

The

The Kansas City Area Grotto

Volume 24

Issue 1

March 2010

Guano

**Carroll Cave Project Work - Rescue and Biology
NCRC Weekend Training
Part One - Benton County and the Irish Wilderness**

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Events

March 10

KCAG monthly meeting - 7:00pm at the Arthur Mag Conference Center on the campus of Midwest Research Institute. Corner of Cherry and Volker in Kansas City, MO.

April 10-11

Colorado Cave Rescue Network 2-day cave rescue training.

<http://www.coloradocaverescue.org/seminar.html> for more information.

April 30, May 1-2

Spring MVOR. The location is Green's Canoe Rental & Campground. See http://www.missourimountaineers.com/Spring_MVOR_2010/index.htm for more information.

May 15

Missouri Speleological Survey meeting. Rolla, Missouri.

May 15-20

National Cave Rescue Commission week-long seminar. Mentone, Alabama. <http://www.caves.org/ncrc/national/2010Seminar/seminar2010.htm> for information and registration.

June 5

Annual KCAG summer picnic. Details will be sent to the grotto email list.

August 2-6

National Speleological Society annual convention. Essex, Vermont. <http://www.nss2010.com/default.php> for information and registration.

The Guano

March 2010, Vol. 24, Issue 1

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. Please submit photos in JPG or PNG format.

Guano subscription rate for nonmembers: \$6.00 annually. Electronic: FREE.

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

Meetings are held monthly. Check <http://www.kcgrotto.org> for dates and places.

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

With the February business meeting, Bill Gee has passed the Sacred Soda Straw on to me, so I am now your new grotto president. Like most of us, I needed one more civic responsibility like I needed a cave in the head. However, I am grateful for this opportunity to pay back the Kansas City Area Grotto for all the great comradeship and fine times, both above and below ground, that Pic and I have shared with you these past three years. I only hope I will prove worthy of the example Bill has set in this office.

The looming ecological catastrophe of White Nose Syndrome threatens the very existence of several species of vespertilionidae (i.e., the bats) that share our love of caves. It also threatens recreational caving. However, there will remain many forms of project caving and spelean resource management that cavers can participate in, even as recreational access to publicly owned caves becomes more limited. I will work hard to find and develop these opportunities on your behalf.

Rather than grouching about lost freedoms, I urge everyone to support federal and state resource managers as they fight this pestilence, while recognizing that a real solution may never be found. One thing we must do is follow the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fungal decontamination procedures to the letter, as prescribed on the agency's website (www.fws.com). Although washing with Woolite and splashing on the 409 probably won't stop the pandemic, our enthusiastic compliance with official directives does bolster the morale of those professionals serving on the front lines of this grim and so far losing battle. It may even buy us some time.

As one long-time caver I know is fond of saying, "Just be grateful you're not a bat."

Bound for underground, I remain

Your humble and obedient servant,

Jim Cooley



Cover Photo

Andy Isbell starting into the breakdown pile at the Mapped End in Carroll Cave. Photo by Jim Cooley.



January 16, 2010. Carroll Cave Rescue Planning. Trip report and photos by Bill Gee. Participants: Bill Gee, Terry Defraties, Lori Schultz and Jeff Grigg.

Above: Terry Defraties at the terminal waterfall (photo by Bill Gee).

This trip had four goals, all of which were met. We placed a cache of rescue gear in the Round Room, we downloaded all data loggers, we changed out some dye trace bugs for Ben Miller and we surveyed evacuation routes beyond the breakdown pile in upper Thunder River.

I arrived at the schoolhouse about 6:00 p.m.

After setting up the camper and having dinner, I went up the hill to service the rain gauge data logger. I suspected its battery was low and I did not want to take the time to change it while others were waiting to get into the cave. The data on the logger was downloaded and I replaced the battery. I was right - it read 2.97 volts which is fairly low. It would

probably not have lasted more than a few months longer.

The next morning Jeff Grigg arrived about 8:30. Terry and Lori arrived just a few minutes later, running quite a bit faster than I expected. We all loaded up in my truck for the trip up the hill. The hill was very soggy from snow melt. Nothing except 4x4 vehicles were able to make it, and even

then it was slipping and sliding all over the place.

We geared up and were all in the cave by 9:30. The first item was to head down Carroll Passage to the Water Barrier so the data logger in Carroll River could be downloaded. We made the trip there and back to the ladder in about 50 minutes.

The next stop was UL2. We changed out a dye trace bug for Ben Miller and downloaded the data logger. From there we went on to the Round Room. We arrived at the Round Room about 11:30.

At the Round Room we placed a cache of rescue gear. The cache is in a medium size dry bag and is located high up near the ceiling. It is marked with green flagging tape which is visible from the floor of the Round Room. This cache contains mostly "stay-warm" items such as candles, large trash bags etc.

We left the Round Room shortly before noon and arrived at the breakdown pile about 1:00 p.m. Along the way we made one wrong turn around a breakdown room, and we stopped for a few minutes so Lori could see the Second Azure Pool.

