and "Where to Learn about Caves", which points to the better educational resources in Missouri, like college courses, workshops, web-sites, books, educational cave tours, etc. The goal of this booklet is to teach cave conservation, not convert people to caving. However, we do mention good caving etiquette and safety rules for those who are dabbling in caves. We recommend this 34-page booklet for cavers, teachers, serious students, cave owners, land managers, scout troops and just about anyone who ought to read it.

Please let me know right away how many of each to send you, and the mailing address, or pass this on to the right person. We will soon send mailing labels to our distribution center, so it may take a little while to get them to you. We probably can spare you up to 100 brochures and 50 booklets for now. Feel free to contact us for more if you need them later. Teachers are already requesting them, and there will be a good demand. There are nearly 50,000 brochures. Since only 9,700 copies of the booklet were printed, we probably will reprint them next year.

By the way, if I can be allowed a personal note, I'm doing well after back surgery on May 2. It's been tough, but I am walking one or two miles a day and healing well. I won't be doing a lot of stoop-walking real soon, but I probably will get back to caving later this summer.

Thanks!

Bill

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Marengo Cave by Bill Gee

Marengo Cave is in southeast Indiana about 1 hour west of Louisville, Kentucky. The cave area is a well-developed commercial attraction with many activities on the surface. Their Web site is <http://www.marengocave.com>.

Marengo Cave offers four tours. Two of them are for regular tourists and the other two are "wild cave" tours of 2 and 5 hours. I went with a group of friend including three children ages 9, 10 and 11, so we chose the longer of the two regular tours. The Dripstone Trail tour is about an hour and 10 minutes long and covers about a mile of cave. Cost is \$12.50.

The tour begins at an artificial entrance which was blasted out in 1978 and 1979, and ends at another artificial entrance created about 1910. The old entrance has a bat-friendly grate above the door. It is an easy 5 minute hike from the visitor center to the new entrance. After passing through an airlock, the real cave is about 50 feet in. We saw a small salamander on the wall of the entrance tunnel just past the airlock.

Most of the tour takes place in large borehole tunnels. The passage is wide, ranging from 40 to over 150 feet, and from 10 to 50 feet high with a nicely arched ceiling. The trail is paved and has curbs for about the first half of the tour, with the last half on well-packed dirt. If you really want to get dirty, there are a few small puddles you can step in, but generally the trail is very dry. There is one duck-under about 4 feet high and 25 feet long. A few ramps and steps go up and down, but whole tour has only about 30 feet of vertical relief. Except for narrow paved sections of trail and a stair at the end, the tour could be done in a wheelchair.

There are a number of nice formations along the way, most of them in small areas off the trail. One passage just off the tour trail contains a forest of soda straws ranging up to a foot long. This passage is illuminated and clearly visible. There are a number of columns, some in groups such as the Lion's Cage and the Prison Bars. A few rimstone dams are present, one of which is rather large. At the end of the tour is a pool of water a few inches deep and about 20 feet across. It reflects a very nice view of the ceiling.

Two notable big rooms are the Music Room and Pulpit Rock. The Music Room was used in years past for square dances, and church services were held at Pulpit Rock. My eyeball estimate is that several hundred people could fit comfortably in either room. The Music Room is also unique in having no formations. There is a cap of sandstone directly over it blocking water from entering the cave.

A third notable room is the Penny Ceiling. The ceiling in this room (which is really just an area of the trunk passage) is covered with sticky mud. If you throw a coin up at it, it is very likely to stick. Our guide encouraged us to try it using coins that were laying on the floor.

Our guide was a very young girl, possibly a high school student. She was very confident in her delivery. The talks she gave at various stops included information on how the cave formed, bat habitat, past uses of the cave, how soda straws form and how other speleothems are formed. Everything she said was accurate.

The tour emphasizes stewardship of the cave resources. Signs warning of the state laws regarding speleothem damage are prominently posted. During our tour we encountered a bat roosting directly over the trail and were warned not to take a picture of it as that would wake it up. The cave hosts eastern pipistrelles and small brown bats, both very common, and no endangered species. Our guide pointed out another bat roosting under the eave of the visitor center on the porch where the tours gather. Our guide made several references to the amount of time it takes to form speleothems, and warned us not to touch. The electric lights in the cave are turned on and off as tours go past, so accumulation of algae is kept down.

