

**The
Month's**

The Kansas City Area Grotto

GUANO

**Volume 17
Issue 9-10
October 2003**

Major Springs of the Current River & Jacks Fork

Trip Reports

**Rumbling Falls Cave
Powder Mill Creek Cave
Little Scott Cave & Hamilton Cave
*and more***

Table of Contents



Rumbling Falls Cave

trip report by Richard Cindric, photos by Ben Boling

page **4**



Powder Mill Creek Cave

trip report by Gary Johnson, photos by Jeff Page and Gary Johnson

page **6**



Little Scott Cave & Hamilton Cave

trip report by Sam Clippinger, photos by Fred Light and Sam Swearengin

page **12**



Major Springs of the Current River & Jacks Fork

report and photos by Gary Johnson

page **14**



Shannon County Shut-Ins

report and photos by Gary Johnson

page **24**



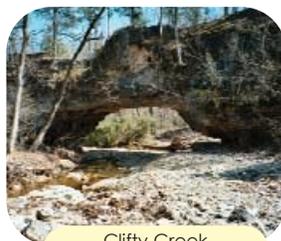
Paul-Petroske Cave

report and photos by Jeff Page

page **26**

Trip reports tentatively scheduled for future issues of *The Month's Guano*

Reports from Fall 2003 MVOR ... the Boston Mountain Grotto and KCAG get together for a trip to Madison County Wildlife Management Area in Arkansas ... Gary Johnson and Sam Clippinger take the Dripstone Cascade tour at Devil's Icebox ... Look for these trip reports and more in future issues of *The Month's Guano* ... And if you've been caving, please share your experiences by submitting a trip report.



Clifty Creek Natural Bridge (photo by Conor Watkins).

Events

October 25-26, 2003

KCAG trip to Madison County Wildlife Management Area, hosted by the Boston Mountain Grotto of Fayetteville, Arkansas. Possible caves to visit include Pine Creek Cave, Picnic Cave, Salamander Cave, Gaffney Cave and Whippoorwill Cave. The group will camp at Withrow Springs State Park (5 miles south of Madison WMA). For more information, contact Gary Johnson at madisonwma@imagesjournal.com.

October 31, 2003

CRF annual meeting. Projected site: Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Parks in California. Possible cave trips or hiking opportunities. This is about a 1.5 hour drive from Fresno or 3.5 hours from the Bay area or L.A. For more information, contact Scott House at scott_house@semo.net.

November 12, 2003

Monthly KCAG meeting: 7:00 p.m. in the Magg Conference Center at the corner of Volker and Cherry (on the UMKC campus).

November 22, 2003

CRF Fisher Cave weekend for survey and restoration work. For more information, contact Scott House at scott_house@semo.net.

December 5-7, 2003

CRF Fitton Cave trip. For more information, contact Scott House at scott_house@semo.net.

December 10, 2003

Monthly KCAG meeting: 7:00 p.m. in the Magg Conference Center at the corner of Volker and Cherry (on the UMKC campus).

The Month's Guano

October 2003, Vol. 17, Issue 9-10

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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 Missouri Caves & Karst
Conservancy.

Meetings are held every second Wednesday at
7 p.m. at Magg Hall (behind Spencer
Laboratories) on the UMKC campus, Volker Blvd.
& Cherry, Kansas City, Missouri.

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 President

This October's issue appears at first blush to be a hodge-podge of
cave articles ranging from Tennessee to Meramec State Park and
the Scenic Riverways in Missouri. But
there is a common theme to be
found. All of the subjects have
some preservation efforts in their
history. Whether it be the political
will to set aside land for a National
Park or an alliance of activists to
halt a development effort, it is true
that we would have fewer caves,
rivers, and other natural resources to
enjoy without the willingness of people to
get involved and work for the benefit of future generations. As we enjoy
the articles in this issue, let's remember that the places we love most
can never be taken for granted.

Cave softly and safely,

Jeff Page

KCAG President



Draperies in a Powder
Mill Creek Cave watercrawl
(photo by Jeff Page).

Cover photo

The spring branch at Alley Spring runs through this verdant area. The
rocks are covered in moss. Tiny snails cling to everything. Spring water
also passes through a chute beside the mill. This water joins the spring
branch on the far side of the trees in the upper right side of the photo. A
trail bridge is visible in the distance. Photo by Gary Johnson.

A trip to **Rumbling Falls Cave** *in Tennessee*

**trip report by Richard Cindric
photos by Ben Boling**

I just got back from another drive hard, cave hard, drive hard trip. The objective was Rumbling Falls Cave in eastern Tennessee. This cave was discovered relatively recently and has some notoriety because of its huge volume. Its discovery played havoc with the construction of a sewage treatment plant. A photo of the very large “Rumble Room” was featured on the front cover of the *NSS News*, and *Sports Illustrated* published an article about the cave's discovery and exploration.

Ben Boling, Jerry Cindric and Jim Watson invited me on the trip. They had visited the cave once before, a little over a year ago. It had rained hard just before they went in then, so I got to hear countless horror stories about the water.

The entrance is very near a highway. The walk was 100 yards (at most) downhill. It was steep, though not Alexander Cave steep! The entrance is positively spacious—maybe 12' wide and 2' to 3' tall. I was a little incredulous that a cave so large and emitting so much air hadn't been found until recently, but I guess the semi-steep terrain had something to do with that.

We went in about 20' and came to an 80' deep slot. It's possible to stay on top and skirt the edge for a bit, but we didn't do that. The way forward was down and that's where we went. The original explorers were nice enough to leave some bolts and hangers for us, so we didn't have to mess around with a nasty anchor.

Above: Richard Cindric in Rumbling Falls Cave (photo by Ben Boling).

The width of the drop starts out about 4' and widens to about 12' at the base. The stream that was the nemesis a year ago was now a trickle, which was good because it's right at the bottom of the slot. Ben took some photos, I took some photos, and Jim shot video.

The plan was simple: go upstream. The downstream route would likely go to a resurgence in the creek below the entrance, though I don't know that. It was a clean walking passage up to the first waterfall, which might have been 20' tall. Someone was nice enough to leave a rope for us away from the falls, but it was easy to free climb through the small water flow so we did that. The next, similar waterfall was a short distance away. It didn't seem safe to

free climb, so we either used another pre-existing rope or climbed up a chimney.

The passage continued on as before, but the floor and ceiling gradually got nearer until we had to hands-and-knees crawl for a few hundred feet. The rocks were small and the water was minimal: It was as pleasant as stream crawling can be.

When we were able to stand up, we crawled under a natural bridge and soon got into some canyon passage. It wasn't fun or pretty. I think Jim did the most cussing, but we all had our moments. The canyon is roughly 20' tall. We started out walking sideways, switched to crawling, went up a level and walked on a ledge, went up to the top and crawled there, went down to the mid-level ledge, then back down to the floor, I think. It's like Nike says: you "just do it."

At the end of the canyon is ... WHOA ... the Rumble Room! We left the narrows of the canyon and were immediately on the edge of a huge void. 4+ acres. Man, talk about echo! I thought about the original explorers and pray I can make a discovery like that some day.

We had gone to some trouble to lug Jerry's new 300' rope to this point, so we decided it was time to rig it and see if PMI did a good job in making it. They did. Good.

I went first. I didn't enjoy the 200' rappel like I should have because I was too busy watching the rope to make sure I didn't rappel into a knot. I had the rope pack tethered to me, so the rope was paying out as I went down. There's nothing wrong with that except, as I said, I couldn't fully enjoy the experience.

My main memory of it was the blackness. The drop was near the center of the room rather than against a wall. The walls were too far away to be seen and the air was misty, so my only view was the rope receding into darkness. Too cool.

We didn't do too much after reaching the bottom, although there is a boat load of huge passages beyond. Ben used his new digital camera to take group photos. We

didn't know which way the cave continued, so we spent some time searching. We finally found the water passage, which we think is the way to go, but we decided to just take photos of it rather than immerse ourselves in it. I was Ben's flash slave.

The stream was about 20' wide and flowing very slowly. It was murky so we couldn't see the bottom, but 6'+ deep wouldn't surprise me. The bank was sandy and continued into the water. We could make out some large boulders in there as well. Ben and I hummed the theme song to *Jaws*.

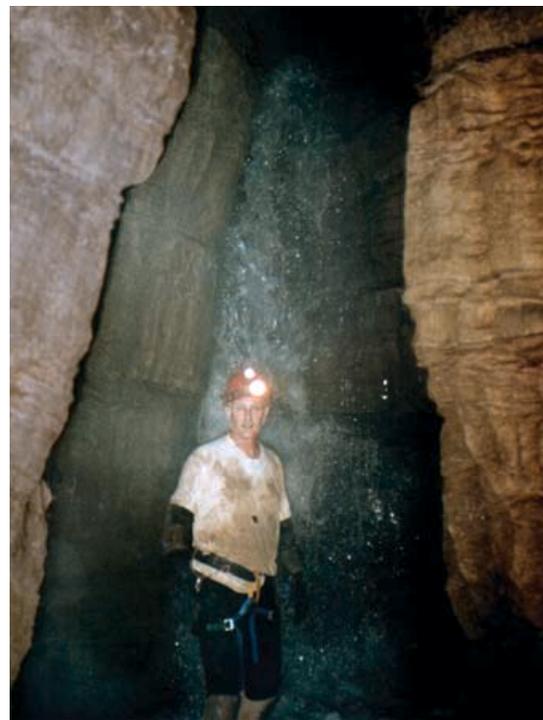
The Rumble Room is tall as well as wide. I guesstimated the top of the breakdown was 100' to 150' above the stream, so add that to the 200' drop to envision it. It's also unstable as hell. I don't think I've ever had so many rocks slip out from under me or teeter when I stepped on them.

Jerry and Jim were near the top of the breakdown while Ben and I were at the stream. When we rejoined them, they asked us if we were hurt by the rock collapse. They said there was a massive BOOM followed by more concussions. Ben and I didn't hear a thing. Like I said, there's a lot of unstable breakdown and I can easily believe we made it more unstable by walking over it, although we were fortunate to not be present when gravity had its way.

Something that surprised me about the Rumble Room were the critters. We saw big crickets, spiders, and flying insects, although we might have been half a mile from the entrance. There was some vegetation along the murky stream, so I wonder if those nutrients accounted for the animal life. We saw very few bats, so their guano couldn't be the cause.

The trip out was uneventful. Jim took an hour of video (with his usual, interesting narrative) so we watched that on Jerry's VCR on the 11 hour drive home. ■

Top: Jerry Cindric, Richard Cindric, and Jim Watson prepare to go caving. **Middle:** Jim Watson prepares to descend as Jerry Cindric watches. **Bottom:** Jerry Cindric in a Rumbling Falls waterfall (photos by Ben Boling).



A trip to **Powder Mill Creek Cave**

trip report by
Gary Johnson

photos by
Jeff Page &
Gary Johnson



Much of the land near the Current River is honeycombed with caves. Most of these caves are relatively short, but there are a few lengthy cave systems mixed in with the simple single passage caves that serve as the norm. Powder Mill Creek Cave is the longest known cave system in the Current River Valley. With over seven miles of mapped passages, Powder Mill Creek Cave is an impressive cave with a large entrance passage and a nice wide creek that runs wall to wall for nearly a half mile back into the cave. Unlike Devil's Icebox—another cave with a watery entrance passage—you don't need a canoe to enter Powder Mill Creek Cave. While there are places that reach waist deep, most of the journey consists of sloshing through knee-deep water. Occasionally you get to step onto clay or sand banks. And eventually the creek begins taking some alternate paths that leave the main branch dry. This entrance passageway is large, twenty to thirty feet high (occasionally reaching as high as 40), and varying from 40 to 80 feet wide. The first three quarters of a mile is easy passage. Then you

Above: The entrance to Powder Mill Creek Cave (photo by Gary Johnson).
Left: This large formation is dubbed "The Dinosaur" (photo by Jeff Page).

