

The

The Kansas City Area Grotto

Volume 24

Issue 2

April 2010

Guano

**Rediscovering Caves on the Irish Wilderness
Biology Project Work at Carroll Cave
Photography project at Ennis Cave**

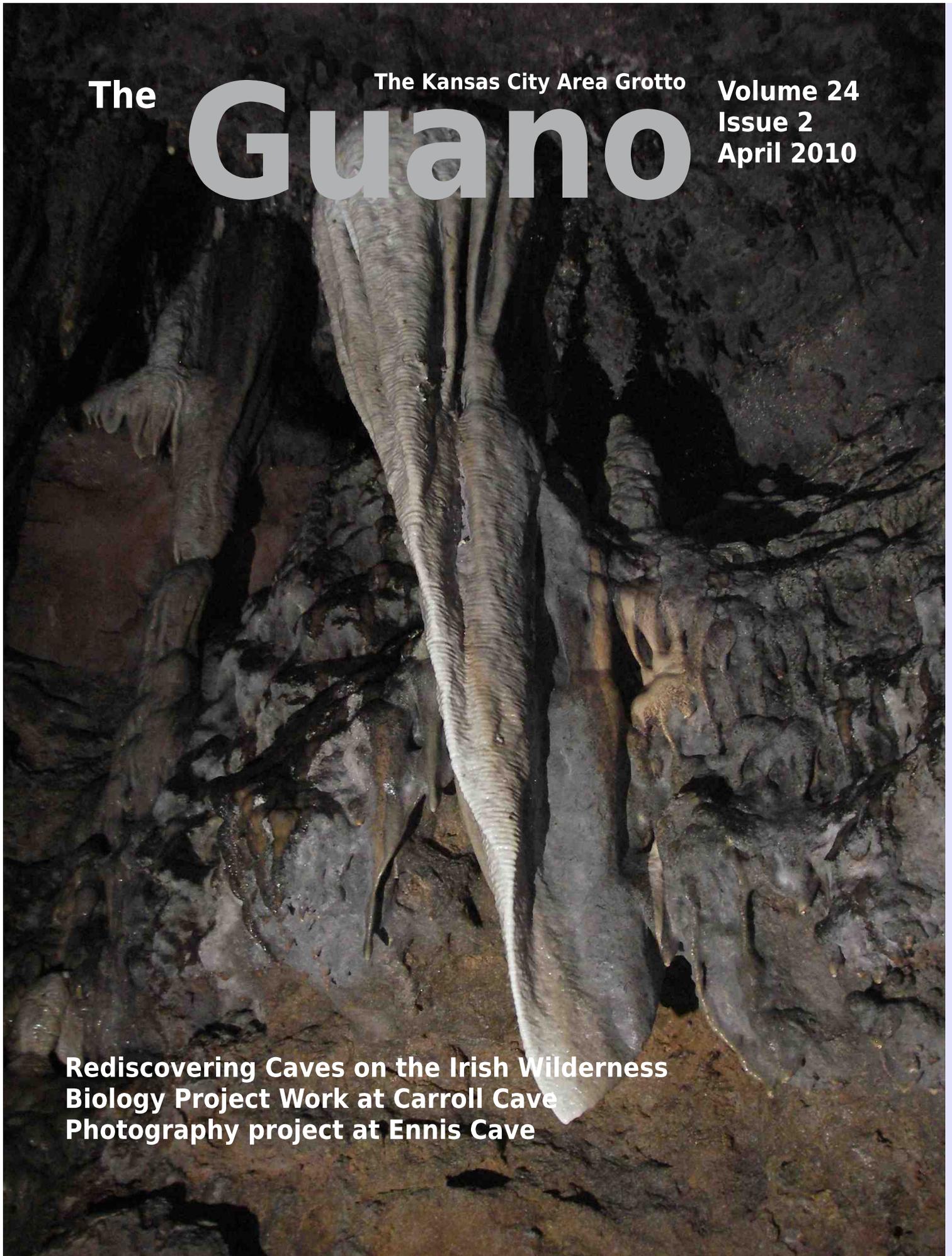


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Events

- May 12**
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, Missouri.
- May 15-16**
Missouri Speleological Survey meeting. Rolla, Missouri. Project caving (survey) on the Paddy Creek Wilderness on the 15th. The meeting is on the 16th.
- May 16**
Missouri Caves and Karst Conservancy (MCKC) 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.
- May 22**
KCAG Cliff Day at Truman Lake. Practice your vertical skills.
- May 26 to June 2**
25th annual Ennis Cave Blowout.
<http://www.enniscave.org> for information.
- 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

April 2010, Volume 24, Issue 2

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.

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Anyone interested in caving or speleology is welcome at our business meetings, normally held on the second Wednesday of every month except June and December. Actual membership in the Kansas City Area Grotto is by invitation only, and requires a demonstrated commitment to cave conservation, successful participation in three KCAG-sponsored caving trips, nomination by a member in good standing, and a vote of the membership.

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.

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 we discussed at length in our last meeting, the White Nose Syndrome (WNS) epizootic (i.e., pandemic) will dominate caving for the foreseeable future. WNS has just been verified in Dunbar Cave in Tennessee, a show cave only 103 miles from the Boot Heel of Missouri. The disease is propagating



rapidly. Resource management professionals predict that Missouri will be hit next winter, perhaps heavily. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) just finalized their response plan, then went immediately to Level Two of a four-tiered response. Like the Mark Twain National Forest, MDC has now closed most of their caves to the public. Hopefully, MDC will get the Cave Stewards portion of their plan operational shortly, which will allow cavers to do something positive to combat White Nose Syndrome. So far, all the agencies are unanimous in praising the support and compliance of the organized caving community. Let's not screw that up!

It appears to be our fate to live in interesting times.

Jim Cooley

Cover Photo

An example of the nice formations in Blair's Creek Cave. (photo by Bill Gee)

October 17-20, 2007. Lost Caves of The Irish Wilderness. Feature article by Jim Cooley. Photos by Jim Cooley, Craig Hines, Marcello Kramer and DJ Hall. Part two.

Finally, Wednesday afternoon we arrived at Whitten Access, just across the Eleven Point River from the western boundary of the Irish Wilderness, only to find it occupied by several late-model pick-up trucks clustered around a large, black school bus. Craig and I introduced ourselves as cave hunters to the Haley brothers, Mike and Tim, and their dad, Carson. They and two friends were squirrel hunting and fishing for trout. After half an hour of friendly “get-to-know-you” conversation, they insisted we stuff ourselves on a huge mess of deep-fried rainbows and corn fritters, followed by fried apples for dessert. They told us they had been hunting that land for decades, being personal friends of the landowner whose ground it had been before the Forest Service bought it for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Riverways system. After more friendly conversation about squirrel hunting and .22s, they told us how to get in touch with this landowner, advising us to mention their names. They also described where we could find some nearby ruins, including a swimming pool, that had been used as a “gentlemen’s entertainment facility” -- a whorehouse, in

other words -- early in the last century. (I later learned from Cindy Price, MTNF archaeologist, that the USFS lists these ruins as “a resort.”) My keen little recovered-alcoholic mind immediately understood why the long-lost cave on the Irish Wilderness with a still in it was probably across the river and up Bliss Hollow, the “approximate” location



“I thought you were a vegetarian,” I said to Craig, as we waddled away from the Haleys’ camp, after bidding them adieu and many thanks.

“Be serious,” Craig said. “Faced with a breakfast of fresh trout fillets, dipped in corn meal and deep-fried in peanut oil, served out-of-doors in front of a roaring hickory-log fire on a cool fall morning in the Ozarks, no one can remain a vegetarian.”

Below: Typical cobble floor of Coffin Cave. (photo by Marcelo Kramer)

given in the Wihebrink document. That’s exactly where I’d put it, just across the Eleven Point, if I were the SSRI (Sole Source of Rotgut Intoxicants) serving a facility devoted to humankind’s oldest profession.

As I said, there is no substitute for experience.

Editor's Note - This is the second of a two-part feature article by Jim Cooley. Part one appeared in the March 2010 issue of The Guano and described events up to the point where Jim and Craig start into the Irish Wilderness. In part two Jim and Craig rediscover Coffin Cave.



We drove half a mile north of the boat ramp on a dirt road, to a camp spot in a crook of the river cut into three tiers in the silty loess that chokes the narrow alluvial channels of the Eleven Point. It was obviously a popular party spot. Trash was everywhere, scattered around the remains of three bonfires, one on each level. Much of this 10 to 15 vertical feet of organic sediment had spent the Pleistocene era happily hugging the sur-

rounding hills, until the Ozark Timber Company had raped and ruined Oregon County between 1890 and 1906, causing massive erosion. It started to drizzle. The forecast called for a full night of rain.

Craig, not intimidated by anything out of doors, wanted to load our packs for four days of primitive camping and plunge off into the wilderness. I, on the other hand, wanted to ease into this adventure, wanted to

Above: A group of gours and rimstone dams in Coffin Cave. (photo by DJ Hall)

feel comfortable and somewhat secure before I hiked straight to heart of a trackless forest with only a compass and topo map for guidance. Gary Johnson, another KCAG member and frequent trip leader, had told us several stories of nearly impenetrable brush-busting in the Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR) trying to get to caves. Craig and I had both tasted of that misery

back in April, on Gary's ON-SR cave inventory trip down the Jacks Fork River. Was I ready to jump right into six miles of that kind of nightmare with 40 pounds of gear on my back, late in the afternoon, in the face of a major thunderstorm? Um ... maybe not.

