

The
Month's

The Kansas City Area Grotto

GUANO

Volume 17
Issue 3-4
April 2003

feature article

Caves of the Jacks Fork Valley

a view from the sinkhole entrance of Jam-Up Cave (photo by Jeff Page)

Events

April 12, 2003

Cave Research Foundation trip to USFS caves in the Ava district. For more information, contact Michael Carter at michael_carter@hotmail.com or visit the Cave Research Foundation website at www.cave-research.org.

April 13, 2003

Cave Research Foundation trip to Fitton Cave. The plan is to survey the Crystal Passage. Lodging will be available at the Steel Creek facility. For more information, contact CRF at pnkambesis@juno.com or visit the Cave Research Foundation website at www.cave-research.org.

April 16, 2003

Cave Research Foundation trip to help with a tour of Crystal Caverns in Barry County, Missouri. For more information, contact CRF at pnkambesis@juno.com or visit the Cave Research Foundation website at www.cave-research.org.

April 18-19, 2003

Speleology Session at the Missouri Academy of Science in Warrensburg, Missouri. Open to the public.

April 19-20, 2003

Restoration project weekend at Carroll Cave. All CCC members are invited to participate. The group will be building/marking trails and doing Restoration Inventory for the purpose of adding projects to the task list. The ladder is installed so access is not a problem. The cave is limited to 24 visitors per day, so signup is on a first-come-first-served basis. Everyone who signs up will have the opportunity to enter the cave and participate in the project. For more information or to sign up, contact Mike Hartley at hartlemike2@aol.com (yes, he has email!) or visit the CCC website at www.carrollcave.org.

April 25-27, 2003

Spring MVOR at Cat Rock Resort in Eldon, Missouri, sponsored by Pony Express Grotto. NOTE: 4 cabins are available to MVOR Staff at a cost of \$35 per day. Reserving a cabin requires paying the first night's rent in advance and they are reserved on a first-come-first-served basis.

April 26, 2003

Cave Research Foundation float trip on the North Fork River. For more information, contact CRF at pnkambesis@juno.com or visit the Cave Research Foundation website at www.cave-research.org.

May 2-4, 2003

Cave gathering at Blanchard Springs Cavern in Arkansas, sponsored by the USFS, Fish and Wildlife Service and the Karst Support Team.

From David Kampwerth:

The main objective is to bring folks up to speed with the ongoing Karst Resources Support Team (KaRST) effort which ultimately will complete a conservation strategy focused on karst throughout the Ozarks. If you've heard of the effort, great! If not, this will be an opportunity to see what's happening and to determine how you can be a part of this karst conservation effort. Each state has some representation from the caving community on the team, but we believe that you (the caver) know a great deal about the resource which would benefit the caves we cherish so dearly. KaRST has an idea of how cavers can participate but we want to know what you think. If you can't make this weekend, don't worry! There will be opportunity to participate throughout the process.

I encourage each of you to arrive as early as possible at Blanchard Springs Caverns on Friday, May 2 due to the potential for limited camping. We have the small group campground reserved but that won't hold us all. Please also bring any literature to share or items for sale such as grotto T-shirts and caps. This should be a fun educational weekend. We encourage you to come, visit a cave, ridgeward in high karst development areas and learn about KaRST, cave biology and karst geology.

For more information or to RSVP, contact David Kampwerth at David_Kampwerth@fws.gov.

May 3, 2003

Cave Research Foundation trip to Devil's Icebox for biological inventory. For more information, contact Mick Sutton at sue&mick@mail.tigernet.gen.mo.us or visit the Cave Research Foundation website at www.cave-research.org.

May 14, 2003

No regular KCAG meeting. Picnic on May 31, 2003 instead.

May 15-17, 2003

Cave Research Foundation "Mapping Cave Biodiversity" workshop in St. Louis, Missouri. For more information, contact CRF at pnkambesis@juno.com or visit the Cave Research Foundation website at www.cave-research.org.

May 16-18, 2003

MSS meeting: 1:00 PM Saturday in Meramec State Park. Friday evening and Saturday morning will include activities and workshops. Sunday will feature trips to several caves in the park, including a survey trip to Fisher Cave.

May 23-26, 2003

Speleofest 2003, hosted by Louisville Grotto at Camp Carlson in Fort Knox, Kentucky. For more information, see the Louisville Grotto's website at www.w.caves.org/grotto/louisvillegrotto.

May 31, 2003

KCAG picnic at Rick Hines' home.

June 11, 2003

Monthly KCAG meeting: 7:00 PM, Location TBA.

July 4, 2003

Annual July 4th party at Bryon's house (see the roster for his address). The celebrations start at 4 PM; bring your fireworks and your climbing gear. Theme has not been decided yet; suggestions are welcome. Questions? Contact Bryon Carmony directly.

August 4-8, 2003

NSS Convention in Porterville, California. Regular (NSS member) admission is \$110 with a \$25 late fee after June 15. The workshops and field trips are extra, between \$15 and \$100 each. More information can be found on the NSS Convention website at www.nss2003.com.

The NSS has prepared a promotional video to showcase the convention site and some local attractions. The video can be downloaded using the following link:

http://www.kcggrotto.org/nss_2003/nss_2003.zip (file size: approximately 96 MB). If you don't have a high-speed connection, please email webmaster@kcggrotto.org to get a copy on CD.

May 17-18, 2003

Restoration project weekend at Carroll Cave. All CCC members are invited to participate. The group will be building/marking trails and doing Restoration Inventory for the purpose of adding projects to the task list. The ladder is installed so access is not a problem. The cave is limited to 24 visitors per day, so signup is on a first-come-first-served basis. Everyone who signs up will have the opportunity to enter the cave and participate in the project. For more information or to sign up, contact Mike Hartley at hartlemike2@aol.com (yes, he has email!) or visit the CCC website at www.carrollcave.org.

The Month's Guano

April 2003, Vol. 17, Issue 3-4

The Month's Guano is published on the last Wednesday of the month. Twelve issues annually.

Submit articles to editor by the last Wednesday of the month.

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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.