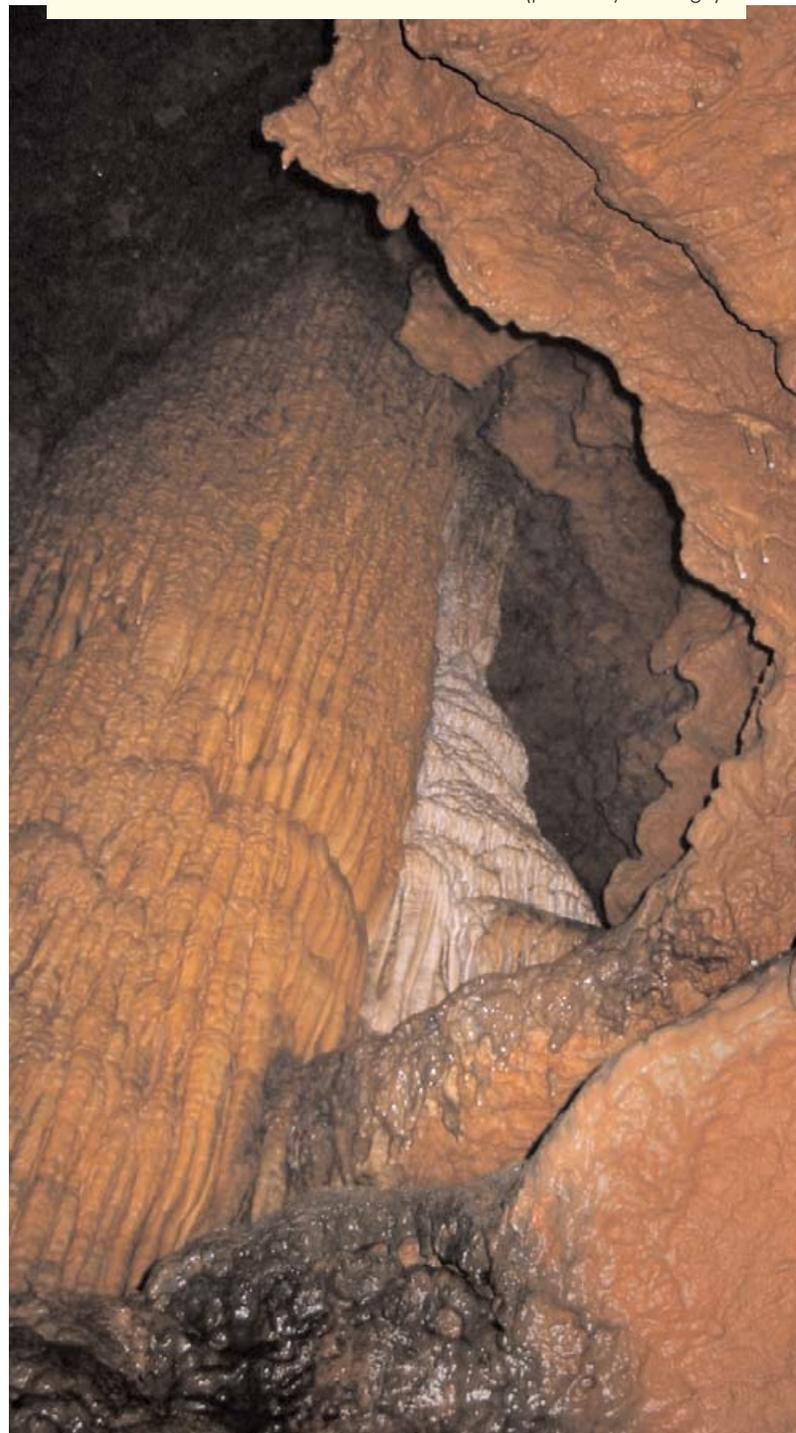
reach the first of the cave's five major watercrawls. Some of these watercrawls go on for thousands of feet, requiring cavers to don wetsuits and even float on their backs to negotiate low air space sections. So after the easy entrance passageway, this becomes a very demanding cave that will push even the most experienced cavers to their limits.

I got an opportunity to see part of Powder Mill Creek Cave when Hal Baker asked for volunteers to accompany him on a geology trip. I had heard about those watercrawls, though, and didn't want any part of them. So when Hal offered a little trip that would only venture about 1,500 feet into the cave, I thought that's for me and signed up. But to my disappointment (I had already traveled all the way to Eminence), this trip was cancelled. However, later, Hal told me about another trip he had scheduled, and this trip would allow me to see more of the cave. On the down side, it would mean negotiating two watercrawls. He said the first two watercrawls weren't bad and didn't require a wetsuit—just polypros. I didn't exactly jump at the opportunity to join this trip. I've got a touch of claustrophobia and tight crawls aren't exactly easy for me, but Hal said the first two watercrawls mostly involve hands and knees crawling. We'd only be belly crawling for short distances. Okay, I can do that. So I signed up. Jeff Page had already signed up for this same trip, so we decided to travel together in his new SUV and camp on Hal's property. Hal has a great spread on the South Fork of the Jacks Fork River. His property includes a couple small caves, a spring, and lots of nice places for setting up a tent.

As Jeff and I passed Springfield and headed east on Highway 60, storm clouds swirled overhead. A weather report on the radio predicted hail—up to softball size. But the clouds seemed to part and either head north toward Salem or south toward West Plains. And while we did indeed get rained on that evening, it was only a short shower. Later, we learned this same storm had left tens of thousands of homes back in Springfield without electricity. So I guess we were lucky. I was concerned the rain might have brought up the water level in the cave, but Hal said rain didn't have much of an effect the first two watercrawls. These watercrawls are separated from the creek that occupies the entrance passage by a three-foot-high waterfall. So while the creek level might climb during rainfall, the waterfall provided some protection from rising water. Some of the cave's other watercrawls, however, aren't advisable during rain. In fact, Doug Baker's surveying trips are automatically cancelled by rain.



Top: Soda straws and helectites in the main passage of Powder Mill Creek Cave. **Bottom:** This thick column rises about 20 feet (photos by Jeff Page).





Above: A stalactite and stalagmite recently touched to form this column in the main passage of Powder Mill Creek Cave. **Below:** This impressive flowstone display is located midway through the first watercrawl. Dripping water creates concentric waves beneath the flowstone. This photo is a composite of several individual photos taken by Jeff Page.

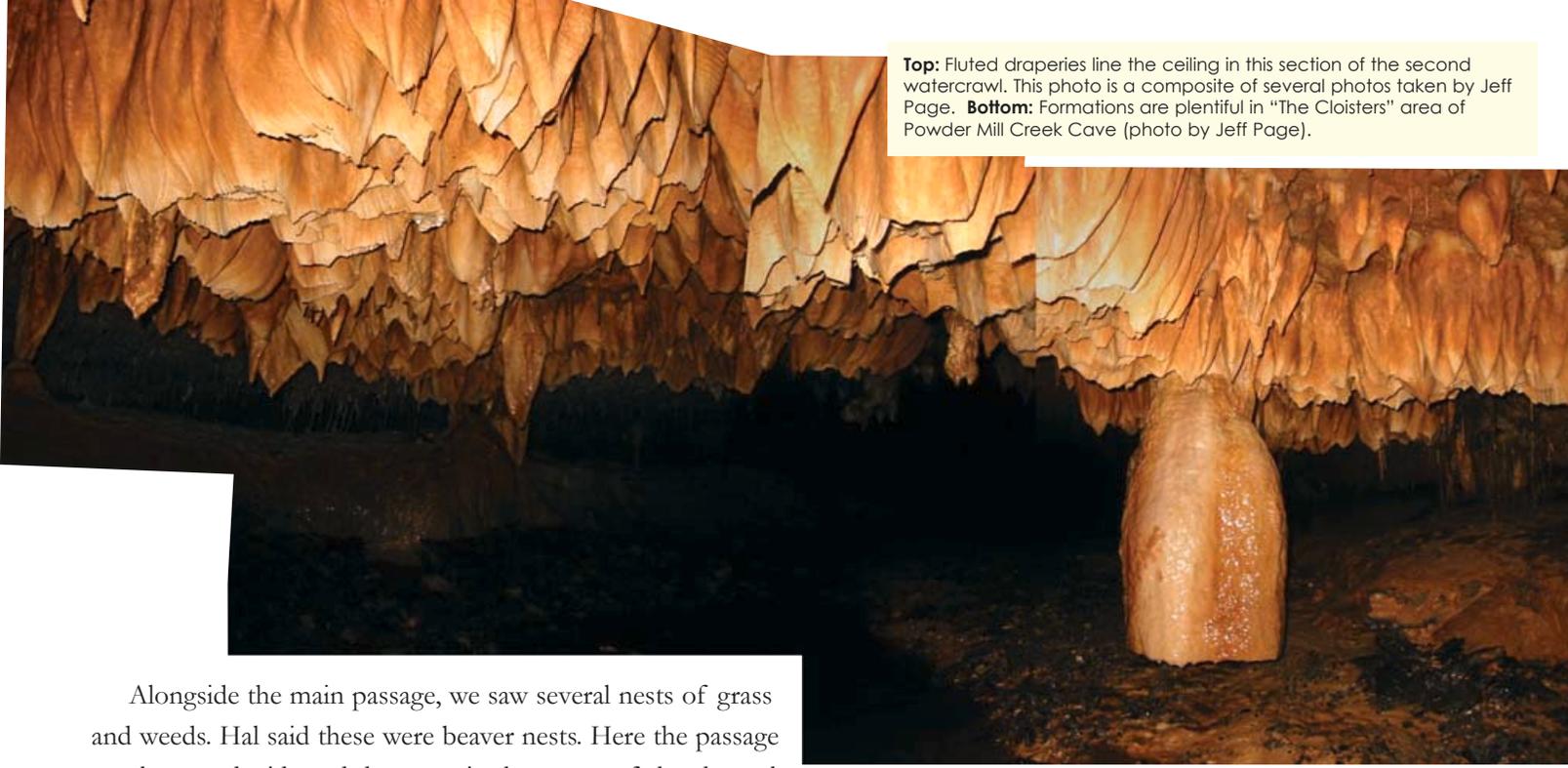
Joe Walsh and his wife were supposed to round out the caving group. Joe had never been in Powder Mill Creek Cave and was looking forward to the trip, but he was weak after undergoing dental surgery earlier in the week. So he and his wife regrettably had to cancel.

The entrance of Powder Mill Creek is relatively modest. A small pond sits in front of an entrance no taller than six or seven feet. I had visited the entrance a month before, after several days of rain, at which time, the water level of the pond was up several inches, making it difficult to reach the cave entrance without wading (and I hadn't felt up to wading, so I had not yet seen the entrance gate.) But on this return trip with Hal, the water was back to its normal height, so we easily found stepping stones that led across the creek to the large gate set back twenty feet from the entrance overhang.

Hal gave me the duty of taking relative humidity readings with a psychrometer in the first half mile of passageway. He was interested to learn if there were any unusual fluctuations in the readings as might occur if the cave entrance were breathing or inhaling air. Hal had marked areas on a cave map indicating where he wanted readings to be taken. It was my job to find those places, turn on the psychrometer, and write down the wet and dry bulb readings. An easy job. So I wandered off on my own to each of the locations. Meanwhile, Hal and Jeff collected core samples of clay. Hal's additional duties involved documenting cave graffiti and carbide dumps.