At the breakdown pile we had a sandwich break, then headed on in. We arrived at the terminal waterfall around 3:30. We took some photos and had a candy bar break, then headed back.

We did not specifically look for biota, but it was hard to miss some of the fish. The fattest fish I've seen were in the stream just up from the exit of the breakdown pile.

On the way back we found two more dye trace bugs which we changed out. One is just outside the Bone Room in the main river flow and the other is a hundred feet up in UL5 which is very close by. I went into UL5 alone, but could still hear the others talking as I changed the bug.

The last part of the trip we started dragging a bit, but even so we reached the ladder about 7:30 p.m. We were all out of the cave by 8:00 and heading down the hill by 8:30.

Evacuation of a litter case from far upper Thunder

River will be very difficult. The breakdown pile has five choke points in it. The first one is the most difficult. It requires lying on your side in about 6 inches of water. The passage is only a foot or so wide and has a rock in a very inconvenient place.

Two more of the choke points are vertical transitions from stream level to a slightly higher passage. The vertical distance is only six or eight feet, but the passage is rather tight. Getting a patient package around the corners would require considerable effort.

The bottom line is this: Don't get injured out beyond the breakdown pile!

Below: Michael Voltz and Zach Copeland in the Round Room. Report starts on the next page. (photo by Bill Gee)





Left: Michael Voltz and Dr. David Ashley examine a bait stick in Convention Hall. (photo by Bill Gee)

January 17, 2010. Carroll Cave Biology Project. Trip report and photos by Bill Gee. Participants: Bill Gee, Zach Copeland, Michael Voltz, Dr. David Ashley.

This trip started with a conversation between Eric Hertzler and David Ashley. Eric was planning a trip to do some biology work, mainly planting additional bait sticks in lower Carroll River near the Mountain Room. When he realized all the bats are in that area, he changed plans and some more people came on board. Eventually 11 people signed up, though two dropped out.

I had been caving on Saturday, so I camped overnight at the schoolhouse. Jon Beard, Eric Hertzler and Josh arrived at the schoolhouse a bit before 9:00 a.m. David Ashley and Michael Voltz arrived a few minutes later. We chatted for a bit while

waiting for Zach and his friends to show up. Eventually they did - they had been waiting up at the silo for us!

Three of us had 4x4 trucks, so we loaded all the gear and headed up the hill. Due to snow melt it was very sloppy. Zach Copeland's truck has street tires and had a bit of trouble with a sloppy spot right at the upper gate.

Gearing up and getting down the shaft took a while. We were all in the cave by 11:00. We split into two teams. Eric led one team for some work in lower Thunder River and I led the other team into upper Thunder River. We agreed to meet back at the ladder no later than 8:00pm.

Our goals were to place some new bait sticks, place two sets of tiles in the river, and examine as many of the existing bait sticks as we could. We left the ladder a few minutes after 11:00.

We carried two sets of five unglazed terra-cotta tiles with us. These were placed in two riffles in the river. The first riffle is near where the trail comes down to the river after going past the Angel Pool Passage. The second is upstream from the second shower head.

The tiles are flat on one side and have ribs on the other. They are roughly eight inches square. Each tile is numbered. By their nature they make counting and measuring animals much easier. They are easier to find than rocks, and easier to count things on. Counting animals on the tiles gives us more repeatable data than counting on rocks.

At Flat Rock Falls we placed a couple of bait sticks, then went on to the Round Room. We arrived there about noon. While walking on a mud bank David took a spill and landed on his back on his camera case. He was hurting but still able to move. At the Round Room we had a lunch break, then placed a pair of bait sticks in an alcove where they are out of the way.



Left: A decomposing bat carcass near the "backdoor" ladder entrance. The skull is clearly visible. (photo by Bill Gee)

The next stop was UL2. As we traveled up UL2 we stopped often to record data about fish. We saw about 20 fish, taking length estimates on most of them. We also saw a couple of smallish grotto salamanders. We did not spend much time looking for snails or isopods.

We arrived at Convention Hall about 1:30. David's back was giving him a hard time, so I gave him some Ibuprofen out of my first aid kit. We examined the bait sticks in Convention Hall. Michael, Zach and I went over to the Conference Room to look at the bait sticks there while David rested his back. In the Conference Room we found a grotto

salamander on one of the sticks. Michael recorded data about the bugs and I took a bunch of photos.

As we traveled, Michael used a laser guided infrared thermometer to measure the wall temperature around sev-

eral bats. We checked perhaps five or eight bats. David used a Kestrel several times to get readings on relative humidity, temperature and air flow.

The trip back to the ladder went quicker than I thought it would given David's bruised back. We arrived there about 5:30 p.m. The gear from the other team was still there, so we knew they were not out of the cave. We examined four bait sticks. Two are in the landing area around the ladder and the other two are under the boxwork formation a little ways down the passage.

