

The

The Kansas City Area Grotto

Guano

Volume 20

Issue 1

January 2006

Caving at Ennis

plus

• TAG Caves, Grand Gulf,
Greer Spring, Mammoth Spring,
and Falling Spring

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Cover photo

A small cavity between two columns in the Birthday Room of Ennis Cave is filled with dogtooth spar. Photo by Rick Hines.

Events

January 21-22.

MSS Meeting — Scott House will give a morning (10 a.m.) presentation on the public land survey system, why it is important, and how to use it (plus other information found on topographic maps). Board meeting is in the afternoon. Expect a Forest Service survey trip that afternoon and the following day. Motel rooms will be available.

February 1-3

Missouri Natural Resources Conference — Includes a caves-and-karst roundtable.

February 8

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

February 17-20

Mammoth Cave — Cartography service/work expedition. Only cave trips will be smaller caves.

March (date to be determined)

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

March 11-12

NCRC — Orientation to Cave Rescue at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. An introduction to cave rescue for both the novice and the experienced caver. The orientation begins Saturday at 8 a.m. with classroom lectures and hands-on activities, including incident command system, medical management, hypothermia, patient packaging, extreme situations, the cave environment, communications, media interaction, search, and more. On Sunday, practice your skills in a live mock rescue at one of the local caves! For more information, contact Jessica Deli by e-mail at scramblerhvn@gmail.com.

March 19-25

CRF Ozark Riverways biological survey trip in conjunction with SE Missouri State field studies class. This trip will support the baseline biological survey of public use caves. For more information, contact Scott House by e-mail at scott_house@semo.net.

The Guano

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

Submit articles via e-mail to the editor:

editor@kcgrotto.org. Preferred file format for trip report attachments: Microsoft Word. Multiple photos are typically required for each trip report.

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

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

Annual Dues: \$15 for full members (three caving trips with KCAG, nomination, and vote of membership required.)

NCRC Callout number – Emergency use only: Central Region (502) 564-7815. This number may be used for cave rescue emergencies in the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

A Message *From* the President

As I begin my second year as president of KCAG, I find myself looking back over my experiences with the Grotto, both above and below ground.

Underground, I was at first touched and later amazed by the way our members treat new cavers—not with contempt but with patience. At first I thought it was silly that experienced cavers would point out footholds, slippery mud and tricky passages to each other. "Everyone can see the mud," I thought, "why do these old-timers have to constantly point it out? Just go!" Later, I began to see the wisdom of this. It's rare to see experienced cavers turn and brace the person behind them to prevent a slip, but KCAG members do it every time, out of habit. There's an attitude of unyielding helpfulness in our grotto that I haven't yet seen elsewhere.

Above ground, I see the same attitudes. When one of us has tips, tricks or knowledge, there's never any hesitation to share it. Our meetings, while perhaps not the most exciting hours in our lives, are always friendly, welcoming and informative. Everyone's opinion is heard and considered, without the political bickering that seems to drag down other volunteer groups.

KCAG, in the time I have known it, has always operated on the principle that we should set the example, even when no one is watching. I'm proud to call myself a member.



Sam Clippinger (left) holding remote flash units in the Birthday Room of Ennis Cave (photo by Rick Hines).

See you underground,

Sam Clippinger

Guano president

Caving in TAG Country

trip report by Jerry Cindric
photo by Ben Boling

I knew this trip might be interesting when I was inquiring into possible camp sites. I called Cathedral Caverns State Park in Alabama and the ranger began bartering on camping costs. As it turned out, camping was free.

ValFernAmer is a consolidated term for the caves visited: Valhalla, Fern and Kennamer. All are in Jackson County in northeast Alabama.

Terry DeFraties, Richard Cindric, and I left on October 26 for three days of caving and two days of driving. Deer hunting season was open but only for archery and spear (who the hell hunts deer with a spear?), so we were likely to survive the hunters.

This was a follow up to a trip I attended in April 2005 which suffered major washout due to rain. On this current trip we did not see a cloud during the entire Alabama visit.

I had obtained permits for Valhalla Cave and Fern Caves and directions to Kennamer Cave. We decided to start with the big drop on Thursday. Fern Cave is the longest cave (over 15 miles) in Alabama; it also has the deepest drop— Surprise Pit, 437 feet. I had been through the horizontal Johnston Entrance of Fern Cave in April, so this time I'd be seeing a different part of the cave.

After a rough drive of 30 minutes from camp and an uphill hike of about an hour, (with 40 pounds of rope) we hit the entrance. We followed the stream into the cave. Not far from the entrance we were treated to see blind cave crawfish. We saw



10-12 during the short stream hike. Because no one brought a camera on the trip, you will have to take my word for it. After a few hundred feet, the stream disappeared, and we saw bolts in the wall. I had been warned not to drop at this location as you would get wet. The better location is further in the cave. Now, the second drop location may be better; however, getting there involves a bit of a "pucker factor." One must crawl and belly crawl along a small ledge that drops off into the pit. If it dropped 10 feet, you would not think about it; however, 400 feet makes you think.