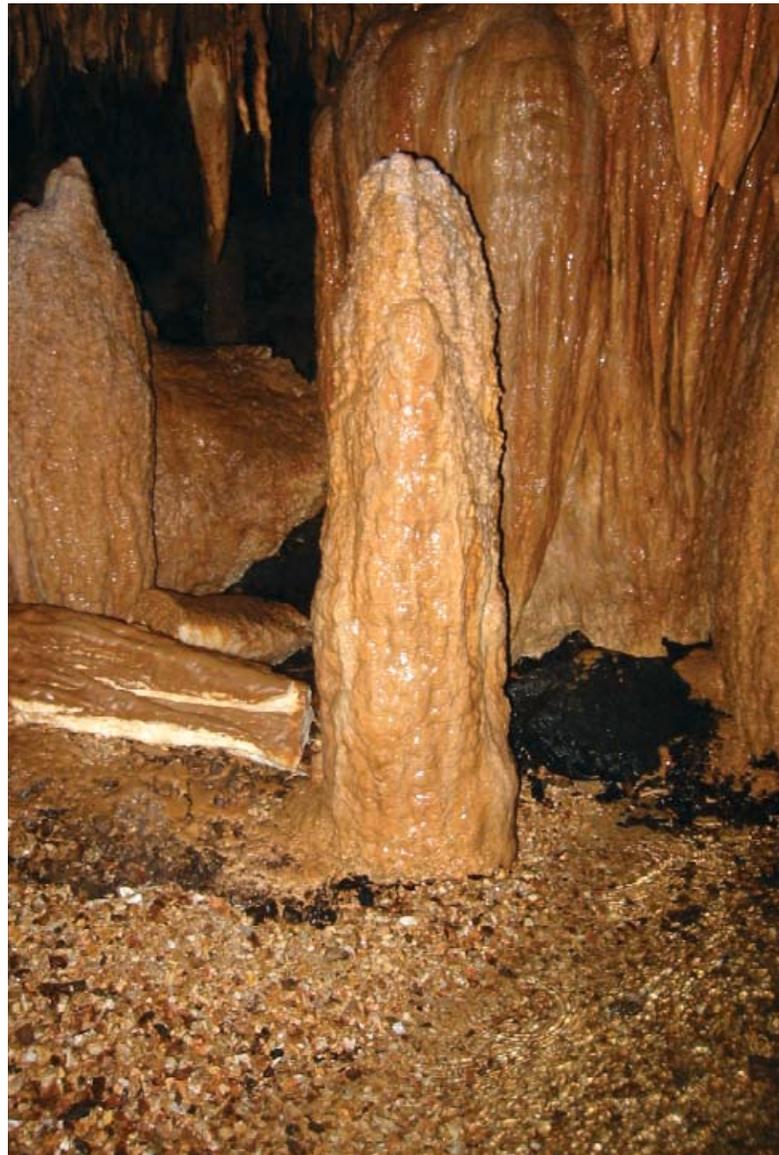


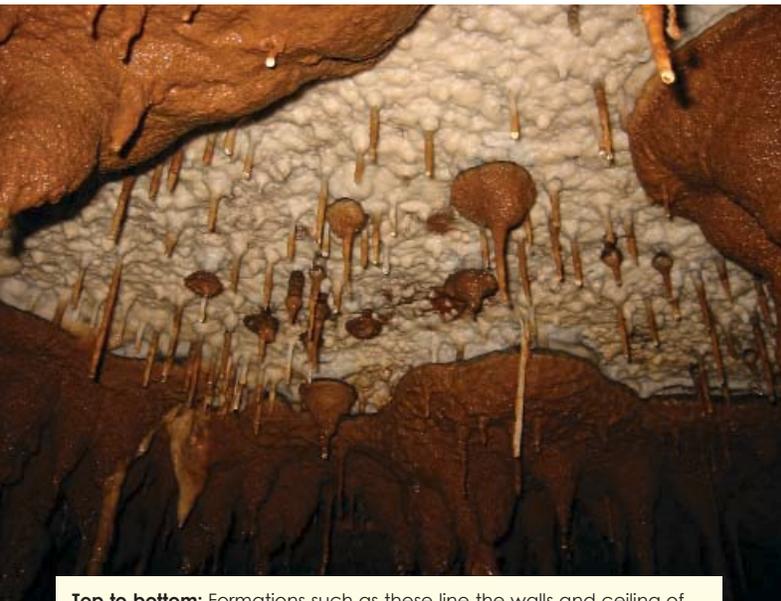
Top: Fluted draperies line the ceiling in this section of the second watercrawl. This photo is a composite of several photos taken by Jeff Page. **Bottom:** Formations are plentiful in "The Cloisters" area of Powder Mill Creek Cave (photo by Jeff Page).



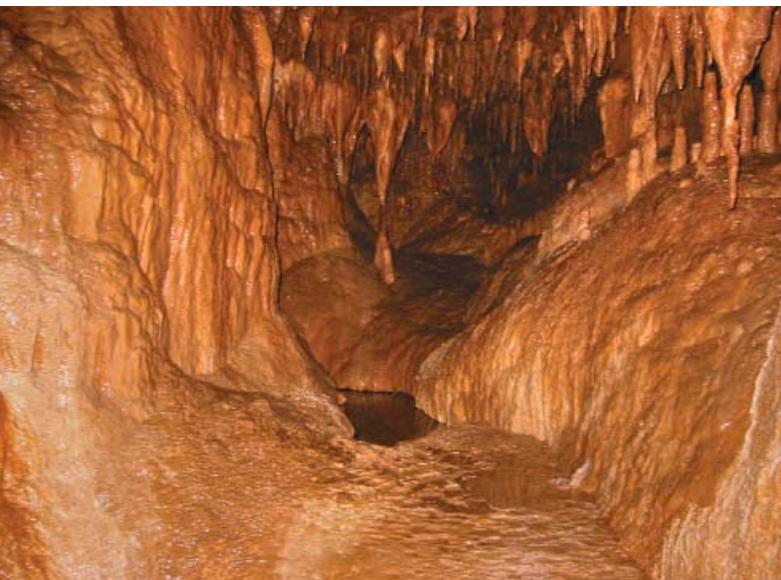
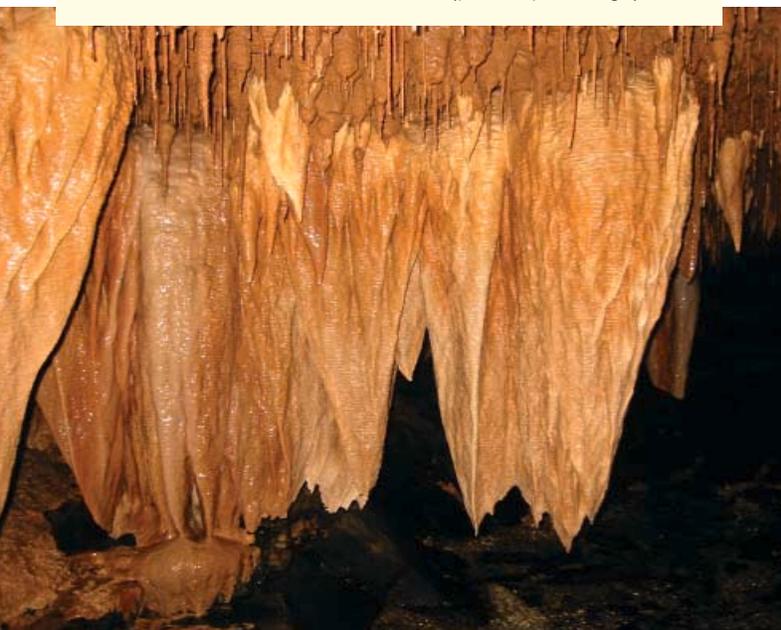
Alongside the main passage, we saw several nests of grass and weeds. Hal said these were beaver nests. Here the passage was large and wide and the water in the center of the channel was two to three feet deep. So there was plenty of water to attract beavers. They weren't attempting to build a dam, but they were definitely calling the cave home. I also saw many crawdads throughout this section of the cave stream. The water was perfectly clear, until my footsteps clouded it, that is. Every time I stopped and spent more than a few seconds looking into the water, I found some crawdads. This continued for at least 300 yards into the cave. In addition, I saw one fish—a sculpin— about a half mile back into the cave. It was about eight inches long with brown bands. The only mammals we saw were bats. A little beyond the half-mile point I saw a cluster of bats on the cave ceiling. The cluster was about a foot in diameter, maybe a little larger. Hal quickly identified the bats as grey bats and speculated that a colony of this size, which easily might contain a hundred or more bats, could possibly close the cave. But in general we did not encounter many bats. We found a few grotto salamanders and cave crickets, but that was about the extent of the cave fauna. However, this cave has proven rich for fossils. Hal pointed out two clay beds where digging had revealed bones of several now-extinct creatures. In addition, Hal pointed out a snake skeleton. This 18-inch-long snake skeleton was well back into the cave, beyond the first watercrawl.

Eventually breakdown chokes off the main passage; however, the constant flow of water has continued to work its way through the cave, finding other avenues. To continue further back into the cave, it becomes necessary to follow the stream course through the first watercrawl. It's about 300 feet





Top to bottom: Formations such as these line the walls and ceiling of "The Cloisters" in Powder Mill Creek Cave (photo by Jeff Page).



long and through that entire route you're in several inches of water. Thankfully, it's mostly hands and knees crawling with no real belly crawls of more than a few feet. I found there was often room to walk stooped over, usually with my hands on the clay bank as I sloshed sideways like a crab through the stream. If you take this strategy you must be very careful because there are occasional soda straws and stalactites. After this first water-crawl, the passageway soon opens up again with a high ceiling and a large trunk passage. The Bone Passage cuts through at this point. This is a large passage, with a ceiling height of nearly 50 feet. The left side section is much larger than the right section. The left side section continues for three or four hundred feet before the passage is choked off by clay and dirt. This passage features some sections where the clay floor has been sculpted by dripping water, resulting in small towers that resemble mini-city landscapes. This section of the cave also includes some beautiful crystals on the cave floor. As Hal took pictures of the crystals, Jeff and I followed the passage to its terminus. We climbed to the top of a steep slope to make sure the passage terminated and found a small crawlway that might have continued further, but we didn't pursue this route. (Be careful walking in the Bone Passage or you might stumble over the tiny clay towers.)

The right side section of the Bone Passage is one of the highlights of the cave. Hal gave us directions where to go and he then stayed behind while Jeff and I climbed a narrow vertical passage into an upper level. We continued forward for 100 feet to an incredible display of tall rimstone dams. The series of dams was probably 15 feet high or more. Looking from above at the dams, we saw large basins of crystal clear water. These basins overflowed and dripped into lower basins. Drops of water splashing in the basins sent out volleys of concentric waves. Above the rimstone dams, the cave wall was covered with flowstone and soda straws. Some of these soda straws were exceptionally long, possibly measuring as much as five or six feet. Regrettably, by the time we reached this passage (we actually explored this passage on our way back out of the cave), Jeff's camera batteries were low and his storage cards were full, so we have no photos of the rimstone dams or the impressive soda straws hanging above the dams.

The second watercrawl was arguably tougher than the first. It contained little water, just a few puddles, but this was belly crawl territory and it wore down my stamina. Sharp chert lined the floor of the passage. Hard plastic kneepads would be a good idea. Foolishly, I had assumed this would be a muddy cave (not sure why I made that assumption), so I had packed a

pair of knee/shin pads made for playing softball (and intended to prevent burns from sliding). They would've worked well in mud. But the pads weren't thick enough for chert, so I felt the sharp edges on my knees. I was very glad to get through this watercrawl so I could stand up again.

Immediately past the second watercrawl, we entered an area filled with thick columns named "The Cloisters." This area contains the highest concentration of formations that I've seen in any wild cave in the Ozarks. The height from floor to ceiling is only about eight feet in this section of the cave. But the room is chock full of wide columns, varying from three to eight feet thick. Small pools had formed on some of the formation ledges. Clusters of soda straws descended from snow-white splotches on the ceiling. As Hal sat down and took notes regarding this chamber, Jeff used up the last of his photos. This is a very unique and beautiful area of the cave.