So we compromised. It was by now 3:00 p.m. Craig agreed we'd cross the river, cut into the White's Creek Trail, then walk north three miles until we hit Brawley Pond spur or for an hour and a half, whichever came first. At 4:30 we'd turn around and head back, trying to be out of the woods by dark. So we had a plan. Craig doffed his daypack, boots and britches and waded barefoot across 75 yards of knee-deep, fast-running shallows, to make sure it could be done. The water, he assured me after he waded back, was big-spring cold. No wonder it was lousy with trout. I had loaded my own day pack in anticipation of getting lost in the dark and having to spend the night out anyway, and carried a Ruger 10-.22, since both mountain lions and black bears sometimes use the Irish Wilderness. We don't get big predators up in Benton County, and I wanted to be ready just in case we happened to run across one who wouldn't listen to reason. I stripped down to my undies to ford the river, too, but decided to wear a pair of



Above: More of the cobbles typical to Coffin Cave. (photo by DJ Hall)

leather sandals while wading to protect my piggies. We crossed the river again with our day packs and the rifle, managing with great effort not to slip on the moss-covered bottom.

After drying off and getting dressed, we did indeed have to force our way through 150 yards of thick river-bottom scrub and vegetation and up another rugged 200 yards of Bliss Creek drainage before finding Bliss Spring. At least we were hitting our landmarks. The trail spur from this spring was easily identified, and we walked up the short, well traveled path to Bliss Cave, a couple of dozen yards beyond the spring. The forest opened up at this

point; that was the last of our brush-busting. We followed the spur to the junction with the main White's Creek Trail, where we discovered the wooden trail sign with mileage information had been vandalized. We repaired the sign as best we could, made a note to report it to the Forest Service, turned left, and headed north up the ridge between Bliss and Barn Hollows. We were finally headed into the Irish Wilderness!

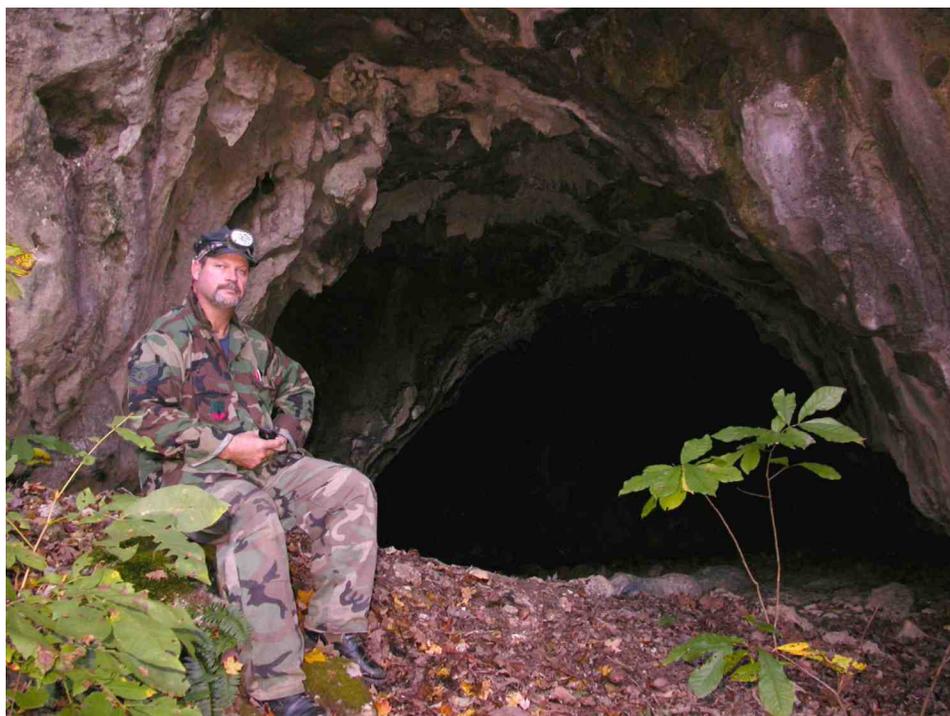
Our walk was uneventful, save for confirming that we were indeed in a very "karsty" region. The White's Creek Trail was marked with only occasional silver-diamond blazes, although the path itself was easy to follow except in areas of extensive deadfall. The drizzle ratcheted up into a steady rain

by the end of the first hour. I promptly became soaked. Craig, predictably better prepared, stayed reasonably dry wearing a two-piece rain suit. We did not get as far as the Brawley Pond spur. Wilderness lesson #1: It's BIG out there, regardless of how cozy everything looks on the little Forest Service brochure. There were undoubtedly lots of caves hiding along our route, around this bend or over that next terrain feature, but trying to maximize distance we had no time to look for them. We got as far as an area that Randy Long had mentioned, where a big tornado had gone through years before and left a frightening gash of big trees ripped from the ground, all splayed over in the same direction, their huge root balls still packed with dirt and

rocks and gaping ugly in the air. After an hour and a half we stopped for a trail mix break, then turned around.

The walk out in the failing light was even wetter. We crossed the river again in near darkness – no need to doff the boots or britches now! -- and crawled into the van to get dry. Craig sat in the front seat for hours before working up the will to pitch his tent in the pouring rain, but finally did. I was up and down repeatedly in the early part of the night as the rain ebbed and raged against the tin roof of the van. I finally gave up trying to sleep and spent the wee hours finishing a good novel by helmet light. Finally the storm blew through and the

Below: Jim Cooley taking notes at the entrance to Coffin Cave. (photo by Craig Hines)



rain quit, so I walked down to the edge of the river and sat for the hour before dawn, as a half-moon peeked out of the rapidly dissipating clouds.

Eventually the sky began to lighten. Thursday morning dawned quiet and cool, the bright blue sky stark above heavy mist lying along the river. A buck snorted at me several times from the Wilderness across the river 250 yards upstream – I could see his heavy rack glinting above the rushes on the gravel bar as he tossed his head. Craig slept in.

I was psyched. Here was the Wilderness I had come looking for.

We got a slow start, taking all morning to clean gear and let Craig's tent dry out, while packing properly for our primitive camping trip. Craig gave great directions on what to take, and why. We worried over the topos three or four more times, then decided, per our plan, to head around to the east side of the Wilderness and enter on a private-access easement road Randy Long had told me about. We broke camp around noon.

En route we stopped in Alton to look up the sheriff and the ex-landowner the Haleys had put us on to; we also checked e-mail at the library. Again, our stop took much longer than expected. The sheriff was attending some meeting up in Texas

County, but the deputy and departmental secretary were happy to talk at length about caves, criminals and anything else my little heart desired. There had been a famous local fugitive in the mid-1990s who'd murdered a game warden, then hidden for six months in a cave on the Irish Wilderness before turning himself in. We should talk to the sheriff, they advised, who could tell us all about it. Just our luck. And the night deputy was a real caver, they said. We should come back after 6:00 and talk to him.

I wrote down the make, model and license plate number of our van for them, and told them our plans, since we weren't going to be parking at one of the usual trailheads, while taking notes on the fugitive and the night deputy, too. They thanked me for saving someone a trip in case they got a call on our vehicle. The deputy did mention that a lot of folks got lost in the Irish Wilderness. He appreciated knowing when we expected to be out.

We couldn't find the former landowner of the Whitten Access either before we finally left Alton at 2:00 and headed east. The easement-road route would take us well south of White's Creek Trail and the known caves on the property. This road ran down the ridge between Freeman and

Greenbriar Hollows. The only folks who could legally run motorized vehicles on it were some landowners who'd ended up with a small in-holding on the Wilderness. We of course would be walking, but I figured the road would be easy to follow because it was occasionally driven over – I didn't want to risk getting lost or off-trail

ward Fiddler Spring, our second night's destination.

We arrived at the gate simultaneously with a bow hunter in a late-model sedan, who introduced himself as Bob Fields. He was heading into the Wilderness a short way to sit on his portable

Below: Jim Cooley standing in the entrance to Coffin Cave. (photo by Craig Hines)



until I got my "wilderness legs." I'd read an Internet account by two guys who'd hiked the White's Creek Trail in February, 2001. They reported it was not well marked, and sometimes hard to follow. My goal was to arrive on the bluffs overlooking the Eleven Point by nightfall. We could then get water in the morning, before cave-searching our way northeast across Freeman Hollow to-

deer stand. I chatted with him for some time, learning that we were just to the south of an old CCC camp (i.e., the Civilian Conservation Corps, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal work program and conservation initiative passed by Congress in 1933, in the depths of the Great Depression), and also of a sinkhole cave "a good quarter mile to the north up this first draw." Because we

didn't want to compromise his hunting, we changed our plan and decided to go back out to the County Road J, then enter the Wilderness on the next section road a mile to the north. We'd hike first due west to Fiddler Spring, smack in the middle of the property, and camp there. I assumed this named spring flowed year-round. If it didn't, we'd be getting thirsty by morning.

By the time we got parked and ready to go, it was already 4:30 p.m. Time flies when you're having fun -- let alone chatting up every local in the county (which, of course, is half the fun.) This time we left the rifle behind; the extra weight just wasn't worth it. We set off on an old logging road marked on the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) topo map, but not on the topo in the USFS brochure. This path angled northwest for a mile and a quarter, then southwest at a corresponding angle an equal distance. According to the USGS topo, we should see several old road junctures along the way, then a permanent, spring-fed stream at the apex of our route. Once we reached a small sinkhole due west of where we'd parked, after two-and-a-half miles of hiking, we needed to leave the road and navigate due west through timber until we hit the south leg of the White's Creek Trail. Having found that feature -- if we

found that feature, and provided we could follow it -- we would have a quarter-mile hike north around a draw to the Fiddler Spring trail spur, then 200 yards more back west on the spur to Fiddler Spring. It was going to be race against the approaching night. We needed to find that spring, though -- I was only carrying enough water for that evening. Our small, micron-pore pump filter would refill the canteens as soon as we found water.