Above: Jim Watson at the entrance of Fern Cave. This photo continues on the next page. (Photo by Ben Boling, from an April 2005 trip.)

We found more bolts, Terry connected into the best ones, and I dropped first. This was my deepest drop, so "slow and safe" was my motto. The rope never left my hyper bar. Also on my mind was the death of an Arkansas caver here eight years earlier. The drop was away from the wall and had a nice landing on a massive breakdown pile. Richard and Terry followed and we explored. The breakdown room was large with two obvious ways to the rest of the cave. One way



involved a crawl under the waterfall area and the other a climb on a permanent bolted rope. We checked out the crawl and Terry evaluated the climb.

It was time to head out. Terry went first alone, and Richard and I followed on tandem. I went first on tandem, having to switch to a short rope at the overhang to make it over the lip. There is nothing quite like switching ropes at 430 feet. We pulled rope and off we went back to camp. Camp was rustic although it did have a porta-potty. The nice part was there was plenty of wood to make campfires.

The next day we had a permit to Valhalla Cave, an SCCi-owned classic,

with a 227-foot entrance drop. We stopped at Western Sizzlin in Scottsboro for the \$4.25 colon-cleansing breakfast. The drive to Valhalla was probably rougher than the drive to Fern. The Fern road would not be passable in wet weather without four-wheel drive. My two-wheel drive Safari van made it in the dry weather. The Valhalla pit entrance is near the road, and it's marked with a rock memorial to two 21-year-old guys who were crushed by a 30 x 30 rock in 1984 at the bottom of the pit while waiting to get their turn to ascend. The pit is spectacular; one of nature's treasures. The descent and ascent should be savored. It bells out from the entrance with walls

that show the work of eons of water passing vertically through limestone. We climbed, walked and crawled through most of the cave. The entrance pit was definitely the highlight of the cave.

On the last day, we went to Kennamer Cave and later paid for a tour of Cathedral Caverns, which is owned by the state of Alabama. I got the directions to Kennamer from Steve Pitts when I got the Fern Cave permit. The cave is in the same general area as Fern, and I later found out it has six entrances and over two miles of cave. The two entrances we found were both walk in. I understand there is at least one pit entrance. We hiked up the mountain for about thirty minutes and found a sizable sinkhole and went to a small entrance on the side of the sink. The cave was sporty with some huge rooms and large breakdown but also plenty of knee time and climbing. We basically followed the stream passage downstream. The part of the cave we saw was not to be explored in high water. There was debris quite high on the walls. Of particular interest downstream were formations that had been eroded by stream water to show interesting greenish/whitish/yellowish/brownish color that had an iridescent appearance (cave chocolate?). At the time, we knew there were at least two entrances so the hope was to continue downstream until we could exit. Because of time restraints we did not do a through trip. Our deal for free camping was to buy tickets for Cathedral Cave, so we needed to make the last tour. We turned around the way we came, exiting the same entrance. We looked around and found a second, larger entrance in the sink. This looked like a return trip. In fact, all three caves looked like return trips.