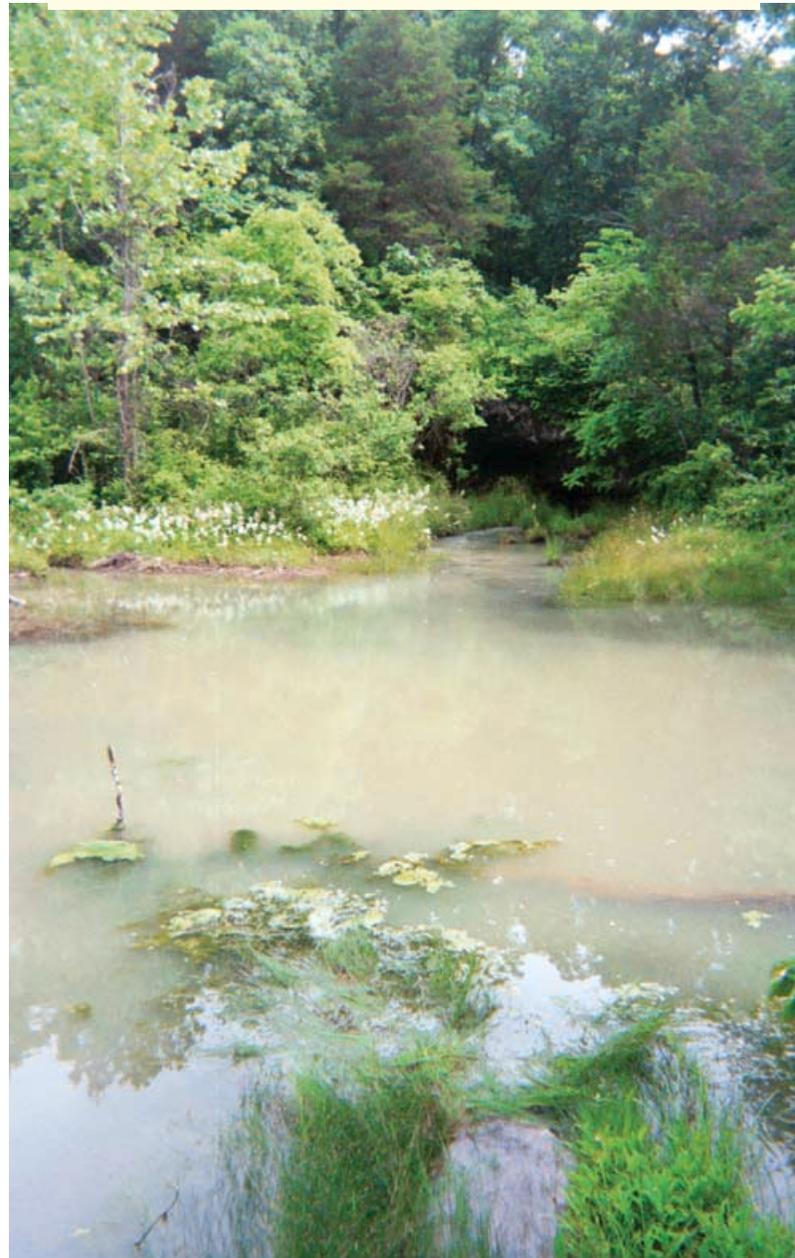
This would be the end of our journey. Just beyond this area, the third watercrawl begins. So we soon began to retrace our steps and begin the journey back to daylight. From the time that we entered the cave to the time that we left the cave, over nine hours elapsed. This was the longest time that I've been in a cave. But the time flew past. It's very difficult for me to judge time when I'm in a cave. If someone had said we had been in the cave for five hours, I would've believed them.

This is a marvelous cave, with many impressive formations. Soda straws fill the ceilings in many locations, often mixed with thick displays of helectites (as at the beginning of the first watercrawl). You'll find several large-scale formations. These are mostly clustered together in the main passage about three quarters of a mile from the entrance. Here you'll find a wide column over 20 feet tall and a tyrannosaurus-shaped formation that some people call "The Dinosaur," about 15 feet tall. And mid way through the first watercrawl, you'll find a magnificent example of flowstone—an orangish frozen Niagara with a bulbous mid section and thinner flows to the sides. This formation is at least 30 feet wide.

The only way to see Powder Mill Creek Cave is by participating in a work trip, such as Hal Baker's geology trips or Doug Baker's surveying trips. The cave is not open for recreational caving. So if you'd like to see Powder Mill Creek Cave, look for cave trip announcements. These announcements are frequently posted in the MOCAVES listserv group and they're frequently published on the KCAG Web site's "Events" page. Whatever the case, be prepared to participate. ■



Above: Soda straws grow from a remnant of a chert layer in the second watercrawl (photo by Jeff Page). **Below:** A small pond sits at the mouth of Powder Mill Creek Cave (photo by Gary Johnson).



A trip to
**Little Scott Cave
& Hamilton Cave**

trip report by Sam Clippinger
photos by Fred Light and Sam Swearingin



Top: The entrance to Hamilton Cave is surrounded by vibrant vegetation. **Bottom:** Sam Swearingin heads out of Hamilton Cave. A huge gate protects the cave from unwanted visitors (photos by Fred Light).

On June 21st, Gary Johnson and I, accompanied by two scouts and two adult leaders from Troop 118, went caving near Meramec State Park. The saga began the previous fall when Bryon Carmoney and I visited one of this troop's meetings, where we gave a short presentation and slide show. The Scoutmaster, Fred Light, is an old friend of mine and used to be Scoutmaster of my Troop as well.

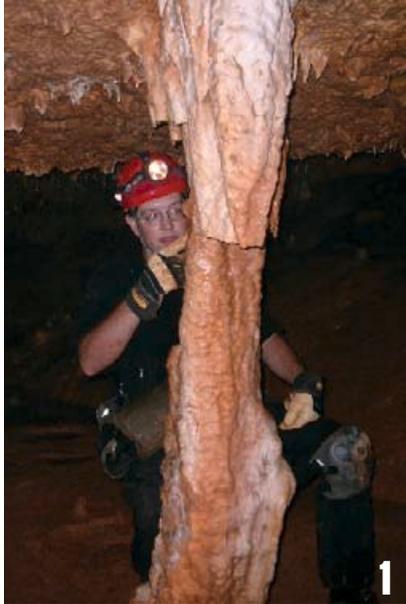
He contacted me after our presentation to begin discussing dates for a trip. Initially, Bryon planned to go and suggested some caves and camping spots that I had never seen. After some amusingly confused moments of trying to decide which cave(s) to visit, followed by Bryon's job schedule not allowing him to attend (at the last minute, of course), the trip was nearly cancelled. It was saved at the very last minute when I e-mailed Gary and he agreed to go.

We camped in Meramec State Park on Friday night and reviewed equipment and rules. In the morning, our first visit was to Hamilton Cave. The park office has the key and they'll give it to anyone who acts prepared for caving. They marked the cave's location on a map for us and we were off. Along the hike, we saw the Old Hamilton Ironworks, complete with educational signs about its history. (The ticks had seen the signs too and were waiting for us. Hilarity ensued.)

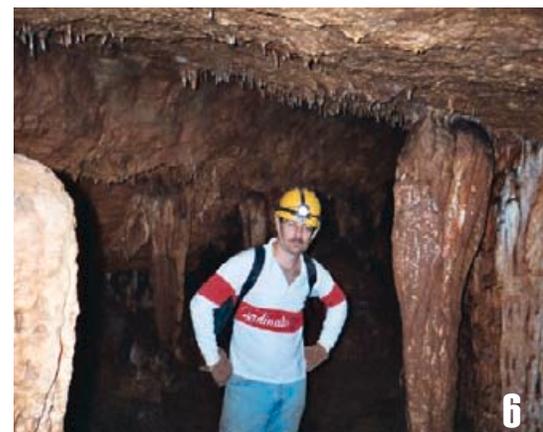
Finally, after about 20 minutes of walking in the stream, we reached the cave. I'd never been in Hamilton before and I was immediately impressed by the size of its gate. The entrance is probably 20' tall and 30' wide. The gate is set back about 50 feet from the cave's dripline. The gate served as a good introduction for the novices about the importance of conservation and why gates are necessary in the first place. We also talked briefly about the lengths to which some people will go to defeat gates. Everyone was impressed with the effort (and expense) involved in installing this particular gate.

Most of the cave wasn't much different than the entrance—mostly big walking passage with flowing water on the floor. The one exception to this was a side passage near the entrance that contained a room with lots of water activity. Overall the room wasn't very large but it had a beautiful clear pool and some lily pad formations. Nearby there was a large old (dry) rimstone dam, one of the deepest I'd ever seen. It was located under a shelf, well away from the walking path, which is probably why it is still intact. In the rest of the cave, there were no decorations to speak of and no real physical challenges, although that didn't stop us from climbing up the banks in a few places so we could crawl along ledges close to the ceiling. All in all, it was a good, easy introduction to caving for three of our novices who had never been underground before. It allowed them all to learn that some caves aren't really challenging; they didn't have anything to be nervous about.

After exiting Hamilton Cave, we found a convenient path that went from the cave entrance directly to the parking lot. Tip to others: walking the path is much easier and faster than walking in the stream (if only we'd followed it on our way in). On the way back we passed a group of three young men who were headed the other way. They were dressed in T-shirts, shorts and tennis shoes. One of them was carrying a headlamp and another had a large flashlight in his pocket. They stopped when they saw us and asked "Is the cave down that way?" "Yep," I replied. They thanked us and resumed walking. I called after them "It's gated and locked though. You're not going to be able to get in." They looked disappointed. Knowing I had the only key in my pocket, I



All the photos on this page are from Little Scott Cave. Photos by Fred Light, except as noted. #1: Sam Clippinger points out breakage. #2: Nick Light and Lee Gibbs stand in front of a nice column (photo by Sam Swearengin). #3: Nick Light prepares to drop through the entrance gate. #4: Formations line this wall cavity in Little Scott. #5: A cave salamander at the entrance. #6: Fred Light poses between columns (photo by Sam Swearengin).



spring was easy but there was no entrance, only a newly collapsed pile of rock (1-2 years old) in a small pit, filled with eroded dirt and leaves. The map said the entrance was small, and since we couldn't find it after 45 minutes of searching, we thought it might have collapsed. Everyone waded in the stream a bit to wash off, then headed back to camp. The next day, one of the park rangers told us that the entrance is actually about 300' away. The collapsed pit we found was an attempt to dig another entrance that had, as we saw, collapsed.

All in all, it was a great trip. Everyone in the group had a lot of fun. The scouts were very well-behaved, both above and below ground. They were interested in caves and had more questions than I was qualified to answer. I would definitely take this group on another trip if they want to go. ■

cheerfully explained that they had to go to the park office to get a key. I'm so helpful.

We stopped at the iron foundry for lunch (provided by the Scouts) before heading for Little Scott. It was a warm day but sitting inside the remains of the huge stone furnace was nice and cool. Almost like being in a cave... except for the ticks, which we acquired by walking around the foundry and observing the old Missouri Department of Conservation signs. We (especially Gary) spent the next 20 minutes or so flicking ticks off of our clothing.

[Editor's note: Because Old Hamilton Ironworks is far removed from the rest of Meramec State Park—and thus an easy target of vandals—administrators have decided to let the foundry grounds return to nature, under the belief that thick weeds and bugs will do a better job of protecting it than the state.]

I've been in Little Scott before, and so far it's my favorite novice cave. It's easy enough for inexperienced cavers to move through, but it presents enough physical challenges to make it interesting. The passages are complex enough that often there are several different ways to get through, either by chimneying, climbing, or crawling. There are several sections that are nicely decorated but easy enough to move through that the formations are clean. Everyone had a great time in Little Scott. When we got to the back (thanks to the talents of Gary, who had a map), we found ourselves faced with a 30' belly crawl that led to a 1' high water crawl. The map indicated that there was more cave beyond the water crawl and the two scouts wanted to continue. I could see that the adults were all tired (myself included) and none of us really wanted to get soaked. We turned around and the scouts led us out. I congratulated them on leading us out without getting lost once, unlike my previous trip to Little Scott where an experienced caver led us in circles on the way out (*cough* *cough* *bryon* *cough*).