A Message *From* the President

Greetings KCAG members and readers of *The Month's Guano*. By now you've noticed that our long time publication has a fresh new look. This is thanks to the talent and effort of Gary Johnson who works in desktop publishing. We have this format as long as Gary is willing to provide it. Bryon is still the editor of the newsletter, only now he can send his finished product to Gary for final layout work. (I sent Bryon an advance draft copy. His response: "all I can say is wow!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" I'm sure you agree.) It's an exciting time with the modern miracles of electronic communication, digital photography and the World Wide Web. We can now put out a publication that formerly would have been beyond our talents and means.

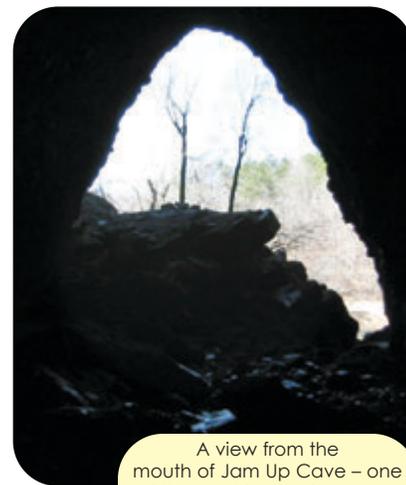
Also, please note that our Events page has been considerably upgraded. We will attempt to bring you all regional caving events of which you can be a part. There are some very exciting things going on in the caving community. I hope we'll all take advantage of the opportunities and make contributions that will bring respect to KCAG among Ozark cavers. It's important that our members record their trips in words and photos. Then we can all enjoy it once again via the Guano.

About the trip to Jacks Fork, I can say that it was a serendipitous experience for me. It gave me a chance to connect with Dave Hoffman who is a key player in the history of Carroll Cave, which I am working to archive. It was also great to have two geologists on the trip – Dave and Hal Baker who have both devoted their lives to the study of our region. Sam, Gary and I shared the same canoe. Sam's considerable canoe experience made up for the lack of such with Gary and myself. It was a safe and fun trip down the river. And kudos to Sam for his work as chef for the trip. Thanks to Gary for so much advance work in understanding the area. Also, Gary gives me all the credit for the photography, but the photo editing was his work. That can make a mediocre photographer look good. To sum up, it was a great trip and I would do it all over again.

Enjoy Gary's article and I hope to see you all in the dark.

Jeff Page

KCAG President



A view from the mouth of Jam Up Cave – one of the most impressive caves along the Jacks Fork River.

Caves of the Jacks Fork Valley

trip report by Gary Johnson
photos by Jeff Page

Bluffs line the Jacks Fork River as it makes its journey to meet the Current River

Ever since I attended the 2002 Fall MVOR and learned about the wealth of caves in the Ozark National Scenic Riverways area, I wanted to do a combo float/caving trip of the Jacks Fork River. Gasconade dolomite surrounds the river and this rock layer has proven to be extremely fertile for cave development. Most of these caves are not very long. But what the caves lack in length (with 400-500 feet being the norm), the valley more than makes up for in cave quantity.

So while few grotto trips were being planned by KCAG, I decided I'd arrange a trip myself. I located the Jacks Fork and Shannon County issues of *Missouri Speleology* and read their every word (several times over); I studied topographic maps of the Jacks Fork area; I contacted Scott House (the cave expert for Ozark National Scenic Riverways) and began asking questions; and I contacted Hal Baker, who has floated the Jacks Fork many times and knows many of its caves. (Hal is

the president of MCKC and a veteran of the Missouri caving scene since the early '60s.)

I knew I'd need a caving team with some canoeing experience, so early on I contacted KCAG member Sam Clippinger. He has extensive experience on white water (and his cooking skills proved to be a huge bonus). Sam agreed to go, and we settled on a trip date of March 21-23. That's a bit early in the season, but Jacks Fork is a popular river. I preferred to float without the accompanying hoards of canoeists who fill the river during the summer months. In addition, I have a strong aversion to ticks and wanted to float the river early enough in the year that ticks wouldn't yet be a problem. So this early Spring date addressed those concerns.

Unfortunately, convincing other grotto members to go on this trip became a bit of a problem, and I was about ready to call off the trip for lack of interest when Hal Baker offered to go himself. And he rounded up

fellow GSRAD colleague David Hoffman as his canoe partner. David has a long history in caves, going back to his days as a student at Rolla, in which he spent time in Carroll Cave, pushing past the Neck Breaker, and surveying parts of the Thunder River Passage and its tributaries.

Now we had a trip. Soon afterwards KCAG president Jeff Page signed on. All we needed was a little rain to bring up the water level. March is typically a decent month for floating but during the past couple of years, March has been relatively dry. However, this year, as if on cue, rains arrived just in time to bring up the river level to a perfect height. Then the sun came out and we had the best weather and river conditions that we could have ever hoped for (with daytime highs in the 70s).

We would spend three days in the Jacks Fork area. On the first day, Friday, we'd leave the Kansas City area at 8am and arrive in the Jacks Fork area in the early afternoon – leaving us enough time for at least one cave. On the second day, Saturday, we'd float a scenic nine-mile stretch of the Jacks Fork and visit several caves along the way. And on the third day, we'd visit a gorgeous area of steep bluffs and numerous caves – Barn Hollow.

The following log contains my notes on each of the caves that we visited.