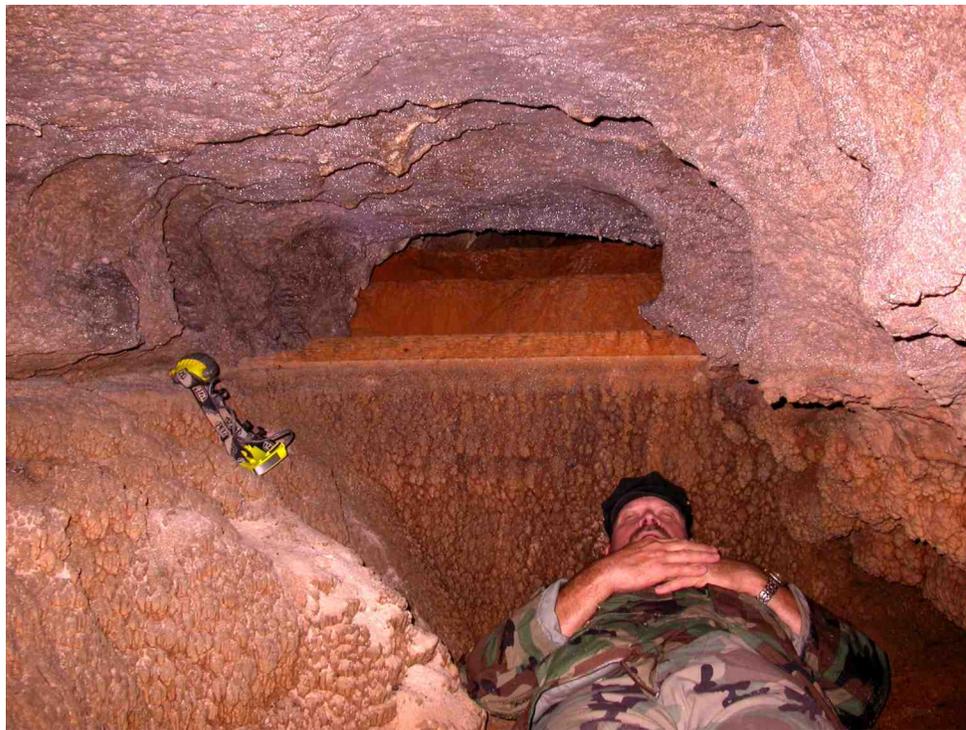
Finally, we found ourselves coursing through the woods with everything we needed for the next three days on our backs (except enough water), savoring the silent, open forest of large

Below: Rimstone dams in Coffin Cave. This photo was taken from the coffin looking toward the entrance. (photo by Craig Hines)

pinus and hardwoods. The failing light, filtering through the partially orange, yellow and red autumn leaves, created a surreal, subaqueous atmosphere. The forest felt empty and primitive, and yes, majestic. Those moments alone were definitely worth the trip.

An hour and a half later, we found two steep sinkholes adjacent to each other next to the road, where I thought the map suggested we would find our single small one. Were these new? Had we taken a wrong turn? Were we lost? We kept walking, because the single sinkhole on the map was a critical landmark for navigating cross-country to Fiddler Spring. Finally, as the light really began to fail, we concluded that we had been heading southwest far too





Left: Jim Cooley demonstrates the formation that gives Coffin Cave its name. (photo by Craig Hines) **Below:** After a heavy rain the coffin floods. Be careful when you take a nap! (photo by DJ Hall)

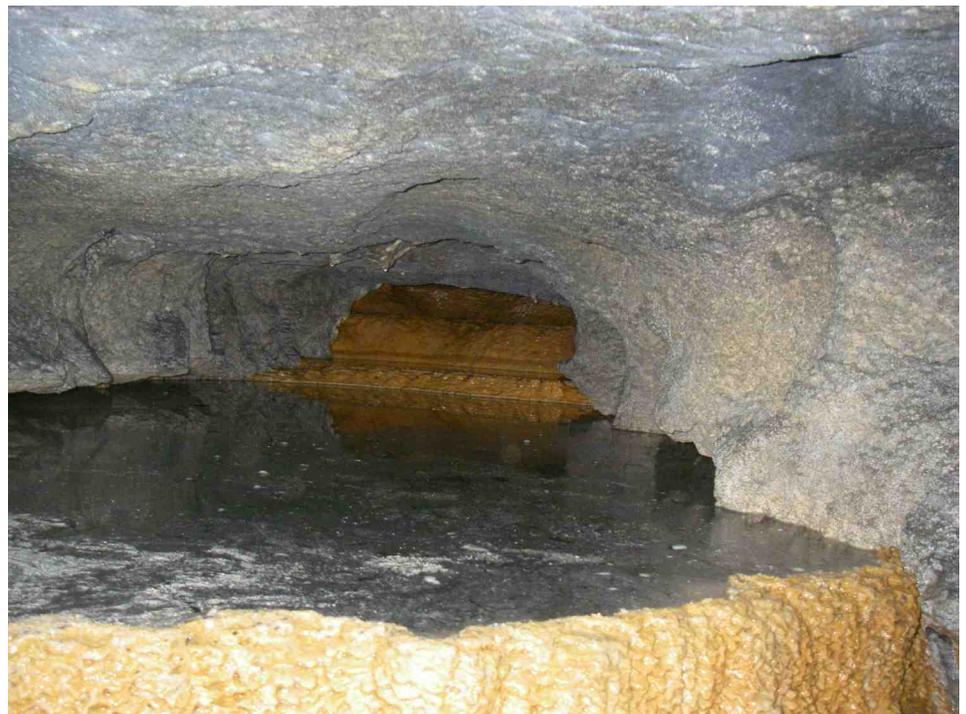
long. Thinking back, we also realized that we'd long since missed the alleged "permanent" stream at the trail's northern apex. We hadn't even noticed a dry creekbed there, let alone a wet one. Wilderness lesson #2: Maps lie. We had noted most of the old road turn-offs, and had apparently taken the correct forks, but had ended up too far south-southwest toward Greenbriar Hollow along a major ridge. We'd clearly missed our turning point for Fiddler Spring. The map suggested we might be right on top of an 817-foot elevation USGS survey benchmark. We looked for it, but not surprisingly, couldn't find it. Those ground-level posts are awfully small.

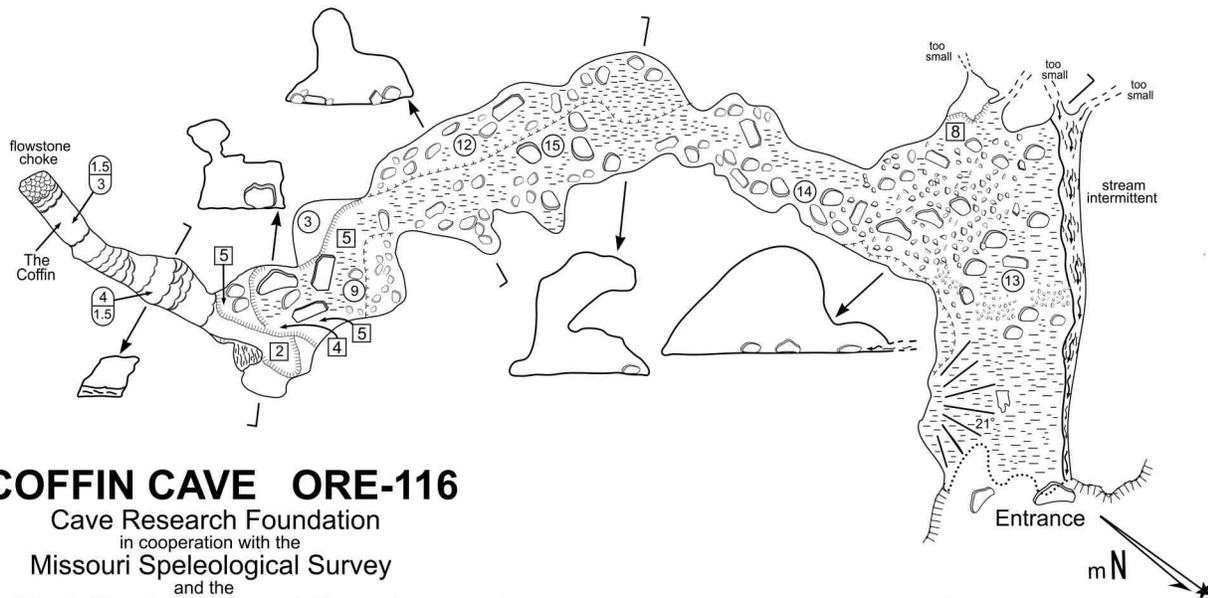
Night was falling. Craig wanted to leave the trail and

head roughly north or northwest through the woods down the gently sloping side of the ridge, toward and then through Freeman Hollow, up over a second ridge, and on to Fiddler Spring. I wasn't so sure. I thought I knew pretty

much where I was on the map. But it wouldn't take long stumbling around in the dark over rough and unfamiliar terrain to get me completely turned around. Been there, done that, don't need no more of them nasty t-shirts. There was also the unanticipated cliff we might have to circumnavigate or, in the worst case scenario, tumble over in the dark.

Our GPS unit was not proving to be the ultimate technological panacea it was supposed to be. Though low on water, I had enough for dinner and probably the night. I suggested we just pitch camp where we were, on high, level ground along a





COFFIN CAVE ORE-116

Cave Research Foundation
in cooperation with the

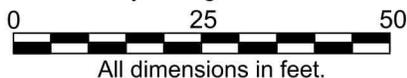
Missouri Speleological Survey
and the

Mark Twain National Forest
Oregon County, Missouri

Suunto and Tape Survey by

Jim Cooley, Dale Curtis & DJ Hall, May 3, 2008.