Since the scouts were still excited about having "an adventure" underground, we headed back to find Hamilton Springs Cave. According to the map it's a rather small cave, but I'd been assured it was very muddy—just what the scouts needed. The park office had told us "the entrance is right above the spring." Finding the



Major Springs *of*
the **Current**
River
& Jacks Fork

report and photos by
Gary Johnson

Photo: Blue Spring silently rises at the base of a bluff. Watercress fills the stream branch (photo by Gary Johnson).

Many rivers throughout the Ozarks have fallen victim to dam projects. The Osage River is now interrupted by huge reservoirs at Truman Lake and Lake of the Ozarks (not to mention dams at Stockton Lake and Pomme de Terre that affect the Osage River watershed). The White River is interrupted by three major dams, which form Beaver Lake, Table Rock Lake, and Bull Shoals. The Black River was dammed to form Clearwater Lake. The St. Francis River was dammed to form Wappapello Lake. The Elk River was dammed in Northeast Oklahoma to form Grand Lake O' The Cherokees. The North Fork of the White River was dammed for Norfolk Lake. At times, it seemed as if the Army Corps of Engineers was intent on placing dams on virtually every river in the Ozarks. But a handful of rivers in the Ozarks have escaped lake projects, such as the Buffalo River in Arkansas, the Gasconade (the longest river wholly contained within Missouri), the Eleven Point, the Meramec, and the Current. Several of these rivers were indeed targeted for dam projects but vocal opposition arose, and the dam projects were headed off.

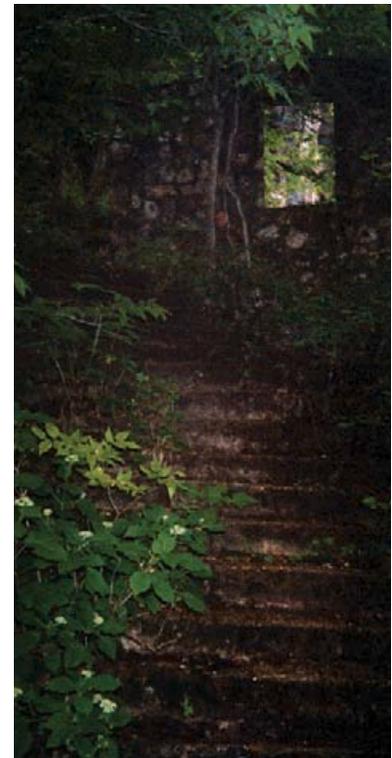
I can hardly imagine the Ozarks without any of these streams running unimpeded. But particularly I think of the marvelous springs along the Current River. These are some of the largest springs in the world, and a lake would have likely submerged many of these springs under several feet of lake water. Thankfully, the Current River dam project never happened and we can continue to experience these marvelous locations where bluish water emerges from deep depths (well over 100 feet in some cases) to flow past watercress and tumble down boulder strewn spring branches, accompanied by steep dolomite and limestone bluffs and thick outgrowths of ferns. These are truly special places.

The following notes provide brief descriptions of each of the major springs along the Current River. While writing this article, I drew heavily upon the work of Gerald Feder and Jerry Vineyard in *Springs of Missouri* and Jo Schaper in *Missouri Speleology* (Vol. 32, Issue 4).

Montauk Springs

Until 1892, spring waters at Montauk rose at a single rise pool at least 200 feet deep (according to Steve Kohler in *Two Ozark Rivers*), but then a storm and flood washed a huge amount of sediment, gravel, and boulders into the spring's mouth. Now, instead of flowing to the surface in one spring, water bubbles to the surface in no less than 14 separate locations, generally in shallow pools. None of these springs can compare in terms of flow or dramatic location with the other major springs of the Current River, but taken together, these springs represent a significant jumpstart to the Current's headwaters. Pigeon Creek is a relatively average sized creek until the flow from Montauk Springs more than doubles the stream size and necessitates a new name entirely for this body of water. This is where the Current River becomes the Current River.

Montauk Springs are located in Montauk State Park. While



Top: One of the numerous rise pools at Montauk Springs. **Above left:** A view from within the ruined hospital at Welch Spring. Straight ahead is a small portal that leads into Welch Cave. **Above right:** This stairway rises from the thick vegetation that enshrouds the hospital ruins at Welch Spring. The stairs lead to the hospital's upper floor (photos by Gary Johnson).

other state parks, such as Round Spring, Big Spring, and Alley Spring, were handed over to the National Park Service when Ozark National Scenic Riverways was created in 1964, Montauk State Park remained in the hands of the Missouri Department of Conservation. MDC operates a fish hatchery at Montauk, where they concentrate on raising rainbow and brown trout. As a result, most of the activities at Montauk revolve around fishing, with large crowds of fishermen patrolling the river and a nearby lake. However, even non-fishermen should enjoy a trip to Montauk. Children enjoy seeing the hatchery pools (we saw a ground hog waddling beside the main hatchery pools) and a preserved mill from the 1920s provides a sense of history. In addition, this site has proven popular with birdwatchers. A lodge, restaurant, store,



Above: Welch Spring rises within a cave and then flows under this bluff. On the far side of the spring branch, hospital ruins are buried in thick vegetation (notice the rectangular window opening) (photo by Gary Johnson).

and cabins round out the scene. For cavers, however, the main interest is the springs. To see them, though, you'll likely have to push past fishermen who fiercely patrol the water where the springs join the Current River. On a recent trip, we encountered a large white-tailed doe at one of the larger spring rise pools. She was drinking from the water. She hesitantly made room for us so we could get a closer look. I wish the fly fishermen had been so considerate. They steadfastly stood their ground along the dirt trail that led from the trailhead parking to the various springs.

Welch Spring

At most springs, water flows to the surface from a rise pool situated at the base of a bluff (as at Blue Spring, Pulltite, and Alley Spring). At first glance, Welch seems to fit into this same pattern, but in this case, the rise pool is actually situated in a cave. The spring water rises in darkness within the cave and then passes through a large tube and under a dolomite ledge before emerging into daylight at the base of a bluff, only a short distance (approximately 100 feet from the Current River). Of course, I'm completely relying upon the work of Jo Schaper for this description of the spring's inner workings. You cannot enter the cave. It is a gated cave and entry requests are not granted, for the cave harbors Indiana bats.

Welch Spring has arguably the most interesting and unique history of any of the Current River springs. For many years, the

land around the spring was owned by the Welch family (thus the name of the spring). However, in the 1920s, Dr. Christian H. Diel purchased the land. He believed the cool pollen-free air emerging from the cave would be beneficial to patients suffering from asthma, so he funded the construction of a sanatorium beside the spring. In addition, he dammed the pool at the base of the bluff, raising the water level of the spring and closing off entrance to the cave. As a result, any air escaping from the cave was forced through a small entrance into the basement of the sanatorium. It's not clear whether this entrance was an enlargement of an existing entrance or a completely new entrance. Unfortunately for Dr. Diehl, his asthma therapy never caught on. After he died in an auto accident, the sanatorium was abandoned. The shell of this two-story stone structure remains. It's surrounded by thick weeds and forest, like the remains of a lost Mayan temple. Its front steps abruptly climb out of the weeds. The building was much smaller than I expected. There couldn't have been room for more than two or three patients at any one time. The entire upper floor couldn't have been more than 15 feet by 20 feet. The window into the cave is in the lower level. At first I didn't see a gate and thought maybe it had been breached, but then I shined my light into the dark window, I found the gate about 15 feet beyond—with a large flow of spring water moving immediately behind it. According to Don Rimbach who mapped the cave in the '70s, the cave is about 2,000 feet long and contains several unique formations, but once again, according to Jo Schaper, entry requests are not granted. Nonetheless, this is still a fascinating location.

You can get to Welch Spring either by canoe or hiking. To reach it by canoe, you would have to be prepared to float from Baptist or Cedargrove. To reach Welch Spring on foot, you have two choices. First, you can hike in from the downstream side by way of Welch Landing (head north from Akers on Hwy. K and follow the signs). After arriving at Welch Landing, hike a half mile upstream along an easy, level trail. When I hiked this trail, I saw a mink, a watersnake, and a brown snake. The trail was somewhat overgrown and could be a real problem in summer months when ticks are out in force. The problem with this first route to Welch Spring, however, is it puts you on the opposite side of the spring branch from the hospital. So if you approach from this direction, you can only view the hospital ruins from a hundred feet away. (Wading across the spring branch is strictly forbidden.) The second hiking option requires a more strenuous hike. Return to Hwy. K and head north from the Welch Landing turnoff to the first left turn. This is a service road. Park your car in the pullout and then hike down the road as it descends to the river. Bear right at the first fork or you'll end up in a shooting range on the bluff above the spring. The road is somewhat steep, but the hike is relatively easy. This road leads directly to the hospital.

At the nearby Akers, a ferry still operates for carrying cars and passengers across the Current River. The National Park Service used to operate a campground at Akers, but the campground is now closed and used as a parking area for the floaters.