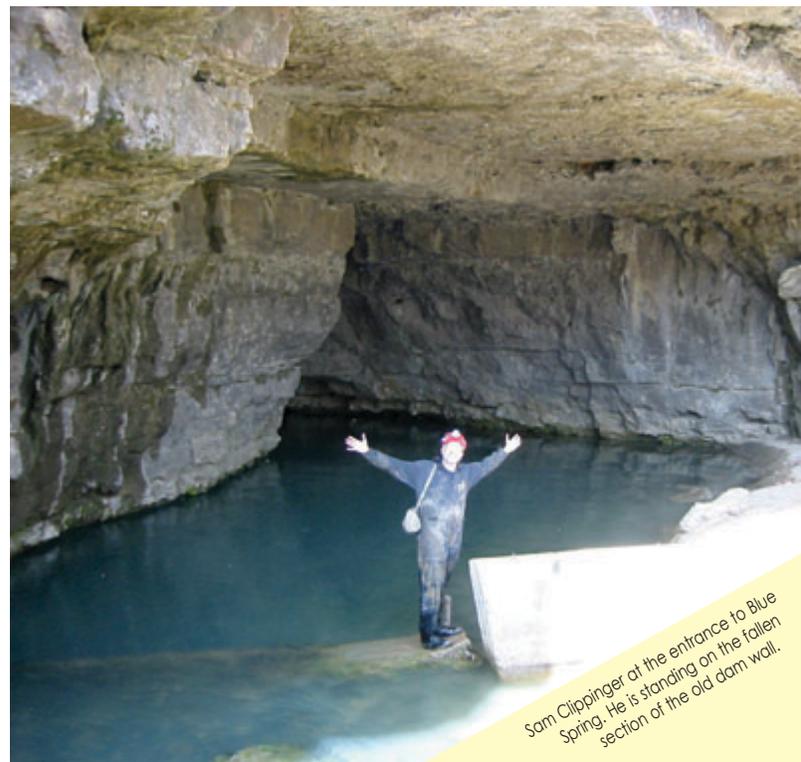
Simpson Hole Cave

This cave is difficult to miss. You can paddle your canoe up to the cave mouth. In fact, the drip line is out over the water by five or six feet. The entrance slopes up a few feet to where you must duck under a low-hanging mass of dolomite. You then find yourself in the cave's main room, a good-sized room about 80 feet wide. This room has plenty of ceiling height, averaging about 10 feet and reaching as high as 30 feet. Water drips constantly from the ceiling's highest point and collects in a small pool. The cave definitely floods during heavy rains, as evidenced by the small tree branches and bark littering the cave floor. A narrow, muddy squeezeway passage extends to the left over 80 feet and opens up in a room with an impressive display of formations. Flowstone juts out on a ledge, a stalactite-flat – an example of flowstone once developing on clay only for the clay to later be removed by water activity. The ceiling in this area is 12 feet high or more. A forest of soda straws covers the ceiling. Many of the straws are 6 inches long or more. Straight ahead, a steep clay

bank rises 20 feet or more and ends in breakdown. David was the only person to climb to the top of this slope. Further to the left, a crawlway continues for 50 feet. After spending several minutes in this pretty area, we returned to our canoes. A fun-to-explore little cave.

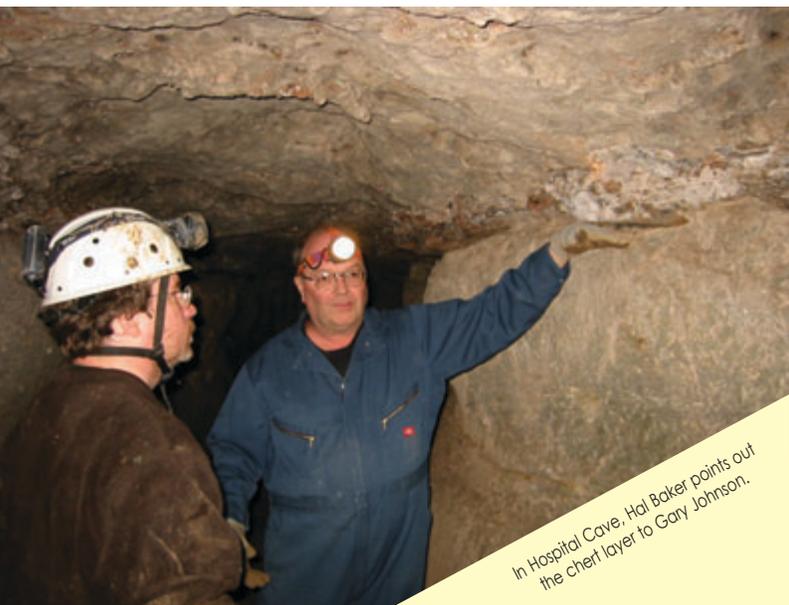
Blue Spring Cave

This is the largest spring upstream from Alley Spring. The water is reportedly a deep blue, although that isn't obvious unless light is streaming into the mouth of the rise pool. And when we arrived, direct sunlight only penetrated a short way into the cave. Nonetheless, this is a very pretty area. Long ago, a concrete wall was erected to dam the spring. A date inscribed on the wall

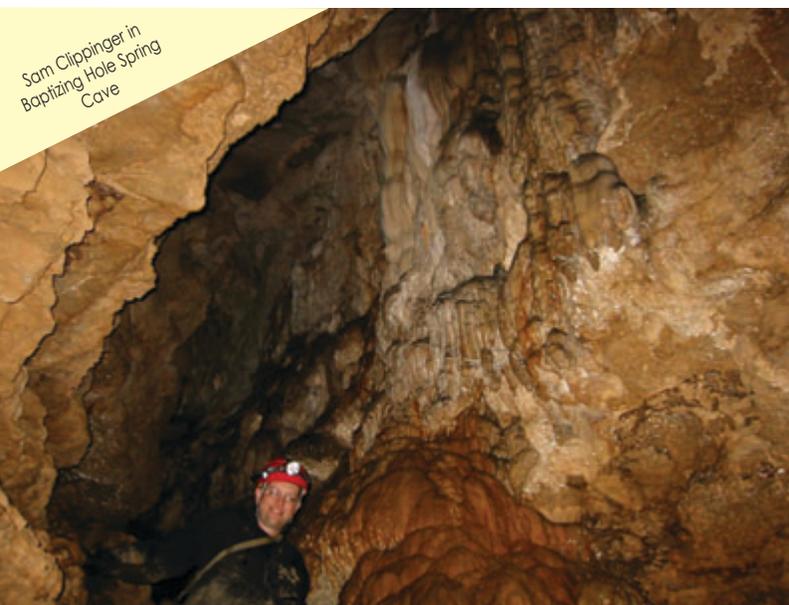


Sam Clippinger at the entrance to Blue Spring. He is standing on the fallen section of the old dam wall.