We had plenty of time and David's back was feeling better, so we decided to head



Right: Close-up view of a bait stick. Several millipedes and springtails are visible. The stick is about one and a half inches across. (photo by Bill Gee)

down Carroll Passage to the Water Barrier to examine bait sticks we placed a few years ago. We arrived at the Rimstone Room about 6:15, spent 15 minutes recording data and taking photos of the bait sticks, then headed back.

When we arrived back at the ladder a few minutes after 7:00, we saw that the other team had exited the cave. We geared up and climbed as a group. Everyone was out of the cave by 7:30. We derigged, packed up and headed down the hill shortly after 8:00.



October 24, 2009. Carroll Cave Biology Project. Trip report and photos by Bill Gee. Participants: Bill Gee, Justace Clutter, Jeff Grigg, Jerry Cindric.

Above: Michael Voltz points out a millipede on the mud near a bait stick. Millipedes are among the largest insects found in the cave. (photo by Bill Gee)

This trip was the annual bat census in Carroll Passage. We do this trip every year to get an idea of how the bats are using the cave. We also look for other critters.

Everyone was at the cave shortly after 9:00 a.m. We all drove up the hill, changed and rigged the shaft. The first person down was at 9:30 and we were all in the cave by about 9:45.

The trek down Carroll Passage through the Water Barrier to the first riffle took about 30 minutes. We stopped at the first riffle to do an isopod count. This location has been used several times in the past for isopod counts. We paused to download data from the stream

level data loggers in Thunder and Carroll rivers.

From there we proceeded to the guano piles. I took pictures of all the guano gauges to document their state, then they were rinsed off and put back in the pile. There were no surprises from the guano gauges. All the gauges that were used in the past were used again.

Two of the gauges from past years had invalid numbers on them. They were labeled as 15a and 15b but were really 12a and 12b. We relabeled these two gauges. Three of the four gauges in the Mountain Room were not labeled at all. We added labels to these. They are now numbers 31, 32 and 33.

We looked for spiders and

planaria but did not find any. All the guano piles were heavily infested with gnats. We found about a half dozen beetles on guano pile 2.

We reached the Lunch Room about straight up noon. The waterfall in the ceiling was flowing, though not as strong as the last time I saw it several years ago. We took a quick candy bar break, then started the bat count.

The practice for the bat count is to separate the cave into sections based on the reflectors installed many years ago by Lake Ozark Grotto. For each segment we keep a running count of bats and other interesting things. At the end of each section we

record the data, then start over for the next section.

The only really surprising thing we found this year was a lack of bat clusters. In years past we have seen clusters up to several thousand individuals between the 4500 and 2500 foot markers. This year we only saw two small clusters of a few hundred individual, and they were at the 500 foot marker.

We saw quite a few cave fish on this trip, and a number of grotto salamanders. At guano pile three we found six or eight salamanders in the river within about 30 feet of each other.

We reached the Mountain Room about 3:00 p.m.

Everyone had a meal. We documented the four guano gauges in the Mountain Room, then packed up for the trip back. We left the Mountain Room about 3:45.

The trip back seemed longer than it really was. We wound up back at the ladder a few minutes after 6:00 for a time of about two and a half hours. Everyone was out of the cave at 6:30. We cleaned up and were heading down the hill at 7:00. Rick Hines was at the school house with a nice warm bonfire for us.



Above right: Jerry Cindric examines a large guano pile with two guano gauges in it.

Below: Three grotto salamanders are present in this photograph taken near Guano Pile 3. (both photos by Bill Gee)



October 25, 2009. Carroll Cave landowner's trip. Trip report and photos by Rick Hines. Participants: Rick Hines, Bill Gee, DJ Hall, Dave Mead, John Pryor, Jason Luttrell, Brad Hatterman, John Reed, Chris Robinson, Machaela Livings, Larry Birkey, Roger Heiser, and Dylan Fry. Surface safety: Jim Cooley, Randy Bruegger.

Over the summer Jenny Fry had been collecting names of friends and family that had requested a trip to Carroll Cave. She asked me if I could lead a trip and we eventually settled on Sunday, Oct 25, 2009.

Prior to starting the landowner trip we replaced the old incandescent rope lights with new LED rope lights. In addition to replacing the lights in the shaft and at the base of the ladder we also replaced the standard bulbs in the basement with LED rope lights. The old lights required about 1800 watts and the new LEDs require less than 200 watts.

Due to the number of visitors, two trip leaders were required. Bill Gee and I were the two official leaders but

Right: Some of the landowner trip participants.

Below: A group at the lip of Thunder Falls. (photos by Rick Hines)



Right: DJ Hall and Randy Bruegger help Dylan Fry get on the ladder.

Below: A group of landowners at the bottom of the ladder. (photos by Rick Hines)



six other CCC members helped get the visitors geared up and in and out of Carroll safely. Thanks to Randy Bruegger, Dave Mead, Bill Pfantz, Jerry Cindric, DJ Hall, and Jim Cooley for helping.