There are numerous surface activities at Marengo Cave. The visitor center has a well-stocked gift shop and a small snack bar. There is a cave simulator that kids can go through. Groups can use the campground and a zip line. Bags of dirt can be purchased in the gift shop and taken outside to a flume where you can pan for gems. Every bag is guaranteed to have something in it! There is a swimming pool on the grounds, but it was closed with the winter cover on it. Several canoe outfitters are nearby for float trips on the Blue River. There is a short nature trail that goes by the sinkhole (now filled) which was the natural entrance to the cave.

Mammoth Cave - Historic Tour **By Bill Gee**

On 18 July 2002 I took the Historic Tour at Mammoth Cave National Park. This is one of many ranger-led tours available at the park.

The Historic Tour is about 2 hours long. Entrance and exit are both through the Historic Entrance located just down the hill from the park's visitor center. The tour covers portions of Broadway up to the Giant's Coffin, then through Sparks Ave and Fat Man's Misery to the Ruins of Karnak. At the Ruins there is a steel tower to climb up. The trip ends up going back to the Rotunda.

The tour covers some of the most-traveled parts of the cave. Along Broadway Ave. are the remains of the saltpeter mining operation from the War of 1812. The passage behind the Giant's Coffin has a duck-under that is tight enough to give some people anxiety attacks. Fat Man's Misery is very tight from about thigh-high to the floor, but considerably wider above that. The ranger says he knows of only two people who absolutely could not fit.

The Ruins of Karnak is one of the most scenic rooms in the cave. This large dome contains a lot of flowstone draperies. This is the wettest part of the cave on this tour. The floor is wet and puddle, and there are many drips from the ceiling.

Climbing out of the Ruins of Karnak, you go up a steel tower with about 160 steps. This is a major effort for some people, though I found the climb pretty easy.

As usual for a "normal people" tour, the rangers gave out basic information about the history of the cave and how it was formed. At one point the ranger turned out all the lights. After speaking for about two minutes, he lit a cigarette lighter to illustrate how much light the early explorers had. It is amazing how bright that small flame is after total darkness.

For \$9.00 and 2 hours, this is a good way to get a basic feel for the cave. You also get to spend two hours out of the hot summer weather! I don't like going in large groups, and this tour had nearly the maximum of 120.

Mammoth Cave - Grand Ave. Tour **By Bill Gee**

On 20 July 2002 I took the Grand Ave tour at Mammoth Cave National Park. This is the longest of the ranger-led tours which can be done by non-cavers. The tour is about 4 miles long and takes a little over 4 hours.

The group takes busses from the visitor center to the Carmichael Entrance. The tour goes down Cleveland's Ave to the Snowball Dining room for lunch, then out Boone's Ave and Grand Ave to the Frozen Niagara exit. Busses return the group to the visitor center.

Almost the entire tour is in huge walking cave. A stretch along Jeanne's Ave is only a few feet wide but at least 40 feet high. In one room we saw evidence of the 1998 floods in the area, with a high-water mark at least 20 feet up from the floor.

There are three major climbs along the way and two places to stop for bathroom breaks. The three climbs are not difficult for people in good physical condition. The number of people panting and wheezing after those climbs is a sad commentary on the physical health of Americans.

Much of this tour is in cave passage that once was filled to the top with fast-flowing water. Consequently there is not much in the way of formations. Still, if one walks slow and looks around with a flashlight, there are pockets of gypsum flowers, gypsum needles and various aragonite formations. One short tight passage is fenced off to protect a forest of short columns that are almost pure white calcite.

For the price of \$18.00 this tour is well worth the money. Although much of the route parallels the Wild Cave Tour, there are enough new and interesting sites to make it worth doing both. The pace of the Grand Ave tour is much more relaxed, giving plenty of time for photos.

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Editor's Corner

Be sure To visit KCAG's Website.

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To download the Acrobat viewer to read the online version of the *Guano* go to:

www.adobe.com