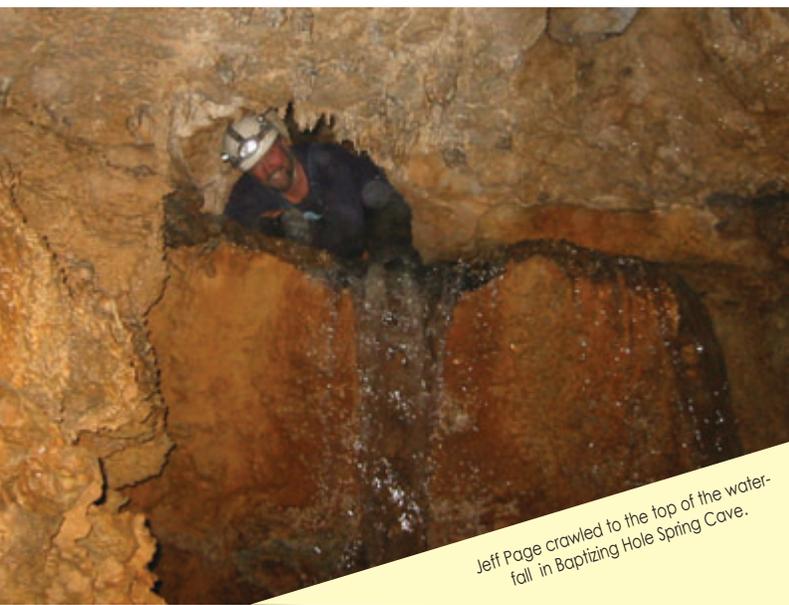
said 1937. But the wall was long ago breached. Now the left section has fallen over and the spring flows over the left wall. The spring rises at the back of the cave, in a rubble-filled pool. So unlike Alley Spring, where divers have penetrated over 150 feet into the tubular channel that feeds the spring, here there is likely nothing to dive (beyond the 10-20 foot depth of the spring basin). The spring water flows through a narrow channel between some rocks and into Jacks Fork. This channel was not filled with watercress like the Alley Spring stream. And I didn't notice the profusion of spring critters, principally snails, that inhabit Alley Spring. The mouth of this cave is about 60 feet wide and 15 feet high.



In Hospital Cave, Hal Baker points out the chert layer to Gary Johnson.



Sam Clippinger in Baptizing Hole Spring Cave



Jeff Page crawled to the top of the waterfall in Baptizing Hole Spring Cave.