The tour lasted three to four hours. We led the visitors to Thunder Falls, a short distance down the Carroll Passage, and to Angel Pool Passage. The visitors were John Pryor, Jason Luttrell, Brad Hatterman, John Reed, Chris Robinson, Machaela Livings, Larry Birkey, Roger Heiser, and Dylan Fry. We made frequent stops to take photos of the visitors in the cave.

Following the trip I mailed a CD with trip photos to all the participants. I hope to make this an annual event with a trip date set far in advance. This should make it easier for the landowners to



Above: Dylan Fry and his reflection at the Angel Pool. (photo by Rick Hines)

hear about the trip and plan for it.

May 16-17, 2009. Orientation to Cave Rescue, Eminence MO. Trip report by Bill Gee. Photos by Bill Gee and Chris McCracken.

One of the seminars offered by the NCRC (National Cave Rescue Commission) is a weekend Orientation to Cave Rescue (OCR). These sessions run most of two days long and

are intended to teach the basics - the VERY basics! - of cave rescue. The first day consists of lectures on various cave rescue topics in the morning, then litter movement practice through an obstacle course in the afternoon. The second day is a mock rescue situation in a real cave.

On May 16 and 17, 2009 Discovery Ministries near Eminence, Missouri sponsored an OCR weekend for their staff. They invited participants from the ONSR (Ozark National Scenic Riverways) and area caving groups. Discovery Ministries

Left: The entrance to Bluff Cave. This area was large enough to stage all participants and the gear cache. (photo by Bill Gee)





provides religious outreach and retreat services with emphasis on outdoor activities. Caving is among the activities they offer.

Attendance was about 15 students. A couple of people came in from Oklahoma and there were two rangers from the ONSR. The staff was Anmar Mirza, Don Paquette, Leanne Hughes, Jessica Deli, Chris McCracken and Bill Gee.

The morning lectures are cut-down versions of the

lectures given at the NCRC weeklong seminar. Instead of running one to two hours, they are cut down to about 10 or 15 minutes each. A few of the lectures are left for the optional evening session.

After lunch Chris McCracken and I went outside and set up the obstacle course. By mid-afternoon we were ready for the students. The instructors spent an hour or so demonstrating how to

Above: Moving the litter through a very tight spot. Yes, it did fit even with a large patient strapped in! (photo by Bill Gee)

package patients into the litters. Both the Washington Ferno and the SKED litter were shown. They also demonstrated various litter movements including the lap pass, J-pass and California Crawl.

A volunteer was packaged up, and the rest of the class practiced moving the litter through various obstacles.



Above: The litter had to move around a tight corner while avoiding the delicate "rose bush" formations. (photo by Bill Gee)

Right: Getting ready to demonstrate patient packaging and litter movements. (photo by Chris McCracken)



All of the various litter movement methods were practiced. The obstacle course went under tables, through the supports of a stairway and along the wall of a building.

After several hours of litter movement, we broke for dinner. The optional sessions after dinner included instruction on how to use the field telephone units and additional practice packaging patients in the litters.

The next day we loaded up the gear and headed for Bluff Cave. This cave is located on the Current River near the Power Mill Research Center. Due to the small size of the cave the instructors elected to run several small scenarios rather than one big problem. In the end we were able to run two scenarios.

The first was a simple problem which mostly

exercised litter movement skills. The second exercise was a bit more difficult since the patient was hiding out in a very small side passage. It was a chance to practice search techniques.

The entire exercise was over shortly after lunch. We packed up all the gear, debriefed in the parking lot and then went home.

NCRC weekends are offered several times a year at various locations around the country. Information about them can be found on the NCRC web site at <http://www.caves.org/ncrc/national> along with other cave rescue information. The price is very low, usually under \$40. Every caver should attend an OCR at least once.



Above and below: Litter movement exercises in the obstacle course. The space under the picnic tables was so tight we had to take the helmet off the patient. (photos by Bill Gee)





Above: Practicing litter movements. (photo by Bill Gee)

Right: Learning the lap pass. One of the big challenges with any kind of litter movement is getting team members ahead of the litter as it moves. (photo by Chris McCracken)



June 1, 2009. Carroll Cave biology project. Trip report and photos by Bill Gee.

Most years Dr. David Ashley teaches a class at a field station operated by St. Louis University. The class is a three-week intensive course on Ozark Cave Biology. One

of the caves they visit is Carroll Cave.

This year we had 12 participants in the trip. Andy Isbell was the other trip leader. Dr. Ashley brought five stu-

dents and a special guest, and we had three regular CCC members participating.

The special guest was Alan Leary who is the staff biologist at Missouri Department of Transportation. His job is to look at all things biological wherever MoDOT is building a road. Dr. Ashley and Alan have worked together doing cave biology work in Tumbling Creek Cave.