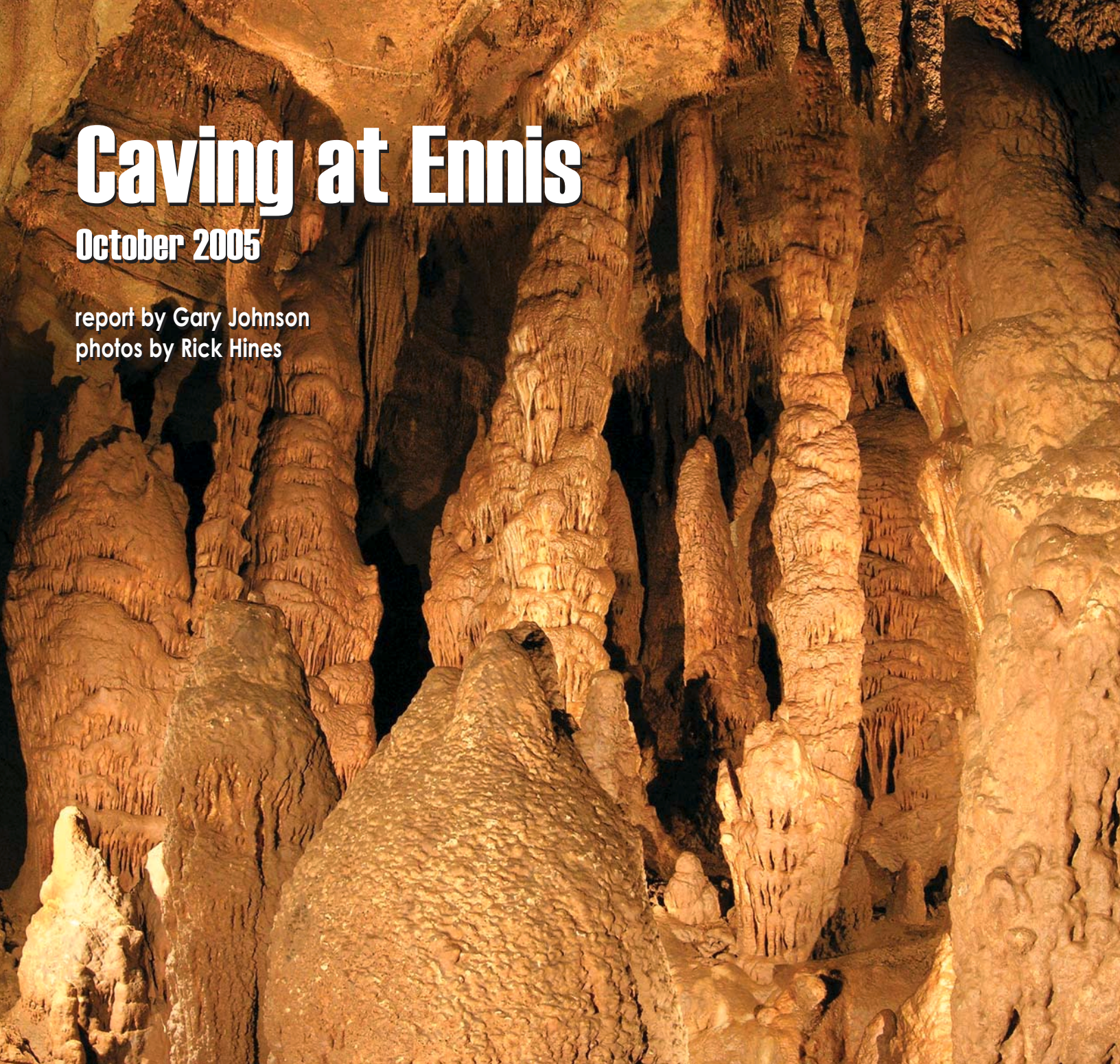
Cathedral Cave was well worth the entrance fee. It had a huge entrance and some great formations. Unfortunately, the cave is not very active and there was more human interference than I would like to see in a cave. As an example, if water did not flow over flowstone a little pumping action was added to help out. But I whine too much.

A very successful trip; great weather, great caves! Good compensation for a spending 24 hours round trip in the van. ●

Caving at Ennis

October 2005

report by Gary Johnson
photos by Rick Hines



On my first trip to Ennis Cave, back in spring 2003, I wandered around near the entrance while waiting for the rest of the group to climb down the ladder. Not more than 50 yards from the base of the ladder and only 50 feet or so from the main elephant trail, I scrambled over breakdown. When I looked up, I could see a room above. It was hard to tell for sure. The angle made it hard to see into the room, but the room seemed to be filled with huge formations. There was no way to get up into this area, so all I could do was look and wonder about what this area might contain. Well, on my next trip to Ennis, in October 2005, this room had been opened. The

cave caretaker, Tim McClain, had constructed a ladder that allowed entrance into this area of the cave, as Tim told us on the night we arrived. More about this in the minute...

Mike McKinney put together the October 2005 trip to Ennis. He wanted a trip where he could just take it easy. He'd been on too many fast-paced trips recently. Ennis was his answer. We could camp within only a few feet of the cave. We could enter the cave whenever we wanted. As often as we wanted. Maybe we'd visit other caves also. Maybe Janus Pit. Maybe Sylamore caves. Nothing was set in stone. We'd make it up as we went along. While I like trips to be a little more planned out (especially if I

Above: Large columns in the Birthday Room of Ennis Cave (photo by Rick Hines).

have to drive seven hours to reach the destination), I knew I'd appreciate the opportunity to see more of Ennis. I had not seen much beyond the Waterfall Room and the Breakdown Room on my previous trip. So this would be an opportunity to check out other areas of the cave.

Most people arrived on Friday, although at least Rick Hines arrived as early as Thursday. I had left home on Thursday morning, but I took a detour through the Eleven Point area and camped at Greer Crossing on Thursday night. I



Left: More large formations in the Birthday Room of Ennis Cave (photo by Rick Hines).
Bottom left: Mike McKinney standing beside a massive column in the Birthday Room (photo by Rick Hines).

arrived at Ennis on late afternoon Friday, having wandered through Grand Gulf and Mammoth Spring earlier in the day.

Mike McKinney was already there, as was Mike Fraley and Kaza (and their baby daughter) and Lawton Hicks and his wife, Tiffany. Bryon and Michelle Carmony arrived later that evening, as did Sam Clippinger. And way late that evening, another group of Mike's friends arrived (Kathy Carr and her family). So altogether we had enough people to warrant two separate caving groups for Saturday.