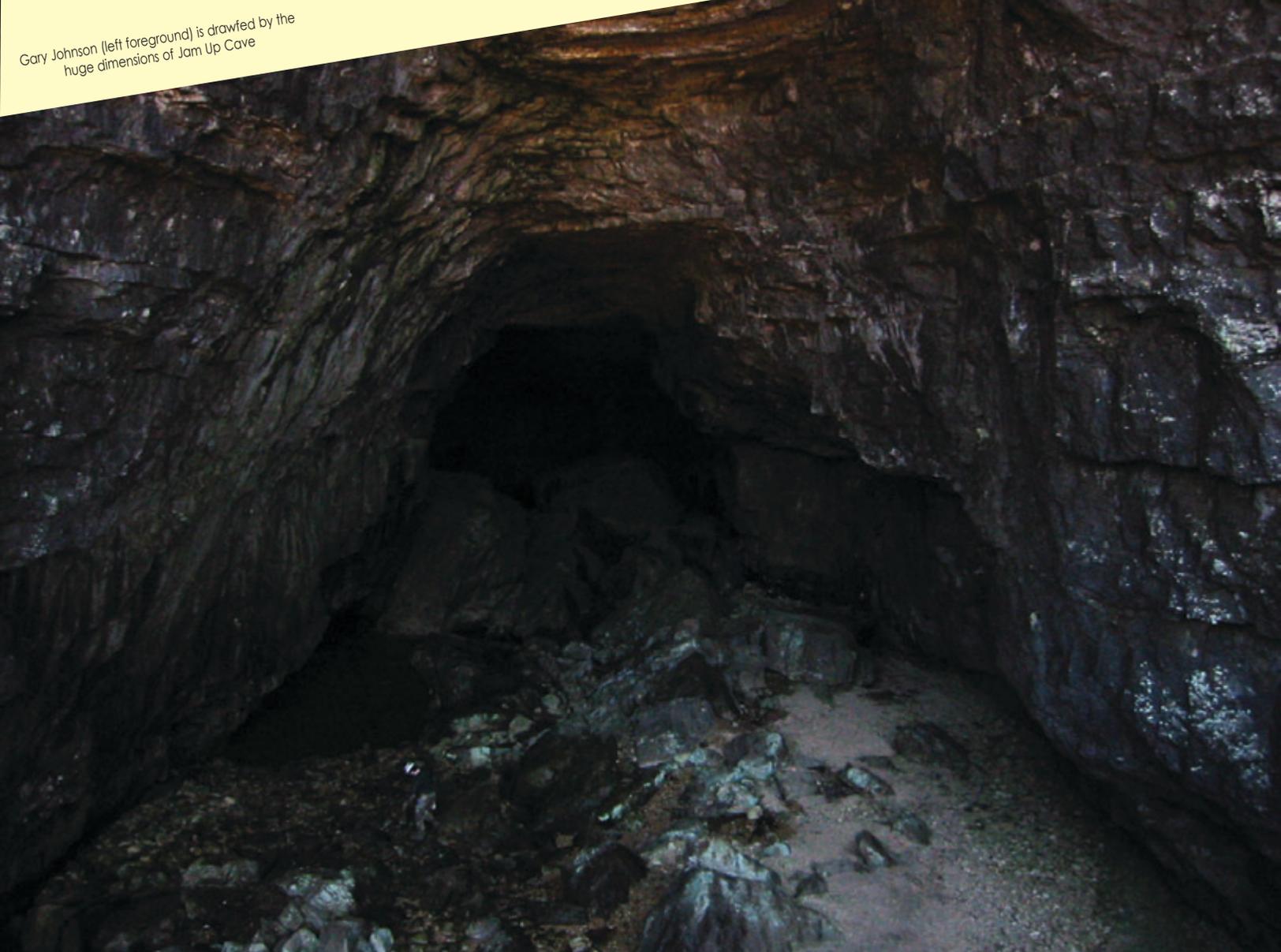
Hospital Cave

The entire Blue Spring area is fascinating. The bluffs are pock marked with caves and crevices. Hospital Cave is the largest of these caves. It's about 375 feet long and has three entrances. We entered through a slot in the dolomite bluff beside Blue Spring. This entrance is an easy-to-negotiate crawlway that quickly opens up into a small room with a high ceiling, 30-40 feet high, and flowstone on the floor. The passage continues up from this room to a T junction. The left passage is a crawlway. With daylight at the end, the passage leads to a high point on the bluff, looking out over Jacks Fork. A great vantage point, 30 feet above the river. I tried the narrow ledge that leads to the right from the overlook entrance. But the ledge eventually terminates. We headed back through the overlook entrance and into the cave, trying the right passage from the T. This is a large passageway with plenty of headroom. Water dripping from the ceiling has left white bulbous formations on the cave floor. So all visitors should be especially careful walking through this section of the cave. A small side room on the right appeared. The ceiling of this room has been perforated by a hole that leads to a small second level. This level contains many small stalactites and columns. We peeked into the second level but didn't try to enter it. The map showed it only extended a short way in each direction. To continue on past this room, you must squeeze past a formation that has almost blocked the passage. The squeeze is fairly tight but it doesn't last for long. Soon you're back into a walking passage that continues for 100 feet before exiting the cave into a small valley. This valley is almost certainly the remains of a collapsed cave system. A jumble of medium-sized breakdown blocks (each two to three feet wide) litter the valley floor. Immediately across from this third entrance to Hospital Cave is a wide spire of rock with a tunnel-like passage. We didn't attempt to reach this passage – which was likely Blue Spring Tunnel (based on Scott House's cave description in *Missouri Speleology*).

Baptizing Hole Spring Cave

A beautiful site about thirty feet above the river. A small stream tumbles out of the cave mouth, between large dolomite blocks, and down to the river. The cave entrance is marked by a sign warning of the dangers

Gary Johnson (left foreground) is dwarfed by the huge dimensions of Jam Up Cave

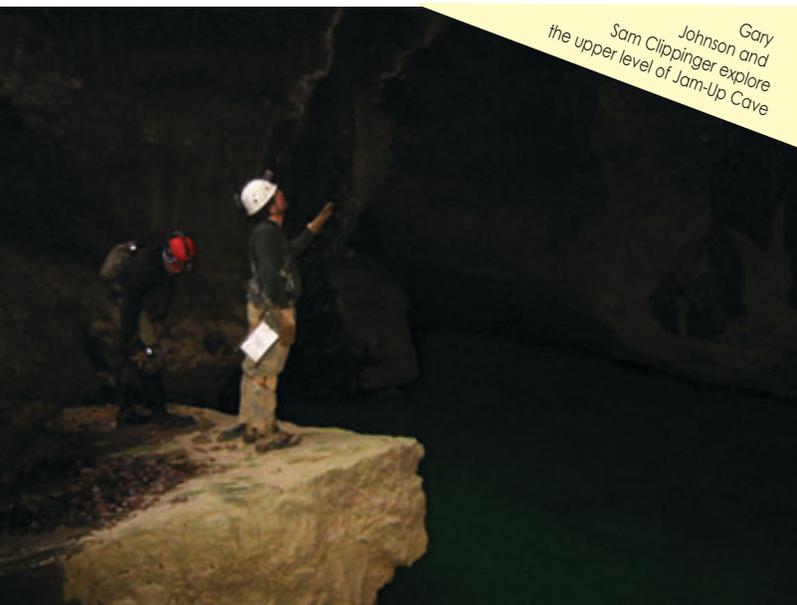


presented by this cave: "This Cave Presents Dangers Of Falls, Deep Water Or Other Hazards." The entrance has two openings. The upper passage goes to the same place as the lower passage; however, if you take the upper passage, you'll have about a 12 foot drop once inside the cave. So the lower passage is recommended. Immediately inside this cave, the left cave wall is covered with an impressive display of flowstone. However, this area now receives daylight through the upper entrance passage, so moss grows on the flowstone, tarnishing its appearance somewhat – but this is still an impressive entrance passage, with a ceiling height of 40 feet. At this point, we could hear a loud waterfall. Until now I thought the sound was the stream cascading to the river. But now it was obvious the sound came from further back in the cave. We followed the passage and emerged into a beautiful little room. A waterfall drops eight feet to a pool on the floor. A ledge

in the right wall (six to seven feet above the waterfall pool) allows further entry into the cave. Jeff followed this route past several beautiful white formations and into a narrow crawlway that led to the waterfall. I followed him, but I was concerned about muddying the white flowstone, so I didn't go far before turning around. A narrow crawlway passage extends beyond the waterfall. Hal suggested we save this crawl for a summer trip, when getting drenched might sound like a good idea. We followed his suggestion and retreated from the cave at this point. The waterfall room is one of the prettiest rooms that we saw during the entire trip.

Nill Cave

My least favorite cave on Jacks Fork. Hal hadn't been in this cave before; it's typically closed to protect endangered bats starting in April, but we arrived on March



Gary Johnson and Sam Clippinger explore the upper level of Jam-Up Cave



A rimstone dam overflows in the pit entrance to Jam-Up Cave.

Jeff decided they'd give it a try, and they entered the passage. But they quickly retreated. Back to the canoes! (Not far downstream we saw an animal that Sam identified as a badger, but from the way it was bounding, I think it was a mink. However, I only saw it briefly, so Sam could be right. I asked Scott House if there are any known populations of minks in the area, and he said yes. He also indicated they sometimes use caves, so the scat we saw in Nill Cave might have been evidence of mink in the area. Or possibly otter.)