Surveyed length: 216.8 feet.



Symbol Legend		
	entrance dripline	
	floor ledge / drop (low)	
	ceiling ledge (high)	
	ceiling height (8)	
	floor ledge / drop height (1)	

Cartography by Jim Cooley, January 2010.

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known trail, and try again for the spring at first light. Craig reluctantly agreed – after confessing that he hadn't brought any water at all, since he figured we'd be making camp on the river or at the spring by now. I pitched my bivy, losing a couple of the thin aluminum stakes in the dark, while Craig built a fire. Craig didn't even pitch his tent. He just rolled the tent around his sleeping bag and slept with his head toward the fire. Only four hours into the Irish Wilderness, I thought,

and the kid's already gone feral.

In discussing our location, I suddenly realized that the two sinkholes we'd passed looked impressive because they were so steep, but they weren't very large. Then it dawned on me that, since topo maps are drawn from aerial photographs, the cartographers staring down through magnifying glasses at those twin sinks back in 1965 simply hadn't been able to resolve them, so had recorded them as a single sinkhole. Wilderness lesson

#2A: Maps can fib, too.

Friday morning dawned bright and full of hope. There's nothing like a good night's sleep to infuse an off-course expedition with renewed morale. After a leisurely breakfast of oatmeal and candy bars, I took a 300-yard circuitous hike down the south side of the ridge, since we would soon be headed the other way. I found a large boulder field of spongy limestone or dolomite pockmarked with lots of phreatic cavities. This was serious karst country indeed.



It had to be saturated with caves. We then broke camp and retraced our steps back northeast to the double sink-hole. Forget the GPS; we didn't have Fiddler Spring coordinates anyway. I got out the magnetic compass, shot a 270 degree azimuth, picked a tree roughly 100 yards away, and started pacing distance. I anticipated hitting the White's Creek Trail, 600 yards away, after six such cycles.

Halfway to the destination, we passed within 20 yards of a water-filled sink-hole, with many small trees growing up through a thick algal bloom. It was an unusual and beautiful sight, not least because it confirmed we were exactly where we should be on the map. At this point, I began to have real confidence in my orienteering skills – and also in the technique of pacing dis-

tances. We were navigating within plus or minus ten meters. While shooting my seventh azimuth at 600 paces, I said, "OK, let's start looking for the White's Creek Trail." Craig laughed and pointed to a silver-diamond blaze on a tree not ten yards in front of me.

Heading north took us to the edge of the anticipated deep draw toward Fiddler Spring. We found a shortcut down a switchback and skipped walking the trail around the draw, instead carefully sidestepping down a scree chute to the creek.

Above Left: A Tri-colored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*) in Coffin Cave. The coating on the bat is droplets of dew. **Below:** A Big Brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*) in Coffin Cave. (both photos by Marcello Kramer)

This would not be a propitious place to break an ankle. The trail picked up again at the bottom, where we quickly found a large wooden junction marker with mileage, one sign pointing northeast toward "Camp Five Pond -- 5 miles," the other pointing back the way we'd come, toward "White's Creek Cave – 1.5 miles." A couple of yards down a side trail there was another post in the ground, presumably for a pointer to Fiddler Spring, but the sign was missing. We made another note to report the damage to the Forest Service. Two hundred yards down this trail found us filling our canteens at Fiddler Spring.

After taking a break, I





Left: Craig Hines in one of the entrances to Niche Cave. (photo by Jim Cooley)

scouted for an hour down White's Creek; Craig explored upstream. We found the same thing: Lots of thick, scrubby brush and tough walking. Frequent flooding and too much sunlight on silt had made a jungle of vegetation. I wasn't too keen on walking the bottoms anyway. That's what everyone does, because it's hard to get lost that way and it's easier than climbing the steep hills. Consequently, most of the Irish Wilderness cave locations in the MSS database were low. Randy Long had said he'd scoured this area anyway, and I was glad he had: It was a pain in the butt to walk through. If Coffin Cave was down here, someone would have found it already.

We ate a hot lunch back at the spring and reconsidered our search plan. Coffin Cave

had been marked on Wihebrink's map on the ridge above us, a few hundred yards to the west. Although no one had specifically said so at the NCKMS, surely someone -- probably several someones -- had looked there, too. I pointed out to Craig that, come to think of it, I'd seen this map resolution issue before, such as we'd had with the dual sinkholes, when working with inexperienced folks on topos. People often would point to a draw on the map and say, "There, that's the draw we went to," when in fact the location they were indicating was several hundred yards beyond anywhere they could possibly have been. The draw they were thinking about, although it looked substantial in the woods, actually didn't cause the slight-

est wiggle in the contour lines on the map -- it was not big enough to be resolved by the mappers. Amateurs also commonly overestimate distances on a topo map. I'd seen people walk 300 yards down a fence line perpendicular to a section road, then pinpoint themselves on the topo map well past the middle of the section -- at least 880 yards from the road. Wilderness lesson #3: Accurate orienteering demands serious, quantitative attention to details.

Our search plan for Coffin Cave needed revision. I proposed we go to White's Creek Cave first -- as much because I wanted to see it, even though the gate would be locked, as because it put us in a region I suspected might be a good place to start a search. I also wanted to get a feel for the geology and structure of the only other known big cave on the area, plus a sense of the terrain surrounding it. Then I suggested that instead of searching as we headed to White's Creek Cave, we search on the way back, navigating from a well defined terrain feature that we could not mistake.

In the event, Craig couldn't help himself, having come this far into the woods, and decided to search parallel to me over the edge of the ridge as I walked the White's



Creek Trail toward the known cave. But this proved to be slow, as we kept losing track of each other in the open but vast and vertical woods. We spent more time searching for each other than for Coffin Cave. Wilderness cave-hunting lesson #4: Bring radios AND whistles -- you're going to need them. Finally I convinced Craig to get on the trail with me and head for the gated cave; we could search afterward. And so we did. Counting paces now, I found that 2,700 steps put me 1.5 miles down the trail and in front of White's Creek Cave. My stride was darned close to a yard.

On arriving at White's Creek Cave, we discovered the gate had been breached high on the left-hand side.

(See photo in previous issue of *The Guano - Ed.*) Two empty Bud Light cans, an empty 7-Up can, and an empty plastic water bottle littered the entrance. We documented the

damage with the digital camera, took GPS readings, but minded our manners – and ethics – by not entering the cave, to avoid disturbing hibernating Indiana bats (and also because it's just plain illegal.) Such restraint merits the Congressional Medal of Conservation -- it was an awfully interesting, inviting cave, and we'd walked one hell of a long way to get there. After collecting the trash, we pushed the broken bar back into position, hoping to convince casual hikers that the cave could not be entered. I noticed that this cave could not have been seen from the creek, or even very far away, although the entrance was substantial.

Above Left: A cricket in Coffin Cave. (photo by Marcello Kramer) **Below:** A group of snails just outside Coffin Cave. (photo by DJ Hall)





Above: A Big Brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*) hanging in a crack in Coffin Cave. (photo by Marcello Kramer)

Working from a well known terrain feature, we started our search for caves while heading back to camp. I would stay high on the ridge along the trail, while Craig worked the side at the same height as we'd found White's Creek Cave, which had not been low in a streambed, but two-thirds of the way up a long, heavily wooded slope. Perhaps similar caves might favor the same geographic stratum. My plan was to pace off a quarter of a mile, while Craig the Mountain Goat searched along the side of the slope that far before coming up and meeting me. Then we'd repeat the process, on the sixth iteration arriving back in camp. We both recognized it would be easy to get permanently separated in such terrain without frequent, planned rendezvous.

I paced my 440 yards up the trail and stopped. Feel-

ing a little sleepy, I laid down for a catnap, a skill I've perfected during years of corporate wage slavery. When I awoke, I stepped over to the edge of the ridge and looked for Craig. At that instant he crested a saddle 100 yards back down the path. Four hundred and forty yards easily becomes 340 yards when you're walking along a steep, rough slope. I hollered and waved. Craig yelled for me to come down. I could tell from the grin on his face he'd found something – and anything he found would be exciting. There were no known caves in this area.

"I found Coffin Cave!" he cried, as I drew closer.

"You're kidding. How do you know?"

"I found the coffin. Right in the back of the cave."

"There's no report of a

coffin in this cave," I snorted. "What about the white man murdered by Indians – any sign of him?"

"No, but there is a coffin. It's a dry rimstone dam, two foot tall, exactly the size of a coffin. Dripstone bulging down the sides even looks like a casket lining. I found four other caves – or two others, each with two entrances, and a long, low shelter."

"Wow!" I said.

Need I say more?

Craig led me down the slope, past the two pairs of cave openings and the shelter ... and suddenly we were at Coffin Cave. It just kind of jumped out at us.

I could see why this cave had resisted discovery, even though the entrance was 25 feet wide and ranged between 10 and 20 feet tall. It was technically located in a rock outcrop that ran east and west, but the passage itself faced northeast with an entrance that canted backwards into the ridge. It would not be easily visible through heavy brush in the creek drainage 75 feet below. Besides, as one of my favorite Far Side cartoons points out: People, like deer, rarely look up.

We took the obligatory pictures and GPS readings and explored the cave quickly, pacing it off at 220 feet. There were 15 dry rimstone dams in the back rising to a rimstone choke, and in-

deed, the last one made a perfect coffin. We both noticed a log on the boulder-strewn floor a third of the way into the cave, which had obviously been used to climb up to a high ledge. But time was against us. It was after 5:00, and we were over an hour's fast walk from camp. We had to abandon our baby for another day. On the way back up to the trail, we photographed the other new caves, but the camera battery was getting low. Lesson #5: Recharge the camera before the trip. We also forgot to get GPS locations for the other caves.