I made a day trip out of it, driving down early Monday morning. When I got to the schoolhouse about 7:15, I found Andy and Lori Schultz just getting up. They had done some caving on Sunday and camped at the schoolhouse. While they went into Montreal to have breakfast, I went up the hill.

After opening the silo and rigging the rope, I installed a permanent rope pad on the

Below: Group photo before we entered the cave. In front kneeling - Dr. David Ashley and Bill Gee. Standing: Nataly Jager, Andy Isbell, Justace Clutter, Lori Schultz, Vishnu Reddy, Maja Sadikovic, Leila Thampy, Joshua Markak, Raunak Patel and Alan Leary. (photo by Bill Gee)





top rung of the ladder. During the student trip in early April the sawing motion of the rope against the top rung wore a hole clear through the sheath. I used a piece of old fire hose sliced lengthwise and fastened on with some big zip ties. The pad worked very well! My brand new rope suffered no damage from the rung.

Dr. Ashley and the students arrived about 9:15. Everyone geared up and by shortly after 10:00 we were heading down the rope. Nataly used a cable grab and everyone else rappelled. We were all in the cave by 10:45.

The entire group headed over to Thunder Falls for the usual touristy stuff. From there we all went upstream to UL2. On the way we searched for fish in the stream. We found about six which were measured for length.

We arrived at the entrance to UL2 about 12:45. Dr. Ashley and a couple of the students took a close look at the bait sticks while everyone else climbed up to view the formations. We grabbed a

quick bite to eat, then split into two teams. I took one team upstream to Flat Rock Falls while Andy took the other team into UL2.

We arrived at Flat Rock Falls around 1:45. Maja, Leila and Vishnu did an isopod count while I took pictures. They counted and measured isopods for about 20 minutes. We went back to the small waterfall at the entrance to UL2 and did an isopod count there as well.

From there we went into UL2 to meet the other team. On the way in we stopped to view the formations. The other team was in Convention Hall where they were relaxing and taking photographs. Dr. Ashley, Alan Leary and I made a quick trip over to the Conference Room where we examined and documented the state of the bait sticks.

Back at Convention Hall Dr. Ashley examined the bait sticks, then we all left. My team went first and headed straight back to the ladder. It took us about 45 minutes.

We arrived at the ladder about 5:00. Andy's team arrived less than five minutes later. While everyone else geared up, Dr. Ashley examined the last pair of bait sticks near the shortcut to Thunder Falls.

Everyone was out by 5:45. We had the hole de-rigged and were all headed down the hill by 6:15.



Above left: Vishnu Patel, Maja Sadikovic and Nataly Jager counting isopods at Flat Rock Falls.

Above: Maja Sadikovic enters Convention Hall from the crawlway.

Below: In Convention Hall. Andy Isbell, Alan Leary, Vishnu Reddy, Joshua Markak, Leila Thampy. Raunak Patel is in front. (all photos by Bill Gee)





October 17-20, 2007. Lost Caves of The Irish Wilderness. Trip report by Jim Cooley. Photos by Jim Cooley and Craig Hines. Part one.

Above: Jim Cooley standing at an overlook above Greer Spring. (photo by Craig Hines)

You can still find adventure in this country if you plan well and go hunting for it. My plan for 2007 was to take two weeks' vacation in the middle of October, a time I favor because the leaves are changing and the Ozarks is putting on – just prior to strip-teasing off -- her autumn finery. The weekend of October 5th through the 7th I planned to accompany

Bob Lerch and his survey crew a couple of miles down Thunder River in Carroll Cave, on my first survey trip ever and my first in-cave camping trip since Nixon was

Editor's note: This is the first part of Jim's report. The second part will appear in the next issue of the Guano. In part one Jim describes events leading up to his arrival at the Irish Wilderness.

president. Bob is the survey chairman for the Carroll Cave Conservancy (CCC), and periodically schedules multi-day expeditions to remote reaches of that cave. Provided I survived that adventure, I would head early Monday morning for the National Cave and Karst Management Symposium (NCKMS) in St. Louis, which ran October 8-12th and was

sponsored by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and the Missouri Cave and Karst Conservancy (MCKC). At the close of conference Friday, I'd head back to Carroll Cave to meet Craig Hines, a lean, incredibly fit 32-year-old Kansas City Area Grotto (KCAG) member, who packs 100 pounds less lard through life than I do. We would join Bill Gee, KCAG president and the CCC biology studies committee chair, and Andy Isbell, another CCC-certified trip leader, for Bill's annual bio survey and bat count down the Carroll River passage to the Mountain Room. This six-mile round trip would feature stunning speleothems, hip-deep, boot-sucking mud, and the Water Barrier, a stretch of cave so named because discoverers in September, 1956 mistakenly thought boats would be required to traverse it. They aren't, though it still offers lots of water in not a lot of passage.