Jam Up Cave

One of the largest cave entrances you're likely to see in Missouri. Approximately 90 feet high and 100 feet wide. Very impressive. Everyone who floats down Jacks Fork will see this cave entrance – unless they're drunk or blind. A small stream tumbles from the cave's mouth on the left and down to the river. We scrambled up the river bank and into the cave. A nice-sized tree grows in the dirt mound at the entrance, and it only reaches two-thirds of the way to the cave's ceiling. A huge bore hole passage leads back into the bluff. Breakdown blocks, some as large as an RV, litter the entrance room floor. Two narrow, wet passages lead off to the left. But according to the map, they don't lead to any rooms. We kept our attention straight ahead. At the back of the entrance room, nearly 300 feet back into the cave, the room terminates in a deep pool and sheer wall. The wall is nearly 30 feet high. It's breached by a waterfall that tumbles through a cleft in the wall. According to Hal, it's possible to crawl up the waterfall, but recent breakdown has made this crawl a tight, wet squeeze. He used to take an inner tube and float across to the waterfall and then scramble up the waterfall. But the breakdown now makes this approach difficult if not altogether impossible. We decided instead to opt for the sinkhole that has breached the upper level. So we returned to our canoes and floated downstream 50 yards to a very steep cleft in the near-vertical bluff. We scrambled up the slope, following Hal and David as they led the way. On top of the bluff, we found a trail. We followed this trail along the ridge. (Lost Hollow cuts through immediately behind the Jam Up bluff, running almost parallel to the river.) After a couple hundred feet we abandoned the ridge trail for a route down through the brush to a trail at the bottom of the hollow. This is likely a horse trail and leads directly to the sinkhole entrance for Jam Up. The sinkhole is deep (at least 80

22nd. Hal looked at me. Should we do it? I said, "Let's go for it." Well ... the cave floor is covered with three to six inches of mud and not far inside you start seeing guano covering the walls. The cave is obviously heavily used by bats. In addition, the first hundred feet of the cave is littered with scat from other animals (similar in size to what you'd expect from a large cat). The cave has very few formations. For the most part, the cave is a muddy trek down a narrow passage. For the first 400 feet of passage, the cave has plenty of headroom (except for a couple places that require stooping), but eventually, the ceiling drops and you're facing a two-foot-high muddy crawl. At this point, I looked at the cave map again and didn't see anything that would entice me to crawl through guano-laced mud. Sam and

feet to the cave floor) and littered with leaves, making the route down somewhat slippery and treacherous. But we negotiated the sinkhole entrance without incident. At the bottom, the cave continues to the left as a watery passage that leads back about 300 feet until the ceiling descends and eventually meets the water. Divers could possibly continue upstream to where the stream enters the cave system. While Jeff, Sam, and I explored this upper level of the cave, Hal and David walked up the hollow to where Jam Up Creek enters the cave's uppermost reaches (an example of a pirated stream) and then flows under the submerged cave ceiling. Sometimes after rains, the stream carries a large volume of water, including brush and logs. As evidence of this activity, large logs, easily the width of telephone poles, lay strewn across the cave's upper level (although they may have also washed in through the sinkhole entrance). Hal had made it clear that we were running behind time, and if we hoped to reach the canoe take-out point by dark, we'd need to make our exploration of the upper level brief. Sam, Jeff, and I headed to the right, back toward the cave's entrance and the 30 foot high wall. Jeff and I chose a route to the left of the wall. This route led over the stream and into the pit entrance. Yes, this is yet another entrance to Jam Up Cave, but this entrance is only for people itching to try out their vertical gear. It descends 50 feet into a wet hole. We passed through the bottom of his hole quickly because a constant shower of cold water made this area less than pleasant (maybe it's a nice refreshing shower in the hot summer months). We followed the passage until it reached an opening over the pool that terminated the entrance room. The vista from this opening back toward the cave entrance is quite impressive. Sam was briefly visible across the pool in another passageway high above the water. He followed us and discovered a fascinating "wishing well" (he called it) in the pit entrance: the top of a chest-high formation in the west wall was scalloped out by dripping water, forming a small pool (one foot wide). A cascade of tiny rimstone dams led down to the "wishing well" from a narrow crevice behind the pool. With time running short, we left the cave, scrambled back down the bluff, and continued our float.

Meeting House Cave

An impressive cave entrance. Only half as big as Jam Up, but still quite large. The cave mouth is 40 feet high



and 60 feet wide. Like Jam Up, the cave floor is covered with breakdown. But unlike Jam Up, the cave doesn't lead very far back into the bluff. This is little more than a shelter cave. We climbed over the breakdown boulders and Jeff investigated the crawlway until it terminated about 200 feet from the cave's entrance. This cave doesn't require much time to visit, but it's worthwhile to visit if you're interested in geology. Many layers of rock are exposed, including a narrow layer of chert (six to eight inches thick). David identified the ceiling as dolomite, possibly a more erosion-resistant layer than your typical Gasconade dolomite. High on the cave walls, several openings poked back into the bluff. None of these passages appeared on the cave map. Pot hunters had left behind a huge pit on the cave floor about 8 feet deep. Rock climbers have clearly used this cave, scaling its walls, traversing the ceiling, and leaving behind their bolts.

Bunker Hill Cave

This is the cave that created my obsession with a Jacks Fork float. It's one of the longest caves in the area, nearly a half mile long. And it contains some huge rooms. After nearly a thousand feet of intermittent crawlway passages, the cave opens up in a room over 200 feet long, 50 feet wide, and 30 feet high ... at least that's what people who have been there say. More on that in a minute ... Bunker Hill Cave is located in a beautiful area. A large bluff (70-80 feet tall) rises over the cave entrance. Past evidence of waterfall activity has left a grey stain down the bluff face. A small waterfall tumbles from the left side of the cave entrance, which

David Hoffman, Hal Baker, Sam Clippinger, and Gary Johnson at the entrance to Bear Cave. Pot hunter holes scar the floor of this room.



is eight feet tall and about 40 feet wide. The cave passage was typically 20-50 feet wide all the way back to the cave's waterfall. Water flow through the cave was much greater than I expected, so the waterfall sounded somewhat intimidating as we approached. We found the stream taking a picturesque five-foot tumble into a pool, nearly 40 feet across and somewhat murky (because of minerals in the water). I couldn't really tell how deep the pool was, although the cave map said three feet. The pool and waterfall can be bypassed by following the ledge on the right. Beyond the waterfall, the passageway soon drops to crawling height and soon after becomes a watercrawl. At the beginning of the watercrawl, I got hit by claustrophobia and had to beg off this cave. I'm not sure what happened. I've been through much tougher passages before, as in Gunner Cave in Arkansas. Maybe it was the knowledge that this passage continues like this for several hundred feet. Whatever the case, it was most embarrassing. (We visited Bunker Hill Cave on our arrival day, before getting together with Hal and David.)