That night at camp we celebrated our incredible beginner's luck – at least as best we could with freeze-dried spaghetti, celery sticks and oranges -- then toasted ourselves with fresh filtered spring water. We had made our bones with the Forest

Service, and probably Scott House, too. I couldn't wait to type the e-mail entitled: We found Coffin Cave!

Saturday morning we lingered in camp, denying the fact that our adventure was over and it was time to go home. Craig made baked potatoes for breakfast, without aluminum foil; no point packing out any more grub than we had to. The five-mile hike to the Camp Five Pond trailhead was our longest continuous trek with full packs. Being all uphill, though on a lessening grade, it was far enough. It being now the weekend, and since we were closing on a major trailhead, we passed two groups on the way out, one on horseback and a second small gaggle of backpackers. We also passed an occupied campsite. Just to remind us who was boss, near the end of our walk the Wilderness

tempted us take a wrong turn onto an old logging trail, which led south of Camp Five Pond. We quickly realized we made a "mistake" because of all the cobwebs we were collecting (the horses and hikers should have knocked down all of those), but we were trending in the right direction so we continued anyway, simply to follow the less beaten path. When finally we intersected County Road J, a short walk back north on the shoulder to the official trailhead formally completed our walk-about at 1:55 p.m. Craig left his pack with me and set out to hitchhike south down J to retrieve the van, parked four miles away. Seven cars passed him in the next hour but no one picked him up, much to his chagrin. By walking fast and jogging part of the way, he was able to return with the van by 3:00. Though we stopped for sandwiches in Alton, I still dropped Craig at his home in Stillwell, Kansas at 9:00 p.m.

The MSS and Forest Service folks were almost as excited as we were to find this cave. The last good report, from 1956, stated that a



Left: In February 2008, Jim Cooley descends from Coffin Cave to the White's Creek overflow channel below, during leaf-off. How did this cave, with a 20 foot entrance, go missing for 37 years? No one ever walks this obscure overflow channel, for one thing. (photo by Marcello Kramer)

makeshift ladder used to access a high ledge had broken during that visit. That was the log we'd found among the boulders on the floor, giving us 100% positive identification that this was indeed the long-lost Coffin Cave. It turns out that there were two other, smaller missing caves in the area, White Cave and Niche Cave. Another examination in light of the scanty historical record will be required, but it's likely the two cave-pairs we found are those caves, too. We'd nailed three for the price of one.

As a consequence of finding these caves, Scott House recommended us to Mick Sutton, the CRF coordinator for the MTNF Eleven Point Ranger District. It turns out that the CRF sponsors several

large, long-term karst research and survey projects around the country, usually on Federal land, operating under Letters of Understanding with the appropriate governing agency, sometimes the USFS, sometimes the National Park Service (NPS), sometimes the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and so on. Mick invited Craig and I to join the CRF, an invitation-only organization, and further offered to fund the acquisition of some survey gear, if we'd like to survey and map the caves we'd found for Randy Long. One of the benefits of CRF membership, Mick said, would be an annual invitation to participate in the survey project at Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, which is still on-going after 50 years.

We gained lots of experience on the Irish Wilderness, not to mention several leads. As Scott House told me at the NCKMS, "If you search those southern draws, I guarantee you'll find new caves." We never set foot in the southernmost hollows on the Wilderness, yet we already have three new caves to map and better characterize, and now the gear to do it. We know the quickest ways to get into these remote areas. I have new confidence in my orienteering skills, plus a good idea of what's needed (lots of people with radios and whistles) to effectively search a long, steep ridge from top to bottom.

We are going to be busy on the Irish Wilderness for quite for some time.



Right: A pile of bones, animal scat and other detritus in Coffin Cave. (photo by Marcello Kramer)

April 4, 2009. Student trip in Carroll Cave. Trip report by Bill Gee. Photos by Dr. David Ashley and Bill Gee.

Whenever he gets enough students to sign up, Dr. David Ashley at Missouri Western State University teaches a course called "Intermediate Cave Exploration". This year we arranged to take his students on a short trip in Carroll Cave to practice some biology work and learn about other projects in the cave. Pam Rader participated as the second trip leader, and Suzanna Langowski helped with cave experience. The ten students were:

- Kaitlin Allison
- Megan Davis
- Summer Gemmell
- Laura Kukuc
- Sandra Levy
- Scott Robison
- Matthew Stehly
- Teri Swift
- Chelsea Unzicker
- Michael Voltz

I arrived at the schoolhouse Friday night about 6:00 p.m. Just before sunset Summer, Sandra and Fred (a non-caver) arrived. They had bad directions and had been driving around for over an hour trying to find the schoolhouse. The four of us talked while they pitched tents in the schoolhouse and grilled some steaks. After I went to bed Dr. Ashley and several more students ar-

rived. Suzanna and Pam got there about 11:00 with Suzanna's camper.

In the morning most of us went to Richland for breakfast. We got back to the schoolhouse shortly after 9:00 a.m. The remaining students had all arrived, so we had a full crew. We packed trucks and drove up the hill.

It took most of an hour for everyone to gear up. David, Pam and Suzanna checked out all the students for proper harnesses and other vertic-

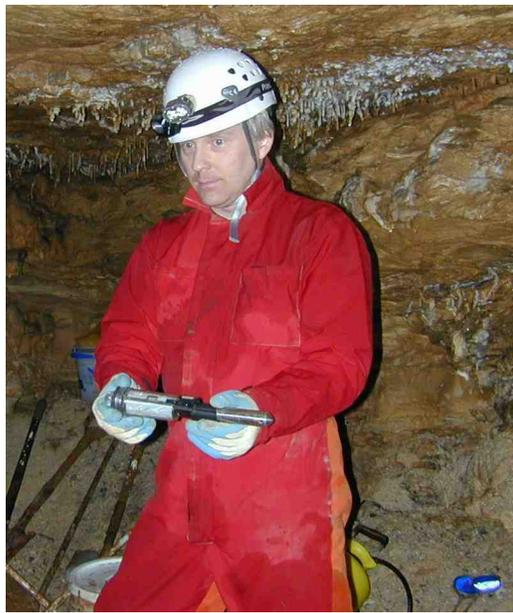
al gear. Mike Voltz, who has been in Carroll Cave before, went down the rope first at about 10:30. I stayed in the tank to help everyone get on rope safely. Mike assisted at the bottom, and Pam and Suzanna checked everyone out before they got into the tank. There were no incidents with the rappel. I was the last one down at about 11:30.

After some introductory remarks and group photos, we split the students into two teams. I demonstrated how the data loggers are downloaded using the barometric pressure logger at the ladder.

We took everyone over to Thunder Falls for the usual tourist stuff. After a few

Below: The class prepares to enter the cave. Front row from left: Dr. David Ashley, Sandy Levy, Megan Davis, Bill Gee, Susanna Langowski, Pam Rader. Back row: Kaitlin Allison, Chelsea Unzicker, Michael Voltz, Summer Gemmell, Teri Swift, Scott Robison, Laura Kukuc, Matt Stehly (photo by Bill Gee)





Left: Bill Gee demonstrates how the data loggers are downloaded. **Below Right:** Measuring isopods on a rock. **Below Left:** Kaitlin Allison measures isopods while Matt Stehly records the data. (all photos by Dr. David Ashley)

minutes and many photos, Suzanna and I left with Team 1 to go to the Rimstone Room. Pam, David and Team 2 started an isopod survey going upstream from Thunder Falls.

It took us about 45 minutes to get to the Rimstone Room. This is the last big room before the crawlway and the Water Barrier. I downloaded the data logger, then we had a sandwich lunch. After that we examined the bait sticks. They are well populated with

mites and several kinds of springtails. Everyone took a look at the dry rimstones, then we headed back.

We arrived back at the ladder about 2:30 to find Team 2 having their lunch. They had counted and measured isopods in three riffles and examined bait sticks near the ladder. Pam and I swapped student teams, then we each repeated what we had just done. Suzanna and I took Team 2 to the Rimstone Room while Pam and David did more isopod counting in Thunder River.

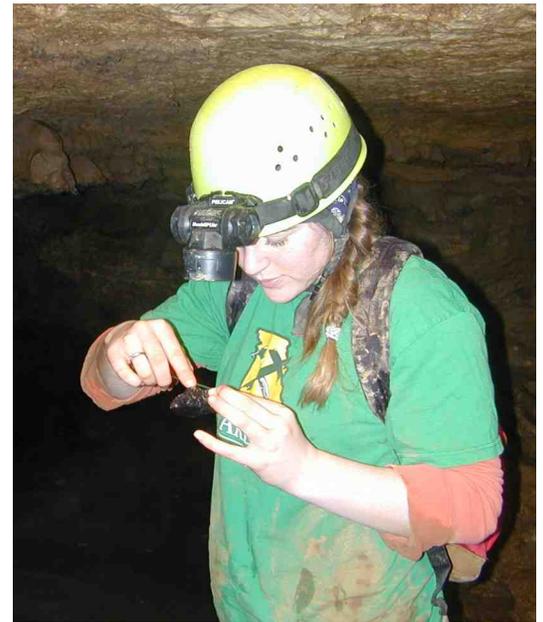
Team 2 moved faster than Team 1, with the result that we were back at the ladder shortly after 4:00. Team 1 was not around. About 10 minutes later they arrived, having been upstream in Thunder River to the first shower head.

We all geared up for the climb out. I went first so I could help everyone get off the rope and out of the shaft safely. The students climbed in groups of three.