While waiting for everyone to arrive on Friday evening, we talked with Tim, and he gave us some tips on where to go in Ennis. He told us about "The Birthday Room," which was newly opened. It sounded like the area with all the huge columns that I had only seen from far below. Now, Tim said you could climb up into this area thanks to a ladder he had recently installed. So that immediately hit the top of my "things to do" list. He also told us about Carol's Attic and some other tricky-to-reach sections of the cave. I got Tim to scribble some notes on my map of Ennis about the location of another recently opened section of the cave, also accessible thanks to a recently installed ladder.

On Friday evening, we entered Ennis on a brief gee-we're-here kind of trip. I made a beeline for the Birthday Room. Several people followed.

The Birthday Room is genuinely one of the most impressive sections of the cave. The area is roughly bowl-shaped, about 80 feet across and marked by suggestions it was carved by intense water action. Long ago the bottom had fallen out of the bowl, which had the result of connecting the room with Ennis' main passage, which crossed just below. In the ensuing centuries, huge formations grew around the hole in the center of the room. The room is sort of shapped like a flat-topped doughnut. The columns are six to eight feet thick and approximately 20 to 25 feet tall. There are at least five columns of these dimensions and several smaller ones. Along with the Waterfall Room, the Birthday Room is one of the cave's absolute must-see destinations.

We continued deeper in the cave, moving fast along the elephant trails, until we reached the Breakdown Room. A few members of the group turned around at this point, but I wanted to take a peek at the Waterfall Room. So a handful of us continued and found the crawlway that leads down to the pool at the bottom of the huge domepit. With a ceiling that is reportedly 100 feet high, this is one of the most impressive rooms you'll see in any Ozark cave. The walls are coated with flowstone, much of it pure white. A waterfall drops from a ledge/crack in the ceiling and free-falls the center of the pit. A clear pool at the base is 20



Top: A small cavity in the Birthday Room is filled with dogtooth spar (photo by Rick Hines).

Below: The Alien formation in Ennis Cave (photo by Rick Hines). **Below right:** Crystals in Ennis Cave (photo by Rick Hines). **Bottom right corner:** Helectites in Ennis Cave (photo by Rick Hines).

feet across and maybe as much as a foot deep in the center. Maybe more. Fragments of formations that have broken from the walls litter the pool. Large scallops several inches across mark the walls beside the pool.

This was just a brief get-acquainted trip, so we soon retreated and headed for the entrance.

Rick liked what he saw in the Birthday Room, so a photo trip was planned as the first event on the agenda for Saturday morning. Mike McKinney, Sam Clippinger, and I accompanied Rick into the cave early in the morning, while most of the others were just beginning to stir. We manned the flash units while Rick set up several photos. I was glad to go on this trip because it allowed me to savor this part of the cave. Tim had told Rick about some dogtooth spar in this area. Rick found a small area on the floor and spent several minutes taking photos. Then, Sam (if I remember right) peeked between a couple columns and ... wow! He had found a foot-wide cavity that was lined with large crystals of dogtooth spar. Somewhat embarrassed to have spent so much time photographing the meager samples of dogtooth spar just a few feet away, Rick turned his camera on the crystal-lined cavity and took several more photos. (See the cover of this month's *Guano* for one of Rick's best close-ups of the dogtooth spar.)

We exited the cave after spending nearly an hour photographing the Birthday Room. By then, everyone back at camp had crawled out of their sleeping bags. We formed groups. Mike McKinney would lead the first trip. I would lead the second trip, accompanied by Rick, Sam, Mike Fraley, Lawton Hicks, and Bryon Carmony. I was the leader of the second trip only in the sense that I had a map, a compass, and a destination in mind. We headed downstream in the cave, to some passages not on the official cave map. The first part off the cave map was a tight crawlway that headed up at a steep angle. It curled up and to the right and into a fairly good-sized room, with a ceiling at least 30 feet high, maybe more. I was looking for a large column on the right. That was the benchmark, called "Big Bob," that Tim had told me to look for. Well, no Big Bob yet. So we climbed up to a passage high in the far wall, for some fairly easy crawling to another room. And here we found a fat column on the right nearly 15 feet thick. Gotta be Big Bob. Along about this time, we started looking for the ladder that Tim said he had placed so that an upper level could be reached. We checked most every side passage we came to for a ladder, but we didn't find one. We kept climbing higher and higher in the cave. Tim said we'd climb through about five levels of the cave on this route. After a little more





climbing and crawling, we reached walking passage again, and here we encountered the little Pinocchio formation, which is a blob-like stalagmite with a broken soda straw protruding for a nose. Very strange. Not far away we found a large profusion of crystals (aragonite?) emerging in a cluster from the wall of a deadend passage.