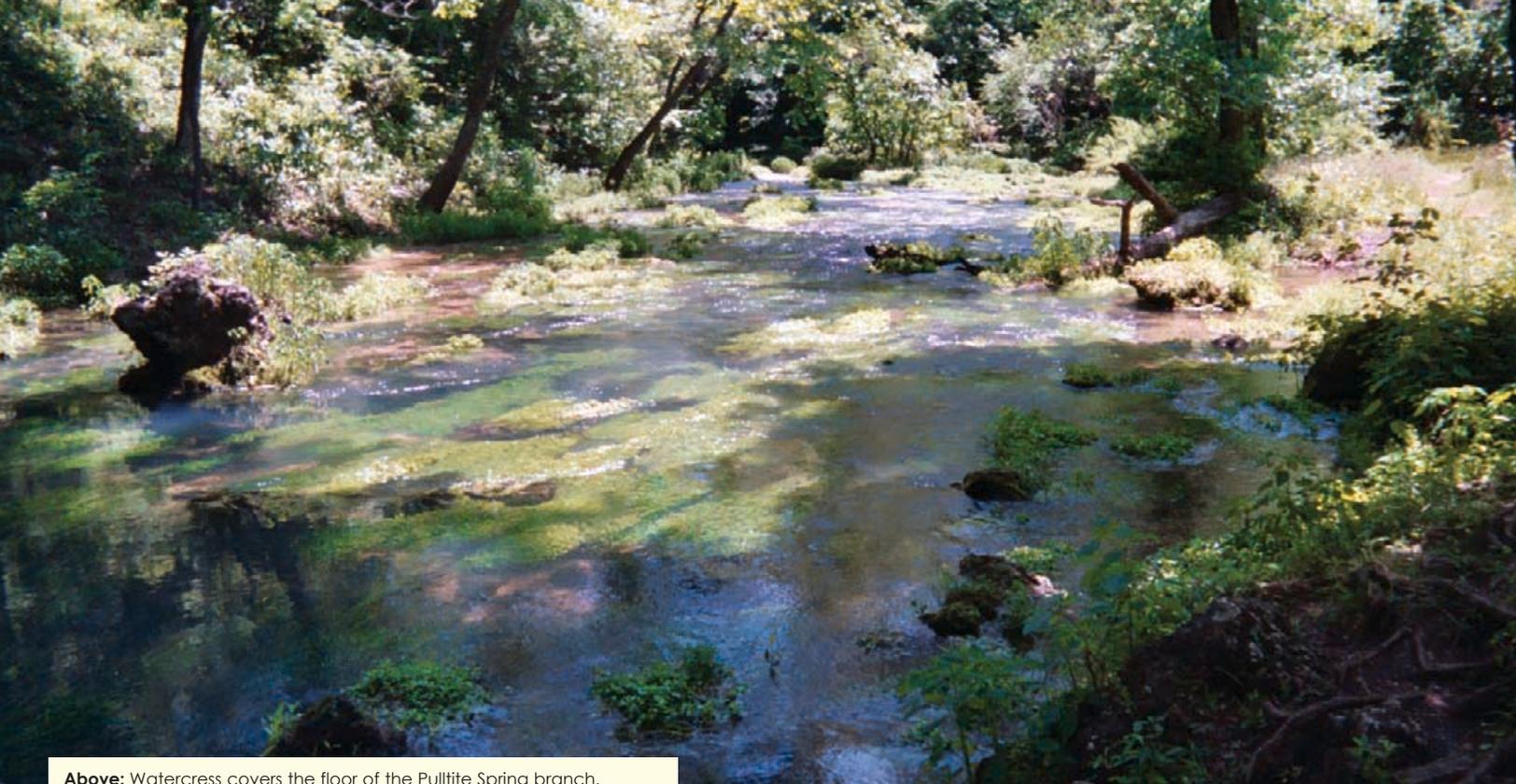
Pulltite Spring

While most of the major springs along the Current are accessible by car and short hikes, Pulltite requires a little more work. It's near the Pulltite campground, but it's across the river. So ideally, if you plan to visit Pulltite Spring, you'll be floating down the river in a canoe on your way to Round Spring. To reach Pulltite Spring on foot, head for the Pulltite showerhouse and then continue down the road until you see an old service road on the right. Follow this road as it heads for the river. When the trail emerges at the river, look across the river and to the right. You'll be looking at the Pulltite Spring branch as it enters the Current River. I recommend heading upstream about 50 yards before you attempt to cross. That way you won't be fighting both the Current River and the Pulltite Spring branch. At normal flow at this crossing, the river will be about mid thigh deep, which can be high enough to knock you off your feet if you aren't careful, so don't take this crossing lightly. Once across, you'll find a trail on the left side of the spring branch. (Do any wading that's necessary in the Current—not in the spring branch.) This is an especially scenic location as the spring flows through a beautiful little hollow. Everything seems to be green. You'll see lots of watercress as the water rushes down the boulder-strewn stream. The stream is virtually alive with vegetation. The bluff on the left shows clear signs of past cave activity, with several small, much-weathered formations remaining in cavities in



Above: Pulltite Spring flows through a beautiful, verdant hollow.
Below: The Pulltite Spring rise pool (photos by Gary Johnson).





Above: Watercress covers the floor of the Pulltite Spring branch.
Below: A stairway winds down to the viewing platform at Devil's Well (photos by Gary Johnson).



the bluff. Soon the bluff disappears and an old cabin appears. This log cabin was built in the French style, with logs placed vertically instead of the more frequently encountered horizontal placements. The National Park Service has attempted to stabilize the structure, but frequent visitation has left the structure marred with many carved names. The masonry chimney has attracted many scribbles and high school graduation dates. Further up the hollow, Pulltite Spring emerges from the base of a bluff. The water is blue and clear. A tall bluff rises behind the spring. This bluff may very well contain some cave passages, which would have been carved when the water table was higher. But with large patches of poison ivy serving as a deterrent, I didn't take the time to investigate the bluff. Over the past 100 plus years, several mills were built along the Pulltite Spring branch, but most traces of these mills have long since been obliterated.

The name "Pulltite" is a shortened form of "pull tight"—which describes the action a wagon driver must take when descending the steep road into the hollow (as in, he must "pull tight" on the reins). Not far downstream from where the Pulltite Spring branch empties into the Current, you'll find another spring: Fire Hydrant Spring. This spring is likely connected to Pulltite Spring. It gushes from the base of a bluff, only two or three feet above the Current River.

The Pulltite campground is located immediately east of the Current River. Many of the campsites have their own little paths through the brush down to the river. Part of the process of picking a good campsite at Pulltite is finding one with a good path to the river. The campsites are a little too close together for my taste, with few trees separating the sites, so don't expect much privacy here. In addition, the showers are located way down by the

group campsites, so they're a long walk for most people. At group campsite 3, you'll find a nice hiking trail that follows the river and then loops around a hill, passing by a small cave (McDonald Cave) with a sinkhole entrance.

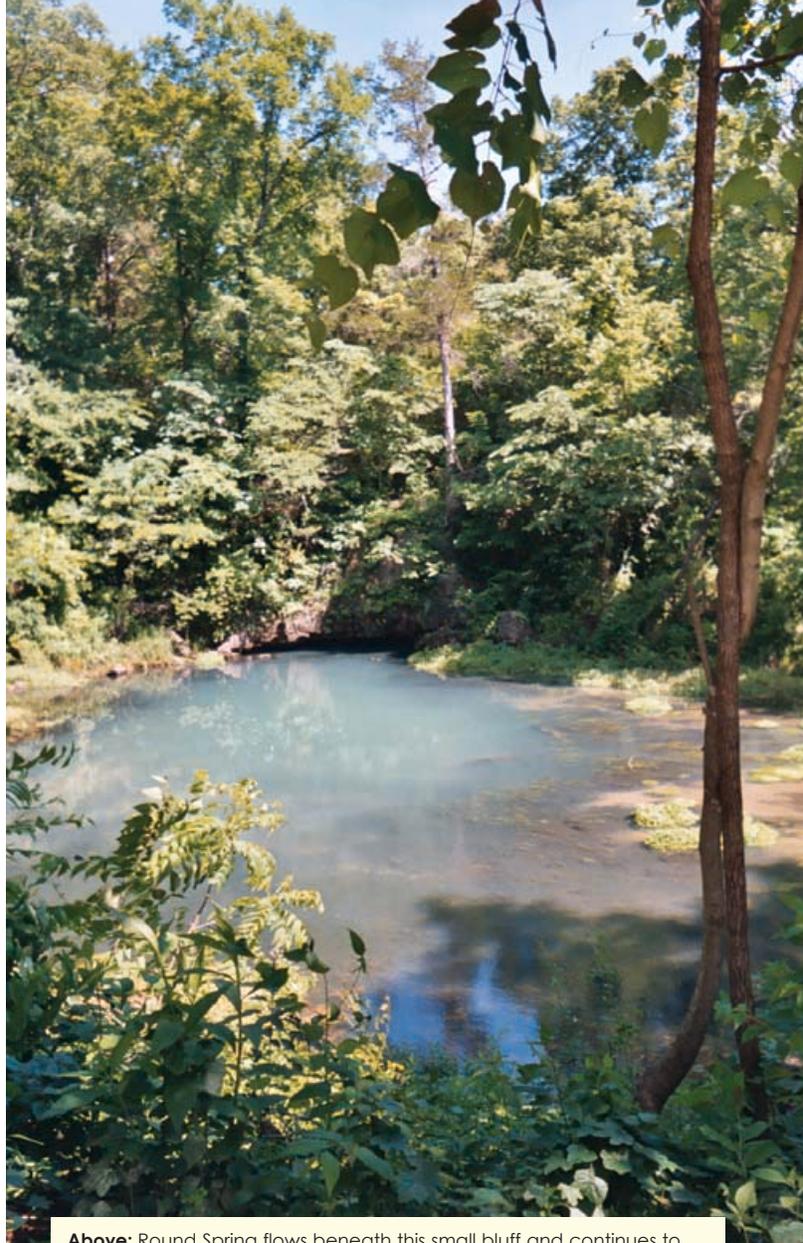
Devil's Well and Cave Spring

Devil's Well is Missouri's most well known window into a spring system. Now part of Ozark National Scenic Riverways, Devil's Well can be reached by a dirt road that heads south from Hwy. KK. Devil's Well is a classic example of karst topology. An opening at the bottom of a sink provides a free fall drop of 100 feet to a lake below. This lake is about 250 feet long and 100 feet wide. A depth of 70 feet was determined by Jerry Vineyard back in the '60s. Dye placed in this lake has appeared within a week at Cave Spring, two miles to the south on the Current River. Back in the '50s, Devil's Well was a commercial attraction. For a fee, you could sit on a bosun's chair that would be lowered into the fissure by way of an electric winch. At this time in the well's history, a visitor center was built over the sink. Once the National Park Service took control of the property, the visitor center was removed and a stairway was built to the bottom of the sink. A metal platform now leads up to the fissure, with a metal cage preventing anyone from falling in. If you lean forward into the metal cage, you can see down into the fissure. By pressing a switch, you can also turn on a light that hangs far below and illuminates the walls of the fissure and the greenish spring water. You can't see much. The angle of vision is severely restricted, but this is still an exceptionally impressive site. Back in the '50s and '60s, Jerry Vineyard led trips into Devil's Well. Canoes were lowered on ropes and cavers explored the handful of short muddy passages that could be entered from the lake. Today, the site is very low key, with only modest facilities—a single picnic table and grill and a small restroom with pit toilets. A surface pond sits to the east.

One of my intentions during this trip was to float the Current River and paddle into Cave Spring, which is located along the Current River (between Pulltite and Round Spring). However, thunderstorms forced us to float a different section of the river instead. So Cave Spring will have to wait for another year. The rise pool emerges in the back of Cave Spring Cave. The spring tube drops straight down for 150 feet. A horizontal tube then continues over 200 feet to the east to connect Cave Spring with a pool visible through a floor crack in Wallace Well Cave. This conduit has been explored by divers. A similar conduit system may connect Devil's Well with Wallace Well., although to the best of my knowledge, no one has dived the entire distance.

Round Spring

All of the major springs along the Current River are different in significant ways. Round Spring is notable for its large, round rise basin (about 100 feet across)—which gives the spring its name.



Above: Round Spring flows beneath this small bluff and continues to the right (photo by Gary Johnson).

The basin was no doubt at one time part of a cave, but the ceiling collapsed. The spring rises in this basin, where vertical walls rise 20 to 30 feet on all sides, and then flows under the south wall, to emerge as the spring branch. As a result of this unusual arrangement, the spring seems to emerge twice—on the far side of the rise basin and at the base of a small bluff in the spring branch. During times of heavy rains, the water level in the basin rises until it floods over the top of the south wall. During normal flow, the rise pool is completely silent. The basin seems to be a still pool. But beneath the surface, water flows at a surprisingly large volume through the cavity in the south wall. During extremely dry periods when the water level drops, the top of this cavity reportedly becomes visible. The spring branch is filled with watercress and snails. It rolls leisurely beside a picnic area and a campground before joining the Current River.

According to Indian legend, the spring came into being when a warrior rapped his fight stick on the ground and left the hole that is now the rise basin. Divers have descended the basin and



A road leads under Hwy. 19 to the parking lot for Round Spring Caverns. This cave is one of the largest ones in the area, with large rooms and plenty of headroom throughout most of the south passage, which is where the tours go. The tours emphasize this section of the cave because it is much more decorated than the north passage. The “tobacco barn” is arguably the tour’s highlight. This room is decorated with many draperies that hang like ... well, leaves in a tobacco barn. Most of the draperies are reddish brown but a few streaks of white are also apparent. A small stream runs beside most of the tour passageways. The tour guide pointed out the dangers of thinking spring water is good for drinking. In dramatic fashion, he trained his flashlight on the stream, which seemed clean enough, but then he gradually raised the beam to reveal an area that the stream had just flowed past—a large pile of bat guano. We didn’t see many bats in the cave, and all the ones we did see were Eastern Pippistrelles. Most of the cave life that we saw was encountered in the entrance passage. This is a side passage that was enlarged by past owners of the cave, in pre-National Park days when Round Spring Caverns was operated as a commercial cave. In this entrance passage, we encountered a cluster of five cave salamanders. The past owners seem to have taken fairly good care of the cave. They never installed sidewalks or handrails or lights. The cave was left in a relatively natural state. Now, tours are conducted with hand held lanterns. The lights don’t cast a great deal of light, so I had to spend most of my energies on simply watching my feet—instead of watching the cave. I wish the lanterns were a little brighter. The guide was experienced and intelligent. He wasn’t exactly a cave expert or a geology expert, but he had nonetheless acquired a good understanding of the cave. The

predictably discovered breakdown. This breakdown blocks access to the feeder channel.