There were two minor incidents during the climb out. One student started suffering an asthma attack from the exertion of the climb. She had an inhaler with her, and

another was with her friend who was in the same climbing group. I could hear her whistling for the last 40 feet or so of the climb. As soon as she got out of the shaft she dug out her inhaler and got a nice big breath. Within 5 minutes she was breathing more or less normally, and had no problem getting out of the tank.

The other incident involved the safety attachment



to the rope. About half of the students used a handled ascender rigged as if it were a chest croll. It was fastened to the seat harness with a carabiner, and a light line around the back of the neck held it up so it would go up the rope easily. This worked well, except for one student who was wearing a light rain jacket. A fold of the jacket material got sucked into the ascender. She finished the

climb but was in semi-panic mode when she got to the top. Once we got a tether on her, she calmed down and there was no problem getting out of the shaft.

On closer examination I saw that the material was wedged in the shell side of the ascender, not in the teeth. Had the ascender been called on it would have functioned. Also, she was the top climber in a group of three. Had she slipped, the other two would have blocked her from a major fall.

Everyone was out of the cave by 5:30. We were changed, packed up and the cave locked by 6:00pm. Back at the schoolhouse I downloaded cameras to my laptop, then made some CDs for several people. All the students and David left to drive home. Suzanna, Pam and I went into town for dinner at Senor Pepper's where we found many of the others!

Suzanna, Pam and I camped Saturday night. I was packed and on the road



shortly after 8:00 Sunday.

Above: Group photo after entering the cave. (photo by Dr. David Ashley)

Below Left: Mud-covered cave pearls? Dr. Ashley's wedding ring is in the photo to give some scale. **Below:** The end of one of the bait sticks has many springtails on it. (Photos by Dr. David Ashley)





July 18, 2009. Biology project at Carroll Cave. Trip report and photos by Bill Gee.

Several years ago while helping with the mapping of the UL2-90 side passage, I noticed a number of cave fish in isolated pools. The passage is muddy and meandering, with very little flow to the stream. During the mapping trips the stream was not flowing at all. How did fish get into isolated pools?

The biology project trip on July 18, 2009 gave us a few answers. We found that the

stream is not always at zero flow. We found both salamanders and fish, though nothing else.

I drove down Friday night arriving at the school house about 6:30 p.m. Jeff camped at a motel in Camdenton. DJ and Craig went to the Deer Creek Sportsman Club along with Jim Cooley, and Andy drove down very early Saturday morning.

Andy arrived at the school

Above: Bait sticks in Convention Hall. The tendrils extend several feet out from the sticks to a fungus halo. (photo by Bill Gee)

house about 7:30 and immediately stretched out for a nap. Jeff arrived about 30 minutes later. Jeff and I talked for a while, then about 8:30 we drove on up the hill.

A mapping crew was in the cave, so the cave was open and the hole rigged with a rope. Although they did not intend to be out until the next day, I put a bagged

rope next to the culvert ready to rig, just in case they came out before us.

Andy drove up about 9:00 and a few minutes later DJ and Craig arrived. Jim Cooley had originally planned to go on the trip, but his back was hurting so he backed out.

By 9:30 we were all dressed and ready to head down the hole. I went first so I could get the data loggers downloaded while the others came down. We were all in the cave in about 20 minutes.

The hike out to UL2 was uneventful. We noticed the water was slightly murky, probably from the mapping crew who were out at the Second Azure Pool. We arrived at UL2 about 10:20. After a quick break we headed on in.

About 100 feet inside UL2 is a dye trace bug. I exchanged the bug for a fresh one, took a water sample and we went on. Just past the decorations area is another data logger which I downloaded. We arrived at Convention Hall about 10:55.



The bait sticks in Convention Hall are throwing out a lot of tendrils. Dr. Ashley photographed them during our trip in June. I tried to get some more photos, but my camera memory card was acting up. I got a photo of a salamander near the bait sticks. I tried to get pictures of the bait sticks in the Conference Room, but the camera was still not cooperating.

There is both a low road and a high road going to UL2-90. We tried the high road but missed a turn somewhere. It took us a while to find the side passage. It was close to 11:45 by the time we all got there. We saw several fish and salamanders in the stream near the UL2-90 side passage entrance.

UL2-90 is also known as the "3M" passage ... Muddy Meandering Madness. It is not a large passage. The stream wanders from side to side and has created what Andy calls "Spanky Banks". The trail goes up and over a number of very slippery mud banks. For the first few hundred feet we did not see much of the stream.

The stream was flowing, though not much. It was about the same flow as Carroll River downstream from the Second Water Barrier. We estimated about 12 feet per minute velocity in one of the narrow portions. We took our time so we could

Right: A salamander in Convention Hall. (photo by Bill Gee)

search for fish and other critters. Even so it was hard work just moving through the passage.

The stream bed is mostly mud and silt. We found very few rocks and so did not spend much time looking for isopods and snails.

We arrived at the passage fork about 1:30 p.m. where we stopped for a hot meal break. After the break Andy decided he wanted to stay put and rest for the trip back. We decided that Craig and I would take the right fork while DJ and Jeff took the left fork. We agreed to meet back no later than 4:00 which would give us an hour and a half.

I've been down the left fork. It goes a few hundred feet beyond the fork, then takes a sharp right and ends at a breakdown pile. There is a very small passage where the stream comes out. It might be passable by a tiny team. We were not up for it during the mapping trips and even less so now. Anyone going up that passage will utterly destroy any life in the stream. DJ and Jeff took a bit less than an hour to the breakdown and back, and they reported seeing no fish or salamanders.

Craig and I went down the left fork. There is a trickle of water coming out of the right fork. After 13 survey stations it turns into a nasty but dry squeeze passage with several levels. Craig squirmed

through a tight spot and found more passage beyond. A bit of searching found another way into that area, so I followed. We climbed, crawled, squeezed and generally oozed for about 20 or 30 minutes. It was very hard work, and we did not find any more stream. Eventually we decided to turn it around and go back. We were gone about 45 minutes. We found a single salamander.

Craig and I got back to Andy first. DJ and Jeff arrived a few minutes later.

We all got packed up and started out. The trip out was not any easier. We decided to take a belly crawl instead of the stream crawl, which saved us some effort for about 40 feet. It took us something over 30 minutes to get back to the side passage entrance.

This time we took the low road back to the Conference Room. It went quickly and we had no trouble finding the way. On the way out of the Conference Room I sat on a rock which collapsed

and rolled down the hill along with me! It was a good size rock, perhaps 100 pounds, but fortunately I was not injured. We took the holes one at a time, and it was a good thing. Anyone below me would have been seriously injured.

We arrived back at the ladder about 5:30 and were all out of the cave before 6:00.

Below: This 2008 photo of the bait sticks in Convention Hall clearly shows the halo of fungus. (photo by Bill Gee)



March 11-16, 2010. Photo trip at Ennis Cave.
Trip report and photos by Rick Hines.

At Randy Rose's invitation Kay and I and Jim and Pic made the long drive from KC to Ennis on March 11, 2010. We were joined at Ennis Cave by Randy Rose, his brother Kevin and the Rose brothers' childhood friend, Paul Miller. Randy had detailed lists of the spots he wanted photographed for the book he is writing on Ennis cave. Randy has many photos of Ennis but wanted specific new shots to help him describe all of the major rooms and passages in Ennis. We did two similar photo trips last year. From March 12 - 15 Randy led us into the cave each day with his list. Each of the four trips lasted six to seven hours.

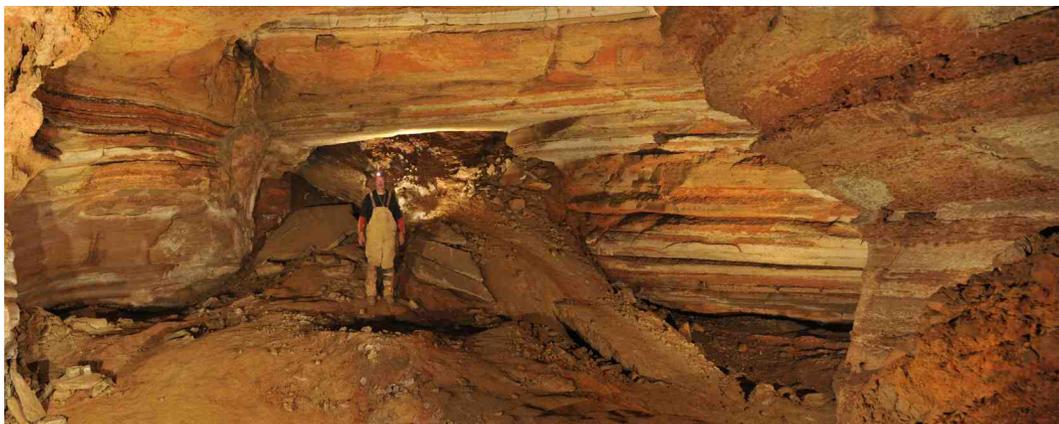
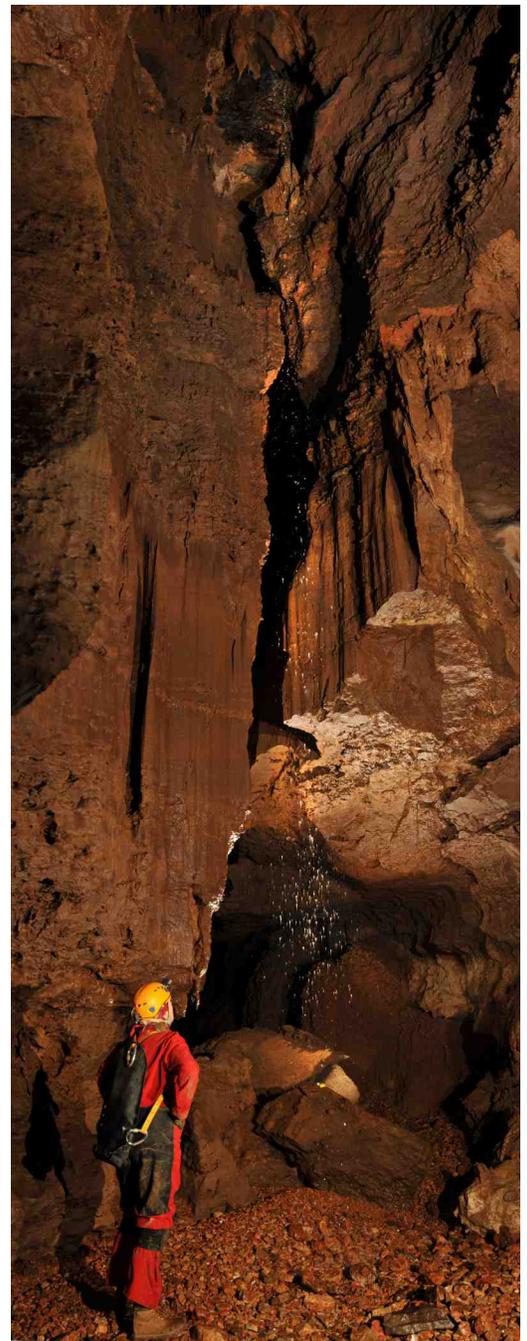
Jim, Pic, Rick, Randy, and Paul made all four trips. Kay did two trip and Linda Russell, a friend of Kay's, did one trip (Linda's first wild cave trip).