I kept pushing further with Lawton, who was eager to crawl wherever I told him. We crawled through a seldom-visited section of the cave (as the intact ground with no footprints seemed to indicate) into a dicey little passage. But still no ladder. We retreated to where the others were waiting. I mulled over the map again and really had no idea where the ladder was supposed to be. Tim's additions to my map were too sketchy.

We started the return trip and climbed down several levels. I was looking closely over the passages, still hoping to see a ladder. Almost all the way down to the tight crawl that took us off the main map, I peeked in a righthand side passage that we had somehow overlooked before, and there it was—the base of a ladder. I inspected a little closer and found the ladder was dangling in position. It didn't actually touch the ground. This looked a little dicey, but I climbed up to inspect the ropes at the top. At the top, I reached forward and pulled on the rope: I watched a knot pull apart. I was holding a loose segment of rope. I yelled for everyone to get off the ladder, and everyone complied quickly.

I looked closer and found the rope that came untied was just a rung placed above the metal ladder. The rigging for the ladder still seemed to be secure; however, it was a bit unnerving to have seen a knot unravel that I thought was holding the ladder.

I crawled forward into a passage about three foot high, which was floored by an old dry pool that was lined with dogtooth spar. Very impressive. The crystals were maybe even longer than those we found in the Birthday Room. On the far side of this little passage, a window led to a chasm. A rope crossed to a passage a few feet away, along a very steep slope and a drop of 30 feet. I somehow didn't feel real confident about trusting this rope and watched as Rick crossed. "I don't see any problem," he said. I looked at the drop again. You have to trust the rope, I thought. I couldn't do it. It didn't sound wise. Rick, Lawton, and Bryon crossed to the passage and reported some nice small formations in a dead-end passage. But nothing different than we'd already seen. I was hoping to hear a report that would give me a good excuse to cross. I didn't hear it. So we retreated back to the base of the ladder. After resting for a while, Rick pointed out that the passage to Carol's Attic was likely the hole beside the ladder. So we crawled through the hole and found ourselves in a well-decorated section of the cave with many slender



Top: The Breakdown Room in Ennis Cave. For scale, notice the caver in the bottom left corner (photo by Rick Hines). **Middle:** A closeup of dogtooth spar (photo by Rick Hines). **Left:** Thin stalagmites are plentiful in Carol's Attic (photo by Rick Hines).

Right: A small two-story mill sits at the base of a bluff at Falling Spring. Look closely in the photo to find the spring. It's falling just a few feet to the left of the mill (photo by Gary Johnson).

stalagmites, no thicker than three to four inches wide and approximately 6-8 feet tall each. Very nice indeed. We explored a little more in Carol's Attic and then began the trip back to the main part of the cave.

I was hoping to do several more hours of caving. We'd only been in the cave about four hours so far. But several people said they were tired. The climbing was fairly strenuous, I suppose. But there was a lot more cave to see. We settled on a trip to the Waterfall Room. Sam and Mike Fraley hadn't seen it yet. So we worked our way to the Waterfall Room balcony, which provides an incredible vantage point. Here, you can really begin to appreciate how the walls of the room are coated in white flowstone. From the base of the room, it's hard to see this. Rick stayed at the balcony while Lawton, Sam, and I took the keyhole passage that descends to the base.

After the Waterfall Room, Rick, Sam, Mike, and Bryon were ready to call it a day. I talked Lawton into accompanying me on a short side-trip near the cave's entrance, into the cave's old mining area. Manganese was mined in Ennis many decades ago. We strolled over to a very impressive drainage shaft called Giant's Potty. Not a very elegant name, but when you're standing there, you'll instantly see the wisdom—because that's exactly what it looks like, the inside of a giant toilet bowl, eight feet across. You can look into the plumbing as it drops down and down, exactly how far, I don't know. We then headed for a long straight passage that was marked with the words "Manganese" on the Robert Taylor cave map. We plowed down this passage for a couple hundred feet, going up and down, up and down, before we felt like we had the general idea and decided to retreat.

Back on the surface, Lawton and his wife invited Mike McKinney and me for dinner. The steaks were great. Maybe the best dinner I've ever had while camping. It tasted absolutely incredible after a hard day of caving.

The next morning I called the Sylamore Ranger office to get us a permit for a cave. But once everyone started to crawl out of their sleeping bags, I found few takers. Maybe I drove them too hard the previous day. But that was okay. I was sort of looking for an excuse to take things easy. On several previous trips, I had been rushed for time and hadn't been able to really check out the local scene in Mountain View. So this time I drove by the Ozark Heritage Center and spent a couple hours listening to old-time music and wandering through the exhibits (sort of like Silver Dollar City without the rides and hype—all very low key). I finished off the trip with a marvelous fried chicken dinner at the park's restaurant, and then I hit the road for home. A very good trip overall. ●



On the Road to Ennis

Falling Spring

On the way to Ennis Cave in October 2005, I took a detour through several natural sites in southern Missouri and northern Arkansas. The main destinations: the Eleven Point River, Greer Spring, Falling Spring, Grand Gulf, and Mammoth Spring. And I planned to camp at Greer Crossing.