Then, after a day to regroup, Craig and I would drive south to the Irish Wilderness, at 25.7 square miles the largest of eight Federally designated wilderness areas in Missouri. Located along the east bank of the Eleven Point River, the Irish Wilderness lies at the southern fringe of the Eleven Point Ranger District, part of the Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF). The nearest town is Alton, the seat of Oregon



Above: Craig Hines at Greer Spring. (photo by Jim Cooley)

County. Although the gate on White's Creek Cave, the main spelean attraction on the Irish Wilderness, is locked between September 15th and April 30th to protect an endangered Indiana bat hibernaculum, there would be other, smaller caves on the area to visit. We could also expect scenic vistas overlooking the Eleven Point River, turkey and squirrel to hunt, trout and bass to catch – just lots of quiet, WAY-out-in-the-middle-of-nowhere to tromp around in. The 18.7-mile White's Creek Trail forms a large loop around the north half of the property, featuring three main trailheads. Spurs connect to Fiddler and Bliss Springs, the two named springs on the unit. Craig would be my ideal companion for a week-long walk-about in a largely trackless

wilderness. He'd lived in Boulder, Colorado and rural California for a decade, gaining a world of experience backpacking in wilderness areas – experience I sorely lacked.

No one's ever accused me of holding a sparsely populated dance card. My agenda for this vacation was no exception. But as Scottish poet Bobbie Burns noted in 1785, "the best laid schemes 'o mice an' men gang aft agley, for a' that, and a' that." My plans started ganging agley right out of the box. I was so excited – and nervous – about Bob Lerch's two-night, wet-suit-mandatory camping trip that for most of the prior week I slept only fitfully. Then, after staying up way too late shopping and pack-



Left: The spring boil at Greer Spring. (photo by Jim Cooley)

ing the evening before I was to leave, I got beeped out of bed and spent most of the wee hours addressing computer problems for my so-called “day” job. Those problems persisted all the next day, using time I should have spent double- and triple-checking my duffle, making me late getting out of town. In spite of intending to arrive early, I showed up a full hour late at the Carroll Cave entrance silo -- not an auspicious beginning. I had also been suffering from allergies for weeks, my usual fall nemesis, had lost my voice, and just flat wasn’t feeling well. It was over 48 hours since my last significant sleep by the time I arrived at the silo.

So even though the other surveyors showed up as late as or later than I did – per

that notorious protocol called “caver time” -- as everyone began to gear up I was beginning to have second thoughts. This trip might just be “a bridge too far.” Worse yet, my biological clock is set for a 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. cycle, but Lerch’s team now wouldn’t enter the cave until 11:30 p.m., not 8:00 p.m. as planned. The sun would be lighting the Camden County sky by the time these guys pitched camp and were snuggling into their (hopefully still dry) sleeping bags, miles away underground. I couldn’t help but notice that three of my four putative companions were a decade or two younger than me, and very energetic. All of them seemed in much better shape than I was, though how much better I couldn’t say since I’d never caved

with any of these guys before. As there were four other participants, the minimum required for a trip permit, they wouldn’t be forced to abort if I excused myself. Lerch had already e-mailed me at one point that “I’m hesitant to have your first survey trip be a camp trip, since the logistics and difficulty are much greater.”

I also remembered Rick Hines’s trip report from December, 2006. Rick is a CCC board member, conservancy member # 001, and even further down the back-slope of the over-50 breakdown pile than I am. He’d struggled to complete his trip, of similar duration, after falling and hurting his leg at the outset while climbing down the breakdown pile at the bottom of the 120-foot entrance shaft. Craig, his son, had ended up packing out some of his gear for him – a favor my new pals would surely not relish extending to me if I proved unable to carry out everything I’d dragged in, plus a well wrapped burrito or two for sanitation’s sake. Rick concluded his trip report with this warning: When in doubt, better head out. Not only have I reached the age when I’ll consider the counsel of wiser elders, I have also learned to heed my own intuition. I decided to bail.

With much envy but little regret, I watched Bob Lerch, Ben Miller, Dan Lamping and Shawn Williams rappel into the bowels of Carroll Cave shortly before midnight. “We’ll play another day, my friends,” I said, bidding them Godspeed as they began their journey deep into the perpetual night.

So the first weekend of my excellent adventure was spent camping and resting up on property leased by the Deer Creek Sportsman’s Club (DCSC), an organization I’ve belonged to since Kennedy was in the White House, nursing my slightly bruised pride while sniping the occasional tree rat. But all was not lost. Skipping the Carroll survey allowed me to participate with other club officers (I am the treasurer) in a long lease negotiation on Sunday with one of our landowners. Heretofore, this landowner had refused to allow anyone to visit the caves on her property – caves apparently unknown to the Missouri Speleological Survey (MSS), on whose board I serve as representative of the KCAG. However, on this day, after negotiations concluded greatly in her favor (in hunting as in caving, landowners hold ALL the cards), our landowner decided that it might be all right after all if the someone from the decidedly non-governmental MSS (me) investigated her caves. My Carroll