I carried my Nikon D700, IR flash, a Nikon 50 mm 1.4 lens, and a Nikon 105 mm 2.8 macro lens. Everyone else on the crew carried a Vivitar 285 flash with a Wein optical trigger. Most shots used more than one flash and as many as six.

Over 600 raw shots were taken over the four days. Many overlapping shots that were taken have been merged into single images using PhotoShop CS4. The raw shots were reduced to 162 images delivered to Randy. A few of the images have been used to build a video slideshow using ProShow Gold 4.0. The video is available on Youtube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioVLkwNfUWU>

If you are interested in a higher resolution version of the slideshow or the full resolution images please contact me (rickhines@aol.com).

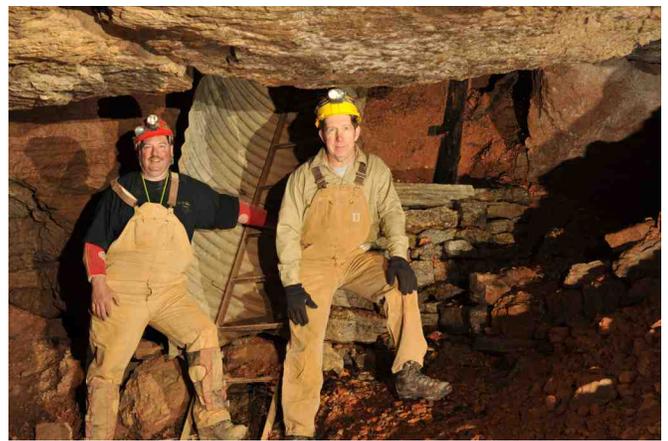


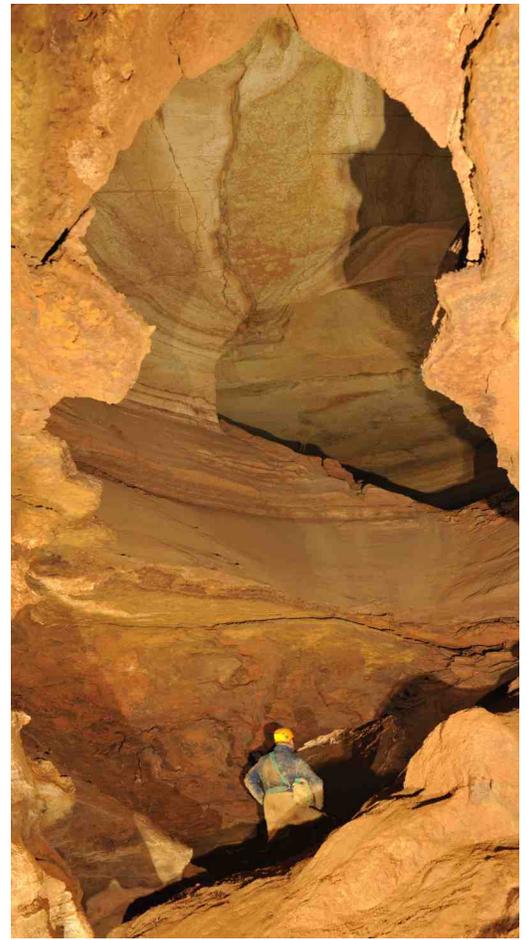
Above: A 40 foot waterfall in the entrance passage.

Left: Looking up into the West Maze final breakdown room (widow maker) from inside the Anthodite Room. (Photos by Rick Hines)

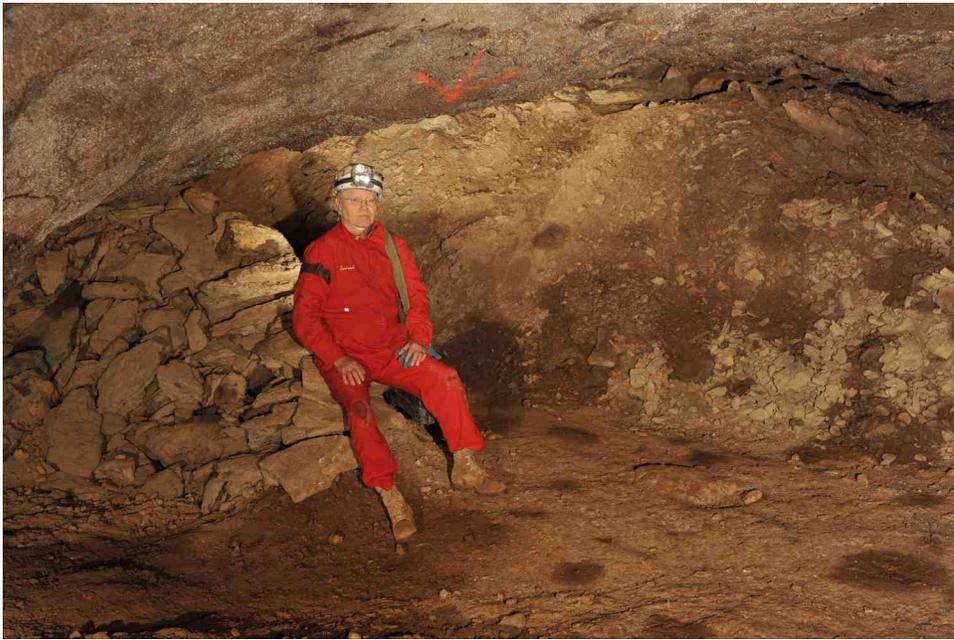


Above: Mud covered anthodite needles in the Overpass above the Crown Room just upstream from the Winged Victory in the upper main passage. The model is Jim Cooley.
Left: Pic Walenta in Column Hall
Below: Randy Rose (L) and Paul Miller at the base of the entrance ladder. (Photos by Rick Hines)





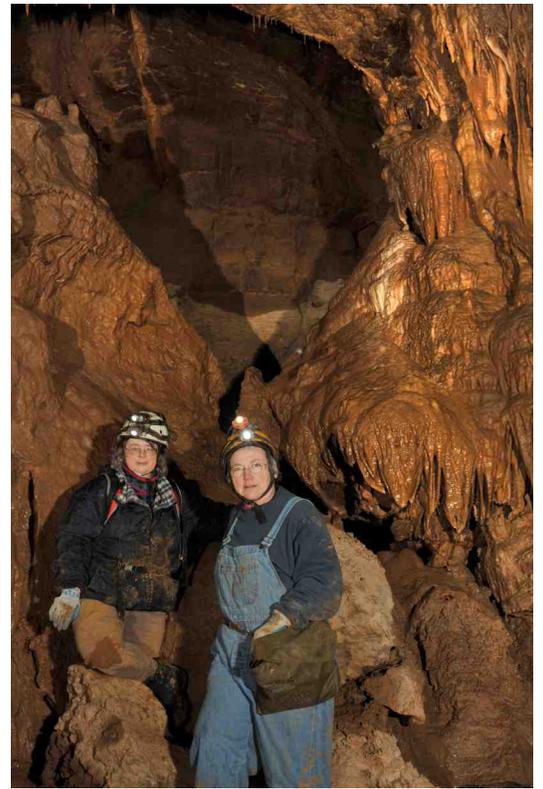
Above and Left: The Contour Band Room in the Main Maze. (Photos by Rick Hines)



Above: Rick Hines near the cave entrance.

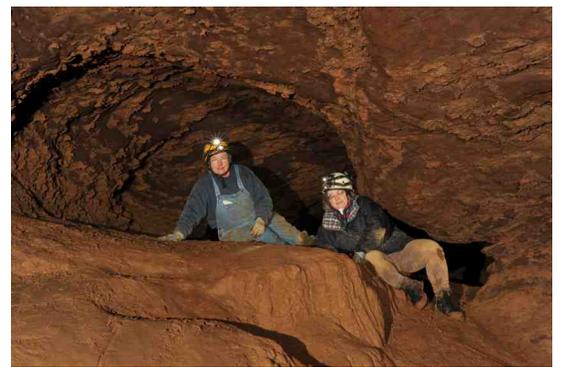
Left: Linda Russell (L) and Kay Hines in Column Hall.