I got an early start from home and reached the area around noon. After dropping by the Mark Twain National Forest office in Winona and picking up some maps and brochures, I headed toward the Eleven Point. First up, Falling Spring. It's only a couple miles off Hwy. 19, which runs due south out of Winona to Greer Crossing.

The dirt/gravel road that connects the site to Hwy. 19 is in good shape. It's an easy drive, suitable for all vehicles. Just before reaching the spring, the road passes a small cemetery with several ancient-looking monuments and tombstones. I resisted the temptation to stop at the

cemetery. Too many other sites in the vicinity were calling.

Falling Spring is a very scenic location. It's frequently photographed. A weathered mill sits at the base of a bluff. A pond (of two or three acres) stretches from the mill to the far left. A trail leads past a cabin on the right. (The cabin has unfortunately been victim of some especially stupid graffiti.) Then the trail crosses the upper reaches of the pond by way of a bridge that leads directly to the mill.

The mill is relatively small, no more than 12x15 feet, with an upper level. The structure is wooden and very rustic, with horizontal planks forming the walls. A waterwheel is intact on the left side of the mill. The wheel no longer turns. Maybe the mill was originally located over the pond's upper dam, but restoration efforts moved the mill building. Or maybe a chute once channeled water directly from the spring to the waterwheel. A photo in *Springs of Missouri* seems to show a wooden construction on the bluff. So I suspect there may have once been a chute.

While the upper dam was long ago breached, you can still follow portions of the dam wall as it extends into the pond. Another dam, further



On the Road to Ennis

Greer Spring

Greer Spring is the second largest spring in the state of Missouri, with a flow of over 200 million gallons per day. It's located in a rugged hollow on the south side of the Eleven Point River. A steep trail, nearly a mile long, provides access to the spring, leading from a parking lot along Hwy. 19 through a forested area to the jumble of rocks at the base of a bluff.

Samuel Greer built a mill at this site in 1860. Greer operated a mill here for nearly four decades, enlarging the operations on several occasions, building a dam, and constructing a unique cable system that transferred power from the turbine wheel at the spring to a mill on a nearby ridge. The mill continued in operation under other owners into the 1920s.

The Dennig family purchased the spring in 1922, and they operated the site for nearly 70 years. The mill building still stands on the ridge and is visible from Hwy. 19; however, it sits on property still owned by the Dennigs and access to the mill is forbidden.

Thankfully, over the past several decades, the spring was well-managed by the Dennigs. If you compare photographs of the spring and hollow from over a hundred years ago with the scenery today, you'll see very little difference. In fact, today the surrounding forest is much thicker, for this area was once heavily forested.

Greer Spring emerges from a cave at the base of a steep bluff. The cave entrance is completely

flooded by water. There is about six feet of air above the water, and the spring stream is two to three feet deep. The cave system is fairly extensive, with approximately a mile of passage. However, swimming, wading, and floating is prohibited in the spring and spring branch, so don't even consider entering the cave.

Approximately 10 to 20 million gallons of water per day flows from the cave. The majority of the spring slow emerges from the boil in the streambed, about 50 yards downstream from the cave. The stream emerging from the cave is nice sized, but below the boil in the streambed, the

Right: Falling Spring drops from a bluff (photo by Gary Johnson). **Below:** Fungus on a fallen tree beside Greer Spring (photo by Rick Hines). **Right:** Greer Spring emerges from a cave at the base of a bluff. The main spring flow emerges in the stream bed just downstream (photo by Rick Hines).



to the left, likely of more recent vintage, is now responsible for the pond. The pond is filled with cold-water-loving vegetation.

Immediately behind the mill, Falling Spring tumbles out of a small cavity in the bluff, dropping approximately 20 feet. The flow is not huge. I was probably witnessing only about two gallons per second, which is tiny compared to what I would soon be seeing at Greer Spring and Mammoth Spring. However, the emergence of the spring from the bluff (during heavy rains it reportedly leaps several feet from the cavity), is unique.

Falling Spring Cave is several thousand feet long. I suspect the entrance to the cave is the bluff cavity (most likely a nasty crawlway) from which the spring emerges. Before leaving on this trip, I took a peek at the cave map, and it made the cave look low and very wet throughout most of its duration.

I followed the trail that heads to the left along the pond, but the trail very soon petered out. The site has two picnic tables and a grill. No drinking water. A pit toilet. There are no trash bins (so be prepared to carry out any trash you create). ●



Right: The spring branch moves fast at Greer Spring (photo by Rick Hines). **Below right:** This cave in Grand Gulf once led to an extensive underground cave system. Now, debris has clogged the main passage (photo by Gary Johnson)

stream increases in size by several fold, until it nearly takes on the appearance of a raging white water river. But don't think about putting in your kayak here. All boats, rafts, and inflatable devices are prohibited.