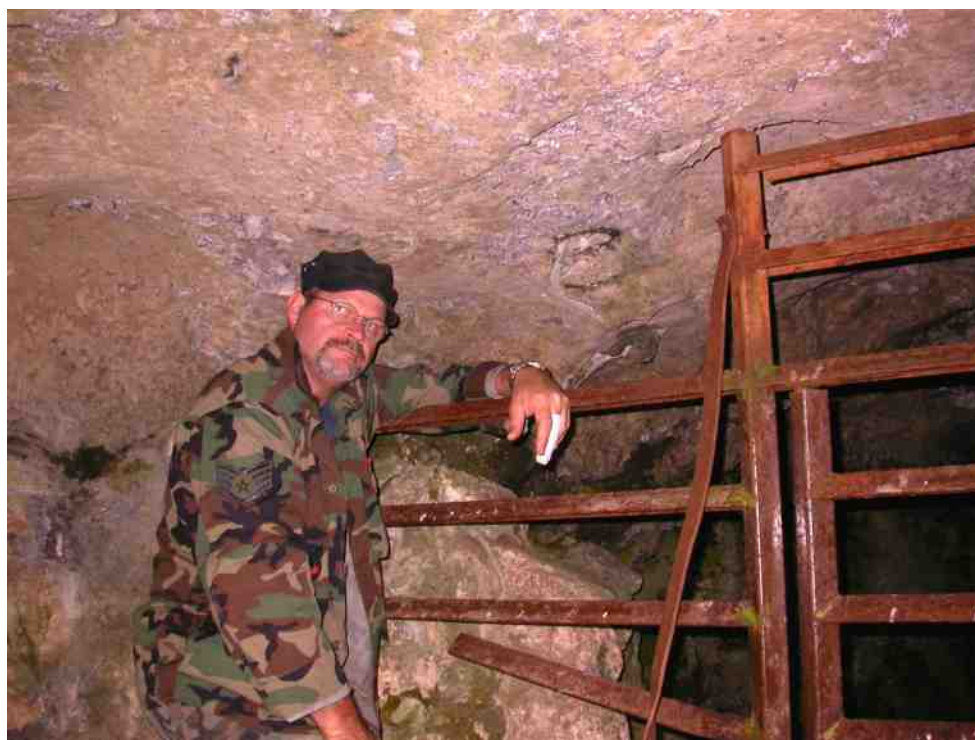
consolation prize was permission to visit the known borehole cave along the major creek that runs through her property, a cave she’d named in honor of her recently deceased husband. I also got the green light for some ridge-walking later in the winter along the mile and a half of that drainage on her 2,200-acre ranch. But that would have to wait ...

Monday found me at the Holiday Inn St. Louis Southwest (Viking), on Watson Road, chosen for its excellent convention facilities and also because it’s close to the MDC Powder Valley Conservation Center. This large conference was a cave hound’s dream, extremely well organized by co-chairs Bill Elliott (MDC) and Jim Kaufmann (MCKC). A large and enthusiastic volunteer staff, led by

Alicia Lewis of the Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto (MMV), did an outstanding job. Bryan McAllister, also an MMVer, designed the stunning commemorative T-shirt, featuring the entrance to Jam Up Cave on the Jacks Fork River. Bryan spent most of the conference working the registration desk, handing out those eye-catching garments.

Every one of the guys on Lerch’s survey trip showed up by Tuesday afternoon – these are all serious caver dudes – and to a man stated that their downstream Thunder trip had kicked their collective and individual butts. They did not exit Carroll until 9:30 p.m. Sunday night. I

Below: Jim Cooley is resting his arm in the breach of the gate at White’s Creek Cave. (photo by Craig Hines)



didn't feel so bad wussing out after guys half my age and body weight said the trip had whupped them.

Of the literally dozens of serious cavers, agency folks, and academics that I met at the NCKMS, the one most pivotal to this story is Randall Long, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) cave and karst resources specialist for the entire MTNF. His eyes lit up when I told him of my plans to hike the Irish Wilderness with Craig Hines the following week.

"Maybe you can find Connor Cave," he said.

"Find it?" I asked. "Did you lose a cave?"

"In fact, we've lost several on the Irish Wilderness. I think Connor's the name of the biggest one, or something like that. An USFS historian named Ronald Wihebrink wrote a history of the Irish Wilderness, complete with map and cave locations, back in 1970 when the movement got underway to preserve the area as a Federally designated wilderness area. You can read it on-line – I've scanned it into the web. The largest missing cave is supposed to have a still in it. One of our rangers was even shown the contraption, back in the early '60s. But no one's been able to find it since (author's note: see page 44 of the history), possibly because the entrance is supposed to be hidden behind a boulder. Try



Above: Jim Cooley geared up and ready to find caves in the Irish Wilderness. (photo by Craig Hines)

pulling that history up – I think it's still on-line. It'll whet your appetite for a cave hunt."