The Round Spring campground is one of my favorites of the large campgrounds in Ozark National Scenic Riverways. It’s large but many of the sites are nonetheless fairly isolated. Trees and brush separate the sites on the perimeter, allowing some semblance of privacy. A nice river access area is within walking distance of the campsites. A cluster campsite is available for the floaters who don’t mind camping clustered together in a relatively small area. And the cluster sites have their own river access. In addition, a walkway leads across the Current River to the camp store and the group campsites. Canoe rental facilities are also available at the store. For the more leisurely inclined, you can rent an inner tube and then float all the way to the main campground’s river access, about a half mile total distance.

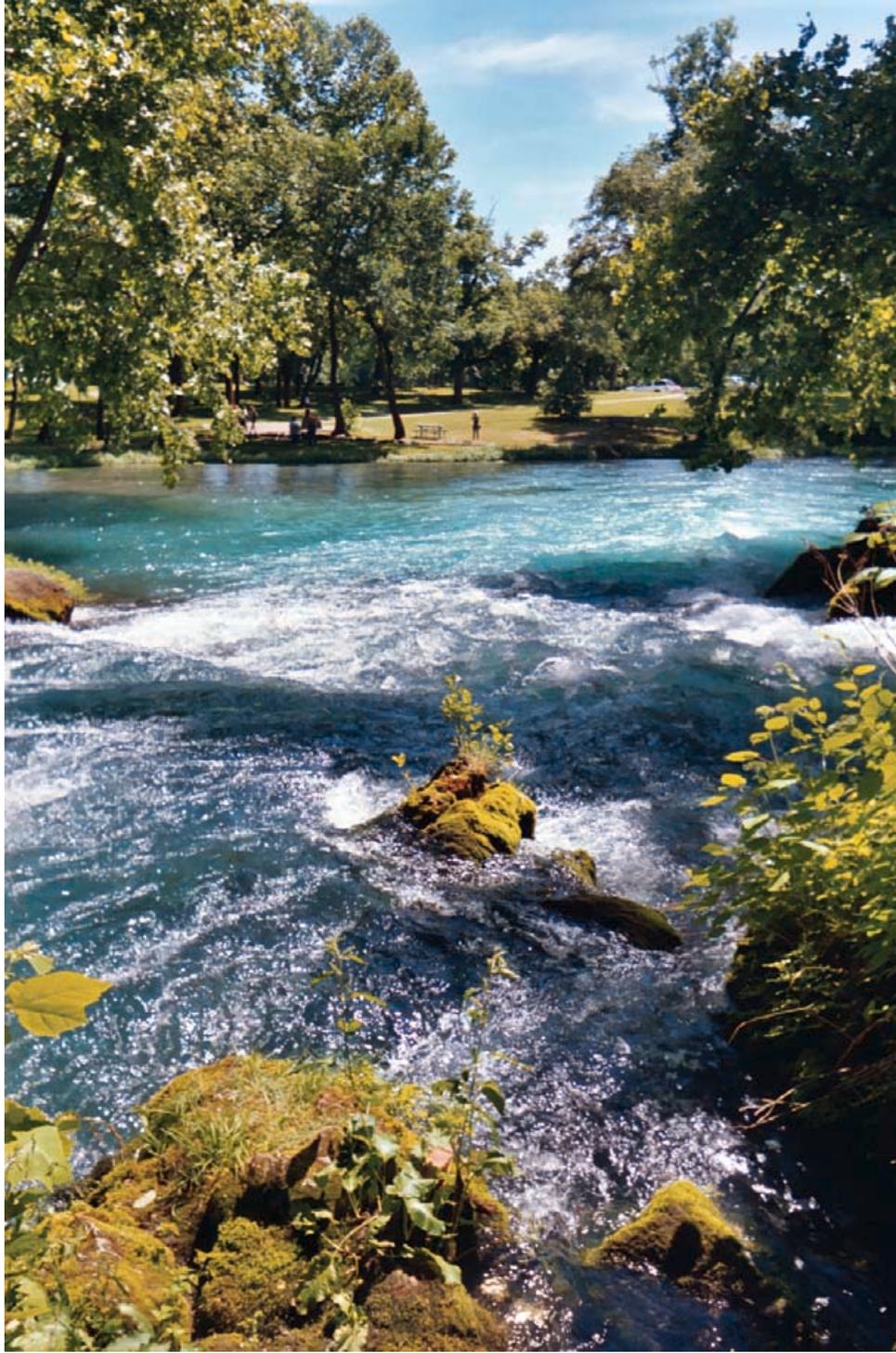
Above: Formations from Round Spring Caverns. The rightside photo shows a typical drapery from the “The Tobacco Barn.” **Below:** The Blue Spring rise pool is impossibly blue (photos by Gary Johnson).



tour operations are relatively low key. A simple storage shed serves as the tour headquarters. You buy your ticket here and then the guide leads you on a short hike of no more than a quarter mile through the woods, across a creek, and up a small incline to the cave's modest entrance, which is shrouded in trees and shadows. Interestingly, the bridge across the creek is hinged so that during floods it swings to the far side. A chain can then be pulled on the near bank to pull the bridge back in place.

Blue Spring

This might be my favorite of the Current River springs. It doesn't attract hordes of visitors, like Big Spring. Its remote location discourages many visitors, so visits to Blue Spring are laid back. I've been there twice and both times I encountered few other visitors, three the first time and only two during the second visit. But Blue Spring isn't notable just because it attracts few visitors. It's notable because of the spring's depth and the clear, blue water. You can lean out from the viewing platform and stare deep into the spring. This is what I think of when I think of springs in Florida—beautiful clear water with a hint of blue and boulders enveloped in light coatings of vegetation. The spring's feeder channel drops away (just out of view) for nearly 200 feet. This is the deepest of the Current River's springs. The



Above: Two views of Big Spring. This spring rises in a series of waves that rush out into the huge spring branch. The bottom photo is a composite photo formed from multiple individual photos (photos by Gary Johnson).





Above: Water from Alley Spring rushes through a channel beside the photogenic Alley Mill (photo by Gary Johnson).

extreme spring depth no doubt adds to the water's blueness. But even without staring into the spring's depths, the water in the rise pool seems a vibrant blue. The spring branch flows for a half mile before meeting the Current River. The branch is similar to the Pulltite Spring branch, but not quite as verdant.

You can reach Blue Spring on foot by two routes. From the Powder Mill campground, a trail strikes out along the Current River. Another shorter route joins this same trail from nearer Blue Spring. This means driving down the dirt-and-gravel access road for Blue Spring. This road can be a bit steep and rocky, but it was in good shape on both of my visits. Some sources recommend a four-wheel drive vehicle, but I haven't encountered any troubles on this road in a two-wheel-drive vehicle. The Blue Spring facilities include a small picnic area and vault toilets. A short trail leads toward the Current and joins the trail from Powder Mill for the final half mile. The Current River is wide and deep at this point. If you're concerned about the Blue Spring access road and don't mind a two-mile hike, then head for Powder Mill instead.

A visitor center was built at Powder Mill by the National Park Service back in the '70s, complete with an operating blacksmith shop for demonstrations during the summer months. But lack of visitors spelled doom for the visitor center. It's now no longer open to the public. A small campground is nestled next to the

river. A ferry service used to operate here. Across the river, you can still see the concrete remains of the dock's foundation.

Big Spring

Most of the Missouri springs rise to the surface silently, but the biggest spring in the state rises in a rush of water. The spring branch looks like a medium size river, over 100 feet across. This is a genuinely awe-inspiring spring. It's not only the largest in the state; it's one of the largest springs in the world. For a graphic example of the cave building capacity of springs, Jerry Vineyard reported in *Springs of Missouri* that O.R. Grawe had calculated the mineral content of the spring water and determined the corresponding volume of cave passage that would be represented: he reported that each year rock amounting to a passage 30 feet high, 50 feet wide, and one mile long was being removed. Considering the thousands of years that Big Spring has flowed that adds up to a mind-boggling amount of cave. Divers have plumbed the depths of Big Spring, but they could not penetrate far because breakdown chokes the passageway, although divers have reported glimpses of huge chambers beyond the breakdown.

Today, Big Spring is one of the most frequently visited springs in the state. Located only a short drive from Hwy. 60, a steady stream of visitors find their way to Big Spring. A wide paved path

leads from the parking lot to the rise pool. A steep bluff rises behind the rise pool. At the base of the bluff and invitingly located are a couple small caves. These might be the most frequently visited non-commercial caves in the state. Higher up, the bluff is pockmarked with more caves. At least one of the caves connects with the Big Spring conduit. This cave, which has a small crawlway entrance, is gated. A dirt path follows the spring branch to the south and runs past several small caves in the bluff face. Most visitors are drawn directly to the rise pool, where water rushes from underneath the bluff and surges in a series of waves before joining the massive spring branch. The Current River is already quite wide by the time Big Spring joins the flow, but Big Spring leaves its imprint in the color of the water. You can trace the Big Spring water. It's clear and blue, while the rest of the Current is a less vibrant green. Behind the parking lot, you'll find a large picnic area with wide fields and lots of elbowroom. The Ozark National Scenic Riverways main headquarters is located nearby in Van Buren. From the park headquarters, a road enters Mark Twain National Forest and provides access to a moderate-sized spring—Watercress Spring.

Alley Spring

Any discussion of Current River springs wouldn't be complete without mention of Alley Spring. It's located on Jack Fork River, not the Current. But Jacks Fork is the Current River's major tributary. Where the two rivers meet, with Jacks Fork still swollen from Alley Spring's output, the Current River grows by about a third. While Alley Spring doesn't attract as many day visitors as Big Spring, it's nonetheless one of the most popular sites in Ozark National Scenic Riverways. Its campground is huge and frequently packed. Thankfully, the campground is located across the highway from the spring, and this makes the spring seem slightly more isolated. If you've only visited Alley Springs in the fall or winter, you'll want to visit it in the summer sometime. From Memorial Day to Labor Day, Alley Spring Mill is opened, and it contains excellent examples of antique mill machinery. Guides on hand can explain the flour and corn mill operations, and nice exhibits on the upper floor give some background information on the region. In addition, an authentic schoolhouse has been setup along the trail from the parking lot to the mill. In conjunction with the construction of the mill, the spring was dammed. Most of the spring water now runs through a niche in the dam, passing through the turbines that power the mill. A walkway leads around the rise pool. Divers have followed the spring conduit down for over 150 feet. The spring branch is especially attractive. It flows at the base of the steep bluff in a small verdant streambed of polished rocks. Watercress and moss cling to the rocks. The bluff is pockmarked with dozens of small cave entrances. Another trail leads to the top of the bluff and provides wider vistas of the surrounding land. (An additional Jacks Fork spring, Blue Spring, is described in the April 2003 issue of *The Month's Guano*.) ■



Above: The Alley Spring rise pool (photo by Gary Johnson).

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Schaper, Jo, 1992, "Large Springs of the Upper Current and Jacks Fork's River Basins" in *Missouri Speleology*, vol. 32, number 4.

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Shannon County **Shut-Ins**

report and photos by Gary Johnson

While Shannon County is mostly known for its caves, rivers, and springs, it also hosts some less common geological features known as “shut-ins.” In these areas, resistant layers of igneous rock, frequently rhyolite porphyry, have been laid bare by erosion of the overlying sedimentary rock. While limestone and dolomite tend to erode when in contact with water, igneous rock is more resistant to erosion. Streams that pass over these outcroppings of rhyolite take much longer to wear a path through the rock, and as a result, the stream water tends to get trapped in small pools. These pools are called shut-ins.