On the day I visited this area, mist was hanging in the valley. So all my photos are hopelessly clouded. However, Rick Hines has allowed us to use three of his photos from a previous trip to Greer Spring.

Services are at a minimum at Greer Spring. This is a day-use only area, with pit toilets at the trailhead.

After visiting Greer Spring, I hiked part of the McCormack-Greer Trail, hoping to see where the spring branch empties into the Eleven Point. At this point, the volume of the Eleven Point more than doubles. The trail books seemed to indicate the trail provides a vantage of the spring branch; however, times like this make you wonder if the trail book authors actually hiked the trail, for the trail is buried in the bottomland, over 100 yards from the river with all sight lines obscured by the trees and brush. I was tempted to go bushwhacking, but recent rains had left everything wet. I would have become sopping wet if I had bushwhacked for more than a few yards, so I retreated to the trail and headed for Greer Crossing, where I'd set up camp for the evening.

First, though, I decided to drive to McCormack Lake. It sounded like a nice location, and the camping there was free. So I made the short drive. The turnoff from Hwy. 19 to McCormack Lake is only about four miles north of Greer Crossing. Then the access road is three miles long. McCormack Lake is fairly small, no more than 10 acres in size. It's in a pretty area, with a day-use picnic area. The eight camping sites, however, were crowded together. And the best site, located beside the lake, was taken. So I drove back to Greer Crossing.

There is a major canoe put-in point at Greer Crossing. The ramp is in a placid side branch of the Eleven Point. The campground has a day-use picnic area. The camp sites are all on bottom land, so they're all level. A few sites have shelters. I should've taken one of these sites because immediately after I set up my tent—and before I cooked dinner—the clouds ripped open and dropped a hard rain for at least an hour. This area undoubtedly floods in heavy rain, so I half expected a forest ranger to show up and start ushering campers out of the campground. But the area hadn't seen much rain over the past several weeks, so the ground soaked up everything. ●



On the Road to Ennis

Grand Gulf

Grand Gulf is one of the most spectacular sites in the Ozarks. Many thousands of years ago, a stream cut down into the ground until it intersected a cave system. The cave pirated the entire flow of the stream, and eventually the roof of the cave system collapsed. The result is a steep-walled gorge, which has been dubbed "The Little Grand Canyon."

Part of the Missouri state park system, Grand Gulf is a handful of miles west of Thayer, Missouri. Oregon County Road W deadends in the Grand Gulf State Park parking lot.

While camped at Greer Crossing, I had experienced heavy rain on the previous evening. I had read reports that Grand Gulf tended to turn into a lake, up to 50-feet deep, after heavy rains, so I expected to see standing water when I arrived at Grand Gulf. But either the rain hadn't extended 20 miles south of Greer Crossing to Grand Gulf, or if it had rained, all the water had drained away relatively quickly.

Water in Grand Gulf drains through the remnants of the cave system. Today, the cave system can only be entered for a relatively short distance before the passage is blocked by mud and debris. However, it wasn't always this way. In her famous book *Cave Regions of the Ozarks*, author Luella Owen reported her visit to the cave in the late 19th Century. She described venturing several hundred feet into the cave, floating through large passages in a boat and finding crowds of cavefish swarming around the boat. Other reports in local





newspapers of the late 19th Century, report similar finds.

In the early 20th Century, a tornado hit the area and reportedly washed a tremendous quantity of debris into the cave and effectively blocked the cave passage. Water still drains through the debris, but the passage is no longer enterable by humans. Dye tracing has connected Grand Gulf with Mammoth Spring, approximately nine miles away. So it's very tempting to consider the amount of passage that may exist beyond the debris block.

While visitors can now only enter the cave for a short distance, there are plenty of other impressive sights awaiting visitors. A trail system allows visitors to get a good look at Grand Gulf. Not far from the parking lot, an overlook projects into Grand Gulf sink, providing a look directly down at the entrance of the Grand Gulf cave, approximately 130 feet below. This sink has sheer vertical walls of crumbling dolomite.

After taking a quick look at the sink, I headed for the stairway that leads down into Grand Gulf. The stairs descend about 100 feet to a point near the end of the southern canyon. Here a wet-weather waterfall spills over rock sculpted by water action, and a small spring seeps from a tiny cavity in the rock floor. Small cave entrances pockmark the bluff walls. From the bottom of the stairway, visitors willing to slip through the railing can investigate the southern canyon, although you can't go far before the canyon floor drops 10 feet over a ledge and makes further investigation a little tricky unless you're prepared to do some rock climbing.