photos on this cave trip, the group moved much more slowly than before, and this less-hurried pace allowed us to search for cave critters. Sam and Jeff found a total of three Cave Salamanders. All about 5 inches long. I also found a Southern Leopard Frog about 200 feet into the cave. Jeff photographed another frog in the entry room. This is a very nicely decorated cave considering its proximity to well-traveled trails. The cave is largely walking height all the way to the end room. Water flows over the chert rubble floor, about two to three inches deep, so cavers should wear boots that cover their ankles. At the rear of the cave, the floor gets muddy. Upon entering the cave, we looked for Gray Bats in the entry room. Scott House had warned us about them. So we were quiet, but we didn't see any bats. The left side of the entrance room contains several small but pretty rimstone dams. The right side of the room is marked by several holes left by pot hunters. Following the cave

Bear Cave

Bear Cave is located in a very pretty location about 30 feet above a stream that runs through the bottom of a hollow. The hollow's steep dolomite sides are quite modest here compared to those we would soon find further up the hollow when we searched for Big Barn Hollow Cave. Because Hal and Dave were taking

A cave salamander in Bear Cave tries to hide from the camera.



Gary Johnson looks at one of the many formations in Bear Dave.



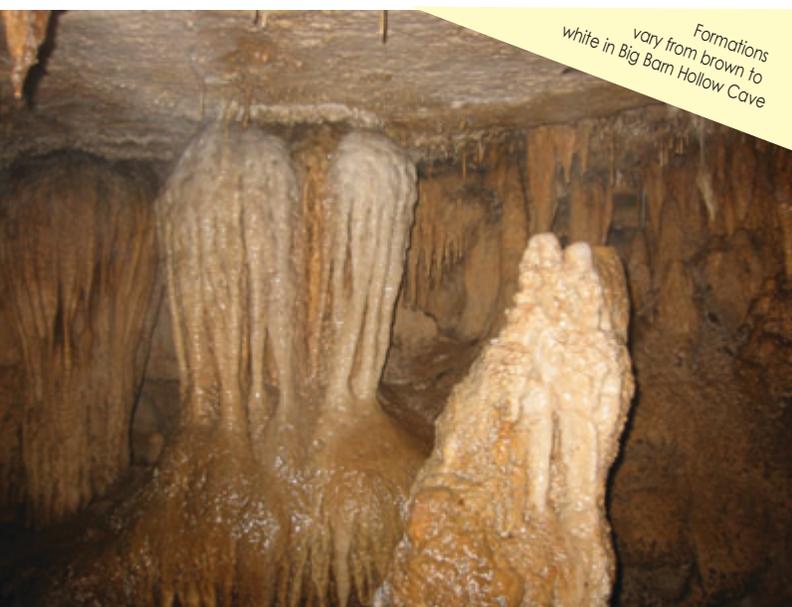
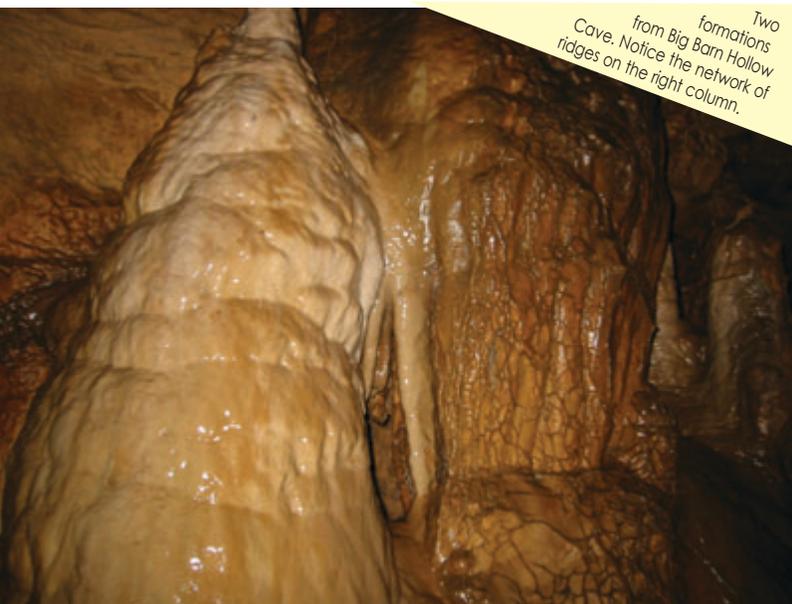
Flowstone drips from a ledge in Barn Hollow Spring Cave

passage a short way, we walked into a small room that is profusely decorated with columns and draperies. The formations varied from reddish brown to white. This is one of the prettiest caves that we visited. The passageway opened up a couple more times into modest rooms with more formations before reaching the end room. This is the largest room in the cave, approximately 20 feet high and 30 feet wide. The ceiling is made of chert, colored black due to manganese oxide. Black soda straws cover the ceiling. The stream that flows through the cave emerges from the bottom of the back wall of this room. It might be possible to crawl a small way into this channel. We didn't try it. To the left, a slippery clay slope leads up to two crawlways stacked on top of each other. We didn't try either crawlway. The map said they didn't lead far. On the way out, we discovered the Gray Bats. They had apparently moved further back in the cave from when Scott House was here two weeks previously. We had apparently passed them by on our way in. Hal urged us to be quiet and we hurried back to the entrance. He said the cluster probably contained at least 80 bats.