After Googling around, the search engine gods finally directed me to: http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/marktwain/ranger_districts/doniphan/Irish_Wilderness_Country.pdf. Just as Randy said, there was the 60-page Wihebrink history. Much of Wihebrink's narrative was based, like his cave locations, on second- and third-hand hearsay obtained from interviews with aging locals. There was even a map with several cave locations on it – all of them wrong, Randy said, with the exception of the historically well known, 1,653-foot-long White's Creek Cave. Those

old Oregon County hill folk loved to brag on their caves and stills, but they didn't give away their locations. Meanwhile, Randy mentioned to Scott House, the MSS database curator, that I would be conducting a cave search on the Irish Wilderness, suggesting that any assistance Scott could provide would be appreciated. USFS employees are forbidden by statute from releasing cave locations (or archaeological site locations) to the public, but the MSS is a private, scientific entity founded by and composed of cavers, which compiles data generated by private-citizen cavers and the maps drawn by them. The MSS therefore is not statutorily constrained, although access to its cave database is nonetheless very tightly controlled. Scott House, incidentally, is currently the president of the

Cave Research Foundation (CRF), a national body that came into existence to survey Kentucky's Mammoth Springs Cave system in the first half of the 20th century. There were a lot of caving-community heavy hitters at the NCKMS.

I eventually determined that the biggest cave that went missing, the one the Forest Service was most interested in, was called Coffin Cave – so named, according to Wihebrink's sources, "after a tale that a white man was killed by Indians and was buried in the cave" (page 58). As Randy and Scott will both attest, I became quite the little pest after reading the Wihebrink document. I bugged Scott again and again for descriptions of

Below: Craig Hines is carrying a pack almost as big as he is. (photo by Jim Cooley)

known caves on the Irish Wilderness, peppered Randy with questions about previous, failed searches for Coffin Cave. After all, I had an honest-to-God treasure map on the screen, right in front of my eyes! Craig and I now had something REALLY exciting to do during our walkabout in the Irish Wilderness – heck, you can hunt and fish anywhere. At night after meetings with Randy and Scott, I jotted down notes and plotted tidbits of information on where Coffin Cave wasn't onto my topographical maps. I tried to puzzle out where on earth you could hide such a cave ... and began to develop some nagging ideas.

But first, there were other adventures to be had. The NCKMS concluded on Friday; I rendezvoused with Craig at

the Carroll Cave schoolhouse campground that night. On Saturday, October 13th, we accompanied Bill Gee and Andy Isbell to the Mountain Room. This trip generated important information: A 5mm wetsuit is way too hot – at least on this fat boy -- for a six-mile rigorous cave hike, unless you wear only the "Farmer John" bottom section and leave the top at camp. Maybe I really hadn't been ready for the Lerch survey trip. My ignominious bail-out had saved myself (or someone) having to hump eight or ten pounds of useless neoprene a lot farther than down Carroll River to the Mountain Room and back, on top of a full backpack.

Sunday we broke camp and headed for the Sportsman's Club to visit our club landowner's cave, an adventure in its own right to be covered in another trip report. Monday and Tuesday were spent visiting that cave, and chatting with other Benton County landowners I knew, prospecting for other new caves and getting permissions to visit them. We tracked down one cave on an old club rifle range that I remembered from my childhood, only to discover it would admit no critter larger than a medium-sized possum. We scratched that one from MSS eligibility. Finally, late Tuesday afternoon, we packed out and headed for



Oregon County.

On the way, noticing that we'd pass right by, we stopped at the 7,019-acre Paddy Creek Wilderness, another of the eight Federally designated wilderness areas in Missouri, and hiked a mile down the 17-mile Piney Creek Trail. Located just south of Fort Leonard Wood, the area is closer to civilization and more heavily used than the Irish Wilderness. I thought a warm-up stroll here to judge the general visibility of wilderness-area hiking trails would provide a useful point of comparison. Craig caught a five-foot blacksnake that slithered across our path, a friendly, mellow fellow we admired and communed with before letting him go. The Irish Wilderness had been described as thick and impenetrable, but this Paddy Creek area was open forest with negligible understory and easy walking, in spite of extensive deadfall, once you got away from the field edges.

I wanted to tackle the Irish Wilderness first thing in the morning, so Tuesday night we coughed up \$8.00 to camp at a nearby USFS campground, the Greer Ac-

cess to the Eleven Point River, on Highway 19. It was the only time we paid for camping our entire trip. Next morning, nothing would do but that we visit Greer Spring just up the road, at 220 million gallons a day the second-largest spring in Missouri – and reputedly the tenth-largest freshwater spring on the planet. The half-mile hike down the new USFS trail to the spring was beautiful and relaxing; we shared our hike and conversation with a solitary canoer, an Indiana die maker who has spent two weeks on the Eleven Point every October for the last 20 years. He'd built his own one-man, wooden-hulled, 36-pound canoe by hand -- a true work of art.

Editor's note: Jim's trip report will continue in the next issue. Read about the rediscovery of lost Coffin Cave and other adventures on the Irish Wilderness.