Below: Randy Rose at the entrance to Tim's Dig. This is just past the Breakdown Room.
(Photos by Rick Hines)





Above: Formations in the Anthrodite Room of the West Maze. **Left:** Randy Rose at the entrance to the lower Downstream Passage off the Broad Room. **Right:** Kay Hines (L) and Linda Russell. This passage leads from the Broad Room to a 60 foot waterfall. (Photos by Rick Hines)

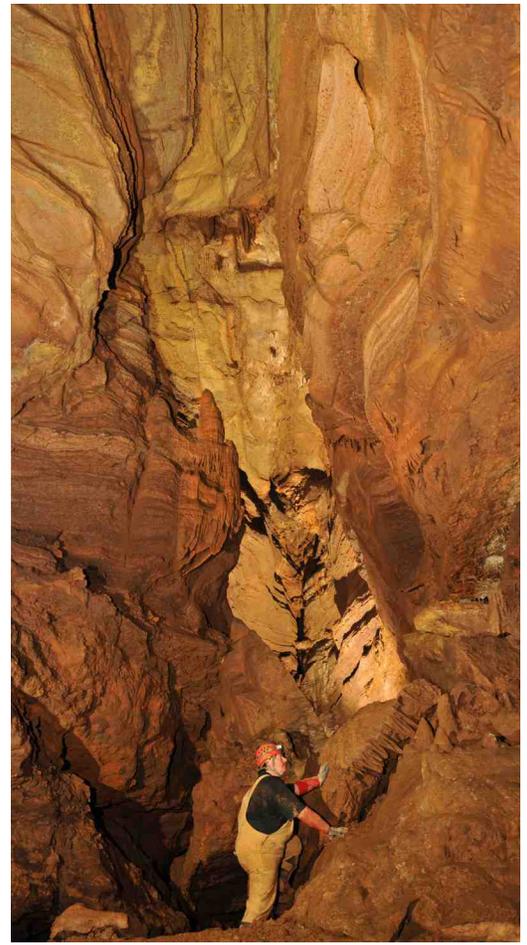
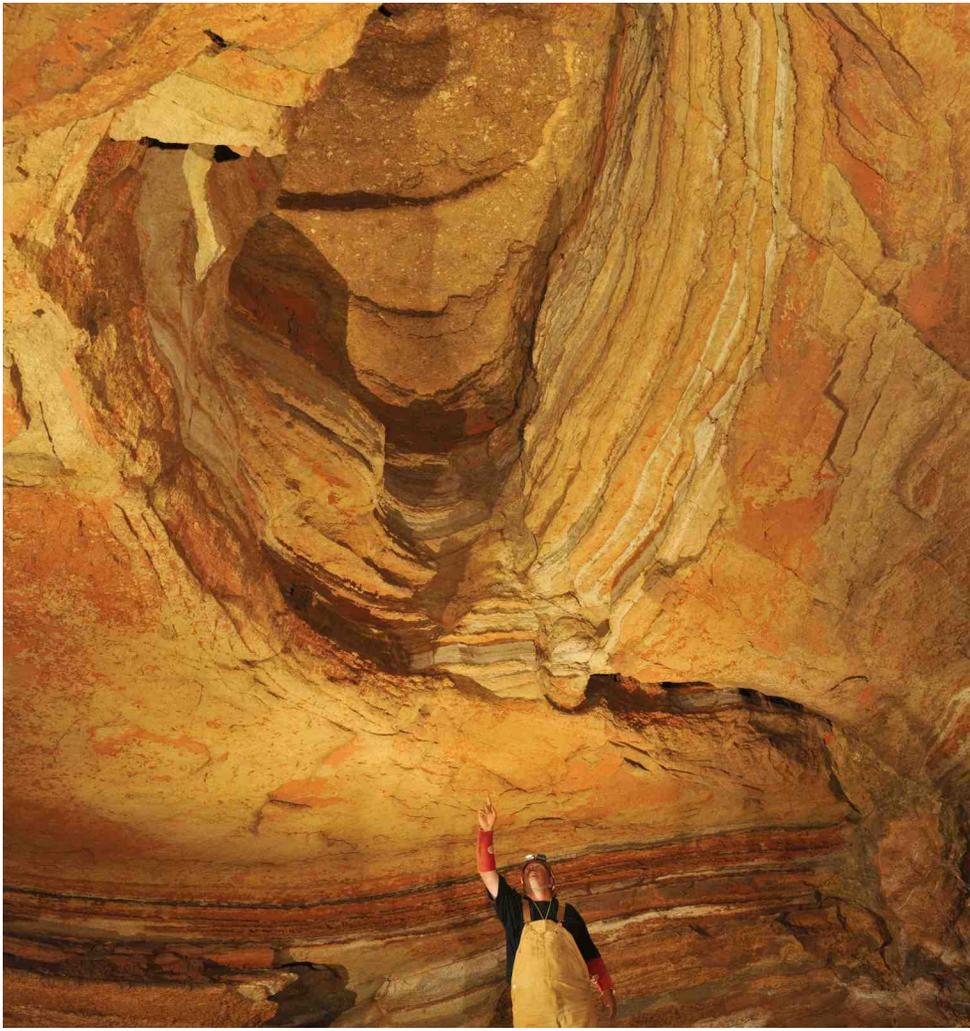




Above: Gypsum flower in the Cottonball Room, Central Maze area.

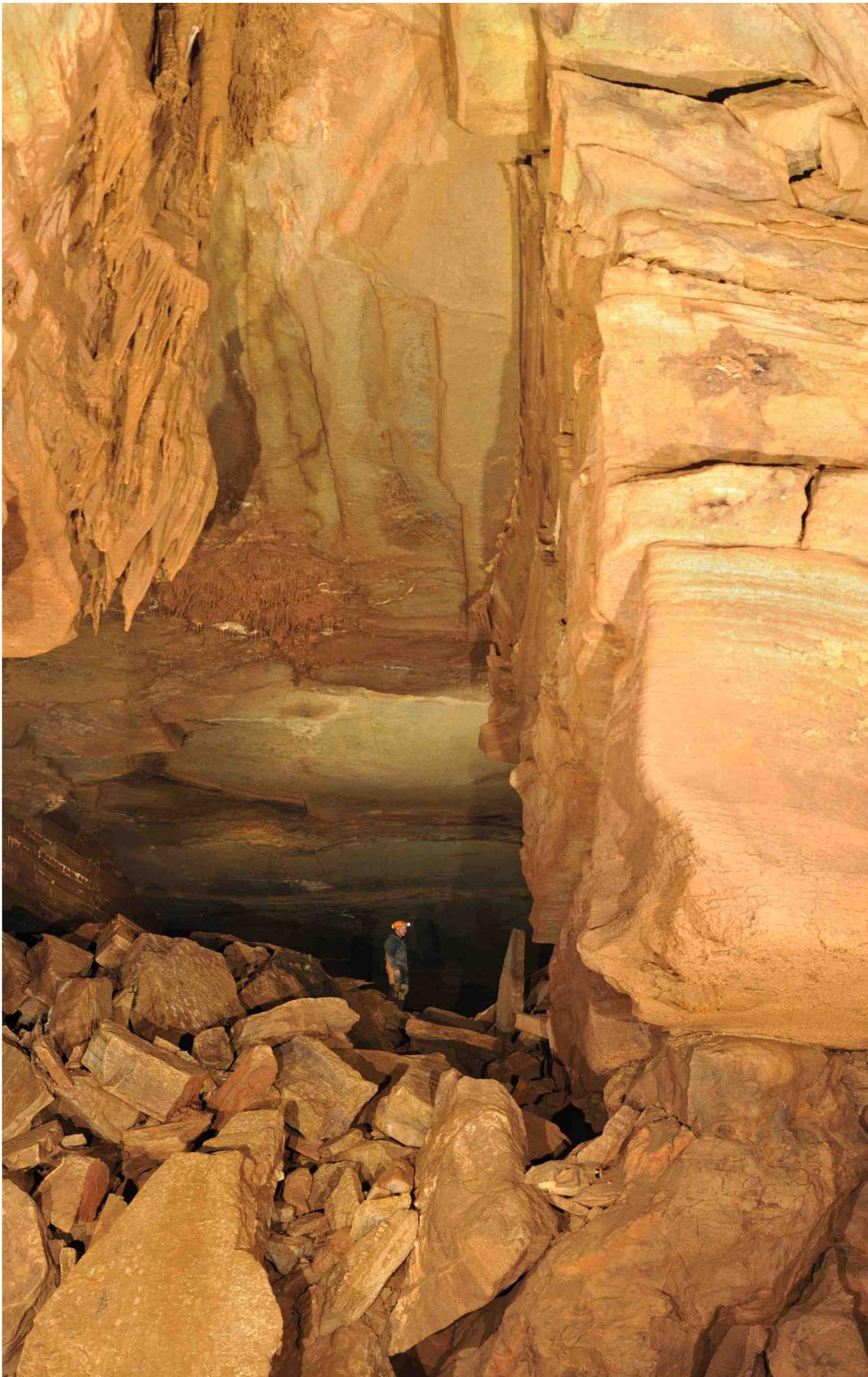
Right: Pic Walenta in Houdini's Hideaway. (Photos by Rick Hines)





Above: Anthodite Room in West Maze. **Above Right:** Entrance to Gravel Falls from Breakdown Room. This goes to the 100 Foot Waterfall. **Below:** Pic Walenta and Jim Cooley in the Breakdown Room. (Photos by Rick Hines)





Left: Jim Cooley near the west end of the Breakdown Room. (Photo by Rick Hines)

Right: Cottonball Room in the Central Maze. Jim Cooly is sitting on top of a natural bridge while Pic Walenta stands below.

Below: Nightmare Gallery unique formations past the Breakdown Room and right before the entrance to Avenue E. (Photos by Rick Hines)