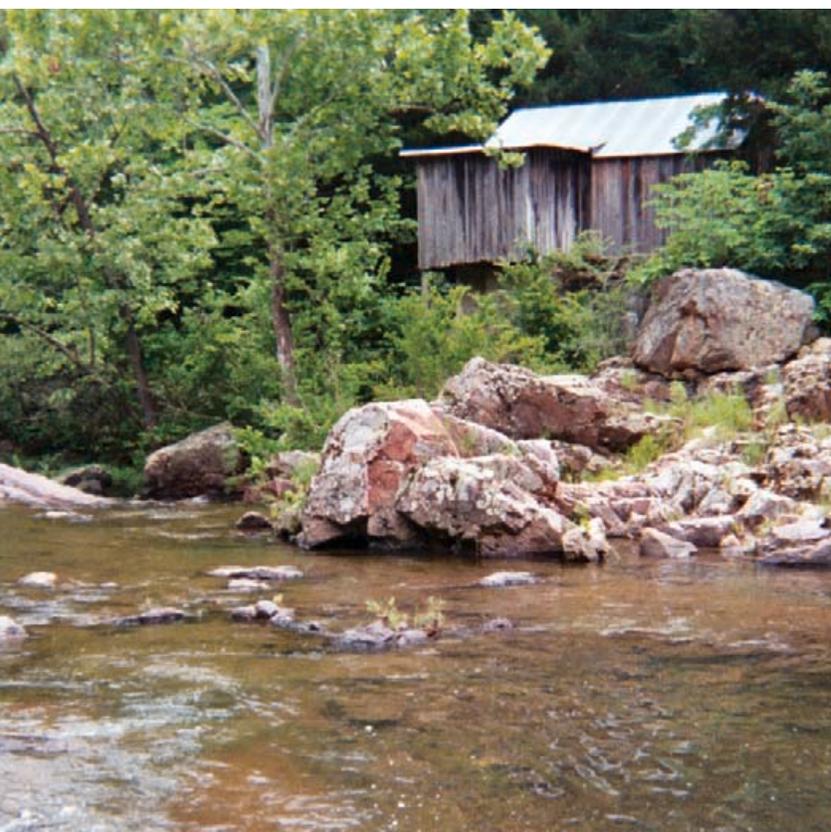
During a recent visit to the springs of the Current River, I also visited several sites notable for their shut-ins: Rocky Falls, Klepzig Mill, and Prairie Hollow Gorge.

Rocky Falls

Rocky Falls is the most well known of the Shannon County shut-ins. It’s located on Ozark National Scenic Riverways lands, along Rocky Creek, southeast of Eminence, off County Road NN. Signs on the nearby roads point the way to the site, so it receives a considerable number of visitors, most of whom come to take a dip in the swimming hole at the base of the falls. During the summer, it’s frequently hard to find a time when visitors aren’t scrambling across the falls and leaping into the pool below.

Rocky Falls drops about 40 feet altogether. Most of this drop is a diagonal slide down the impervious rock face of pink and purple porphyry. Water collects in occasional pools and slides to lower levels.

It’s easy to climb to the top of the falls; however,



Above left: At Rocky Falls, the creek slides down this face of rhyolite porphyry. **Left:** At Klepzig Mill, the creek slows as it encounters igneous rock (photos by Gary Johnson).

all climbers should be especially careful because the hard igneous rock is very unforgiving.

Camping isn't allowed at Rocky Falls, but you'll find a picnic table and pit toilets.

Klepzig Mill

Downstream from Rocky Falls, Rocky Creek continues to the north for several miles on its route to the Current River. Along the way it runs through several shut-ins. One of these areas can be reached at Klepzig Mill, north of Mill Mountain, three or four miles northeast of Rocky Falls. The dirt access road runs through some soft sandy soil, so a vehicle with high clearance is probably recommended, although I've made the trip in a two-wheel drive passenger car.

Klepzig Mill isn't particularly photogenic, unlike the mill at Alley Spring. It's a sawmill house, made of simple vertical planks and a corrugated iron roof. If you step inside the mill, you'll find a few remnants of the mill machinery and an open pit where a turbine would have rotated. A very simple operation.

Just outside, Rocky Creek continues its journey to the Current River. You'll find clumsily constructed concrete footings for a water chute. The creek spills over pink and purple porphyry, much like the rock at Rocky Falls, only on a smaller scale. The vertical drop here is only a few feet, maybe ten to fifteen feet altogether. The water pools are a bit too shallow to serve as swimming holes, but it's fun to jump from rock to rock as you inspect the small waterfalls and shut-ins. Crawfish love the pools here. If you spend a few seconds inspecting the pools, you'll almost certainly find several crawfish scuttling along the bottom.

There are no facilities here, just a couple unmarked places for vehicles to park. The Ozark Trail passes

through this area. And not far to the northwest, you'll find a primitive camping area that is typically choked with tall weeds.

Reportedly, the ruins of the Klepzig family home and barn are located nearby, but I've not seen them. Recently, the mill structure was stabilized with new materials. Care was taken to use weathered planks that would help the structure retain its primitive charm.

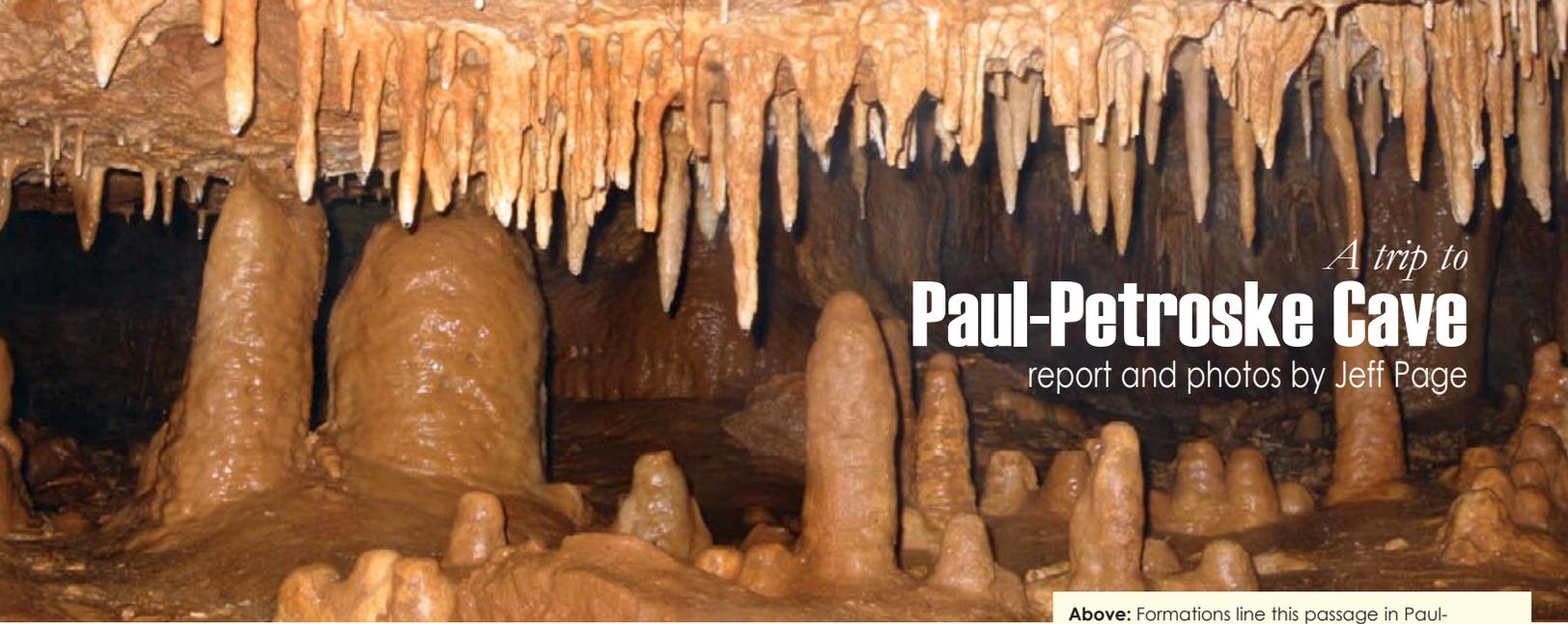
Prairie Hollow Gorge

I almost missed finding Prairie Hollow Gorge. It's located just south of the Two Rivers access point, on the east side of County Road V, down a road that is clearly marked as a private road. However, the first part of the road, which leads to Prairie Hollow Gorge, is on public land. You'll need to park your vehicle at the top, where there is room for three or four vehicles, and then walk down the steep hill. When you reach a concrete slab at the bottom of the hill, you've reached Prairie Hollow. An intermittent stream flows over the concrete, and nearby you'll find some very modest examples of shut-ins. To find the gorge, however, you'll need to look for a path heading south along the west side of the stream. Not more than 50 yards up this path, you'll begin hearing some modest waterfalls to your left. Continue up the path, past numerous pine trees, and you'll soon be forced to start squeezing past boulders and jumping from rock to rock. You're now in a small gorge gouged through a thick layer of igneous rock. The sides of the gorge rise a sheer 100 feet on both sides. The stream spills over numerous small drops. This is an absolutely beautiful area. Rock climbing isn't allowed in Prairie Hollow Gorge. Neither is camping, although the soft pine needle beds are definitely attractive. ■



Above: The shut-ins near Klepzig Mill. **Below:** The shut-ins at Prairie Hollow Gorge (photos by Gary Johnson).





A trip to
Paul-Petroske Cave
report and photos by Jeff Page

Above: Formations line this passage in Paul-Petroske Cave. **Below:** Soda straws and stalactiflats cover the ceiling of this passage in Paul-Petroske Cave. **Far Below:** The entrance to Paul-Petroske Cave is a tight squeeze (photos by Jeff Page).

I attended the Spring MSS meeting in Meramec State Park as the KCAG representative in May of 2003. This was an unusually active session where presentations were given before the business meeting on various cave subjects. After the business meeting ended, some cavers from PEG asked if I'd like to join them on some cave trips they'd arranged. I was glad to accept.

There are many caves in Meramec available to the public. Some require permits, others are open access. The cave on the agenda this Saturday was Paul-Petroske, a permit cave. Michael Carter of OHG showed us the way to it. He is active on many cave projects in the park and had been in P-P several times. He calls it the least visited cave in the park. One look at the entrance tells the story. We'd been warned it was a bit of a squeeze getting in. The entrance is about one foot high by one and a half feet wide. The worst part was, after a body length in, a tight constriction listed on the map as 0.7 feet. It's probably a bit bigger than that because I'm not going to get through smaller than 0.8'. After emptying my lungs and pushing past the constriction, I joined Steve Potter and Brent Gerling in a roomy three-foot-tall chamber.

The total mapped passage of Paul-Petroske is 2700 feet, about half a mile. That shouldn't present too big of a challenge, except that most of it is a hands-and-knees or elbows-and-knees crawl through water. We continued north into the cave until it made a bend to the west. We found a dry spot to rest for a few minutes before proceeding to a fork at about 850 feet. We'd been told the most

scenic part of the cave was to the left (or west). It was also the shorter of the two passages, being about 650 feet as opposed to 1200 for the right passage. Because we had a camera, we decided to go for the pretty stuff. This passage was a bit taller than the first, allowing some stoop walking for part of the way. When we made it to the end, we could stand up in seven-foot-tall passage that was highly decorated with thousands of long soda straws, draperies, and several stalactiflats.

Past this area, the passage diverged into two low, wide rooms that had many nice decorations. I pulled out the camera and began to capture the rewards of the long water crawl. I got about thirty shots, including the soda straws on the way out. The cave didn't offer anything new or unusual in decorations, but it was nice to see them in such good shape in a state park cave. The tight entrance and long water crawl makes it unnecessary to gate this cave. We were ready to get some dinner by now, so we opted not to enter the long north passage on this trip. The water crawl seemed longer on the way out.

I had been under the impression that the cave had been named for one guy named Paul Petroski. When I got home and looked up the map, I found it was two promising young cavers from the former SLUG who died in their early twenties. On the map is written:

“This map is dedicated to Joe Paul and Jim Petroske — principal explorers and surveyors of this cave, officers of our grotto, and our dear friends — who were tragically killed in an automobile accident. Their contribution to caving and enrichment of our lives will not be forgotten. In fond remembrance, St. Louis University Grotto.” [1981] ■