Barn Hollow Spring Cave

Next on the itinerary was Big Barn Hollow Cave. Caving is allowed by permit only in Missouri Department of Conservation Natural Areas. Hal secured permission from MDC cave expert Bill Elliott. From the natural area's parking lot, we followed a half-mile trail along a narrow ridge to a wonderful overlook point, nearly 100 feet above the hollow floor. From this vantage, we could appreciate the gentle curve of the hollow as it snaked its way around a bend and headed further upstream. A truly marvelous vista. We next went searching for Big Barn Hollow Cave. We knew the general area where the cave was located, but there were so many holes in the bluffs, it was hard to know which one was Big Barn Hollow Cave. First we tried a cave with a crawlway entrance. It didn't look right to me. Big Barn Hollow Cave was supposed to have a four-foot-high entrance. But here, a large pile of dirt, leaves, and branches had washed down from the right, through a cleft in the near-vertical bluff, nearly obscuring the cave entrance. I thought maybe the debris had washed down the bluff face recently after a series of big rains, so I agreed the cave was worth checking out. Hal was first to crawl in. I looked at the map and yelled out, "Does it open up to an 11 foot ceiling?" Hal said, somewhat

hesitantly, "It opens up..." "To 11 feet?" I got nothing more. It didn't sound promising, but I crawled in anyway. I immediately realized this cave didn't match the Big Barn Hollow Cave map. The floor sloped down to an easy-to-negotiate squeezeway into the next room. There's nothing like this on the Big Barn Hollow Cave



map. To make sure it was the wrong cave, we decided to check out a few more feet of passage. The next room is impressive. Immediately to the right is flowstone with pools on its shoulders. We followed the room to its end. And Jeff followed the tight crawlway a few feet further. The cave seemed to be at an end less than 100 feet from the entrance. Then Sam turned around and looked up. He discovered a passageway extending through the ceiling and into another room. This room was profusely decorated. But the most impressive part of this room was the ceiling height. I joined Sam from his vantage at the back of the cave's lower level. From this perspective, the ceiling height into the second level is very impressive. I initially guessed the ceiling was 50 feet above the floor of the lower level. That was probably a small exaggeration. The height was probably closer to 35 feet. Still mighty impressive. Jeff made the somewhat difficult climb into the upper level and reported breakage and signs that other people had been there. Definitely not virgin passage. But a surprising section of the cave nonetheless. Other evidence of previous visitation was sitting in the entrance room. On the way out, we found two tin cans. Both rusty. They'd been left there for many years, which seemed strange. We felt confident that Bill Elliott or Scott House would've been in this cave and cleaned out trash like this. But then Jeff handed one of the cans to me. "Is that a formation fragment inside?" he asked. Yes, it was. The can contained the tip of a stalactite. It was wedged in the can and we couldn't get it out, so we left the cans. I knew Barn Hollow contained many caves, but I hadn't printed any extra maps of the additional caves we might encounter in this hollow. So I wasn't able to determine the name of this cave. However, once we returned from the trip, we provided Scott House with the cave's GPS position and the location marked on a topo map. And he soon identified it as Barn Hollow Spring Cave. I'm not sure how this cave got its name. I didn't see any evidence of a spring, although the cave map shows a small stream very briefly entering and then leaving the cave. The only critters I saw in this cave were two Pipistrelle Bats and two cave crickets, all in the entrance room.

Big Barn Hollow Cave

After the detour through Barn Hollow Spring Cave, we continued searching along the same side of the bluff. David walked along the stream and pointed up at

prospective areas, while Hal scrambled along the bluff. About 70 yards downstream from Barn Hollow Spring Cave, they discovered the entrance for another cave. This time the cave entrance matched the map exactly, including a large rectangular breakdown block in the middle of the entrance room: a wide opening at the base of a dolomite bluff drops to a rubble filled cave floor and forms a fair-sized room. Certainly a more impressive entrance than Barn Hollow Spring Cave's. The cave then extends straight back into the hillside – almost as straight as an arrow. Before entering the cave, I assumed the straight direction was the result of a fault, but I didn't see much evidence of this (such as high, narrow ceiling joints). The cave contains a fair amount of formations. Hal was interested in visiting this cave because Bill Elliott said it contained a variety of formation that Hal had written about. This type of formation is covered with small ridges – that look sort of like varicose veins. Hal had hypothesized that the ridges developed after flooding covered an existing formation with mud. The mud would then dry and crack. Calcite deposits would then fill the cracks. The mud would eventually be washed away or coated with new flowstone, leaving behind a strange system of ridges over stalagmites and flowstone. (After looking at this cave, Hal seemed less certain of this theory.) Many of the formations look unusual in Big Barn Hollow Cave. Soda straws twist into spirals. Stalactites grow at strange oblique angles. An interesting cave. Hal and David followed the passage until it dropped to crawling height and a wet floor made the journey a bit messy. They retreated. I continued forward as the passage became a watercrawl. There was just enough vertical space that you could hold your body above the water. At the end of the crawl, you had to bellycrawl through a puddle. But then the passage opened up to four feet of headroom. While standing up, I discovered a bat. It wasn't a Pipistrelle Bat. This bat was light grey in color and a little bigger than a Pipistrelle (and there were several Pipistrelles in the same area as this grey bat so it was easy to compare them). A few feet further back in the same passage I found a second bat like this one. (After talking to Scott House, I decided these bats were likely lone Gray Bats.) I continued back for 100 feet, to a short crawl over some breakdown. I crawled over the breakdown and stuck my head into the next room and found the floor dropped away by six feet into a pool of clear water, about two to three feet deep. The map hadn't prepared me for this much water. On the left side, along a very steep clay ledge, I could see evidence of past traffic. If we had plenty of time, we might've



Hal Baker, David Hoffman, Sam Clippinger, and (sitting) Gary Johnson at the bluff entrance to Hospital Cave.

continued further. But we felt the day slipping away, and we wanted to get back on the road to Kansas City. So we decided to turn around at this point. The cave map shows the watery passage continuing 50 feet to a large room, about 150 feet long, with a 30-foot-high ceiling and much breakdown littering the floor. The cave almost bisects a narrow ridge. The stream that flows into the cave may very well be an example of a losing stream entering a cave passage. Before we hiked into the hollow, from the Barn Hollow overlook, we could see sections of the hollow floor that looked wet and other sections that looked dry, as you might expect if a cave system were swallowing up the stream.

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Altogether, this was an excellent trip. We passed many additional caves as we floated down Jacks Fork. So there are many caves remaining for future float trips. The number of caves is almost intimidating because to visit them all would probably take a week or more. Now that I know the Jacks Fork area and I've gained a little more experience canoeing, I'm sure I'll be back to visit some of the other Jacks Fork caves (and to investigate further some of the ones that we only partially visited).

Thanks go to Jeff Page for taking plenty of trip photos; to Sam Clippinger for providing all the meals; to Scott House for the information he provided by way of e-mail; to David Hoffman for his help finding caves and for sharing his knowledge of geology; and to Hal Baker for providing an excellent campsite and first-class river guide services – and for withstanding my non-stop avalanche of questions.