I retraced my steps back up the stairs to the main trail, which begins by crossing between the canyon and the sink. At this point, you're crossing a natural bridge, although it's hard to tell it's a natural bridge. But underneath the seemingly solid ground, a tunnel connects the canyon and the sink. I continued as the trail curved to the north and followed the lip of the canyon. After several hundred yards, I encountered a steep, wide trail that headed away from the main trail. Curious, I decided to follow the spur. It led to a rock-floored spillway that dropped to the bottom of the canyon. The route was a little tricky, particularly at a six foot drop with no footholds. I knew this would present a challenge on the way out, but being so close to the canyon floor, I plunged forward (thinking this is how people get trapped in places like this).

The north canyon is fairly narrow. At one point the opposing bluffs come within only a few feet of touching, sort of like one of those places you see in old western movies, where a rider might spur his horse to jump across a narrow gorge. The canyon floor could easily become choked by vegetation, but the brush and weeds are fairly close cropped. Maybe the state sends workers into the gorge with weed whackers.

I headed toward the tunnel that connects the main canyon with the sink. I found the tunnel has a huge entrance, approximately 80 feet high. A large debris pile in front of the entrance makes it very difficult to get a good picture that conveys a sense of the scene's scale. The tunnel only lasts about 100 feet, so you're never out of twilight (although it will be hard for your eyes to adjust to the light changes, so be careful or

Left: Grand Gulf Natural Bridge (photo by Gary Johnson). **Middle:** In the north canyon, the sides of Grand Gulf nearly touch (photo by Gary Johnson). **Right:** A view from the cave entrance in the main sink. The sink walls rise 130 feet above the floor (photo by Gary Johnson).

you trip on a rock). While the entrance of the tunnel is quite large, the tunnel's ceiling quickly drops until it's only about 10 feet high when you enter the Grand Gulf sink.

The Grand Gulf cave is directly across the sink. The cave entrance was much larger than I had imagined. I expected a stoopway passage, but found an entrance about 20 feet high and 30 feet wide. The passage headed straight back and soon became very muddy. That was as far as I went, not beyond the twilight zone.

Standing in the bottom of Grand Gulf sink is a weird experience. The grass and weeds that cover the floor form a consistent green carpet that is criss-crossed by neat brown trails. The vertical walls of the sink reminded me of a deteriorating ancient ruin. I felt like I was standing in the courtyard of a centuries-old castle.

The trip back out of the gorge was indeed a bit dicey. One ledge in particular was too high for me to scramble over safely, so I was forced to skirt to the left through thorn bushes and up a talus slope. Numerous scratches later, I scrambled up onto the main trail.

This is a magnificent site. Anyone interested in geology and karst terrain should visit Grand Gulf. Camping is not permitted in this day-use-only state park. The park has picnic areas and pit toilets. ●

On the Road to Ennis

Mammoth Spring

Mammoth Spring was my last stop before beginning the final leg of my journey to Ennis Cave. This spring is the easiest to access of all the major springs in the Ozarks. It's located a stone's throw east of Highway 63, just across the border in Arkansas. While Greer Spring requires the ability to go up and down steep trails, Mammoth Spring can be visited by just about anyone. The park is largely wheel-chair accessible, with a concrete walkway skirting the rise pool, spring lake, dam, and hydro-electric plant.

Producing over 230 million gallons per day, Mammoth Spring is the second largest in the Ozarks, following only Big Spring (near Van Buren, Missouri). The site lacks the drama of Greer Spring. In comparison, it's pastoral, like a small-town city park. A huge parking lot sits beside a visitors center.

Walking counter-clockwise around the spring lake, you first come to the dam. Built in 1888, the dam provides an impressive 20-foot-high 100-foot-wide sheet of water that drops to form Spring River. This river is stocked with trout. On the far side of the dam sits a now-inactive hydro-electric plant that once was used to provide electricity to the town of Mammoth Spring. Built in 1925, the plant operated until 1972. Today, much of the machinery inside the plant is intact and can be observed along with displays that explain the history of the plant.

The trail continues around the spring lake (nearly 10 acres in size), past an old railroad depot, and through a picnic area. As you approach the rise pool, cattails crowd around the stream bank. Then the spring branch becomes deep. It runs as a fast moving white water stream for 50 yards. And then you're standing at the wide rise pool. A brilliant green marks the center of the pool. A small lookout sits at the north side of the rise pool, at the base of a very modest bluff. A profusion of cattails obscure the footings of the lookout.

While much of the site's drama is compromised by the artificial confines of the spring pool and the urban park atmosphere, the site is still very impressive, particularly along the east spring branch. A second spring branch to the south of the rise pool is much smaller. It spills over rocks before joining the spring lake. ●



Top right: The rise pool at Mammoth Spring (photo by Gary Johnson). **Above right:** The Spring Pool at Mammoth Springflows over this dam. A now-inactive hydro-electric plant sits beside the dam (photo by Gary Johnson).

Alexander Cave Project Donations

Donations are now being accepted for the Alexander Cave project. Send your donations to

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(make checks payable to "Big A Project")

All questions about the project should be directed to Tom Lounsbury at tlounsbury@alltel.net