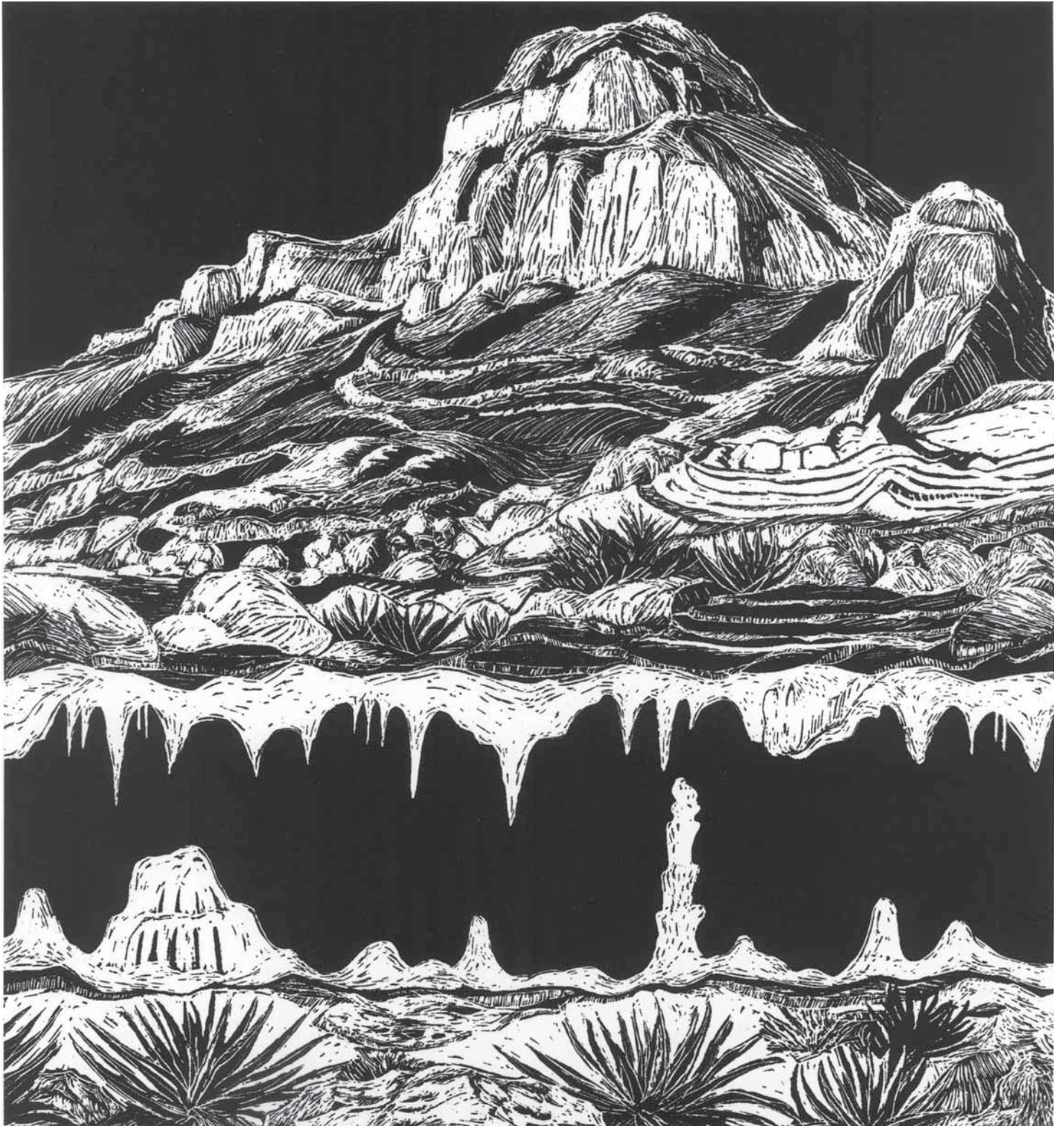


ILLUMINATIONS

The Publication of the NSS Arts & Letters Section

Issue No.1

Spring, 1998



Illuminations



The Publication of the NSS Arts & Letters Section Issue No.1

Spring, 1998

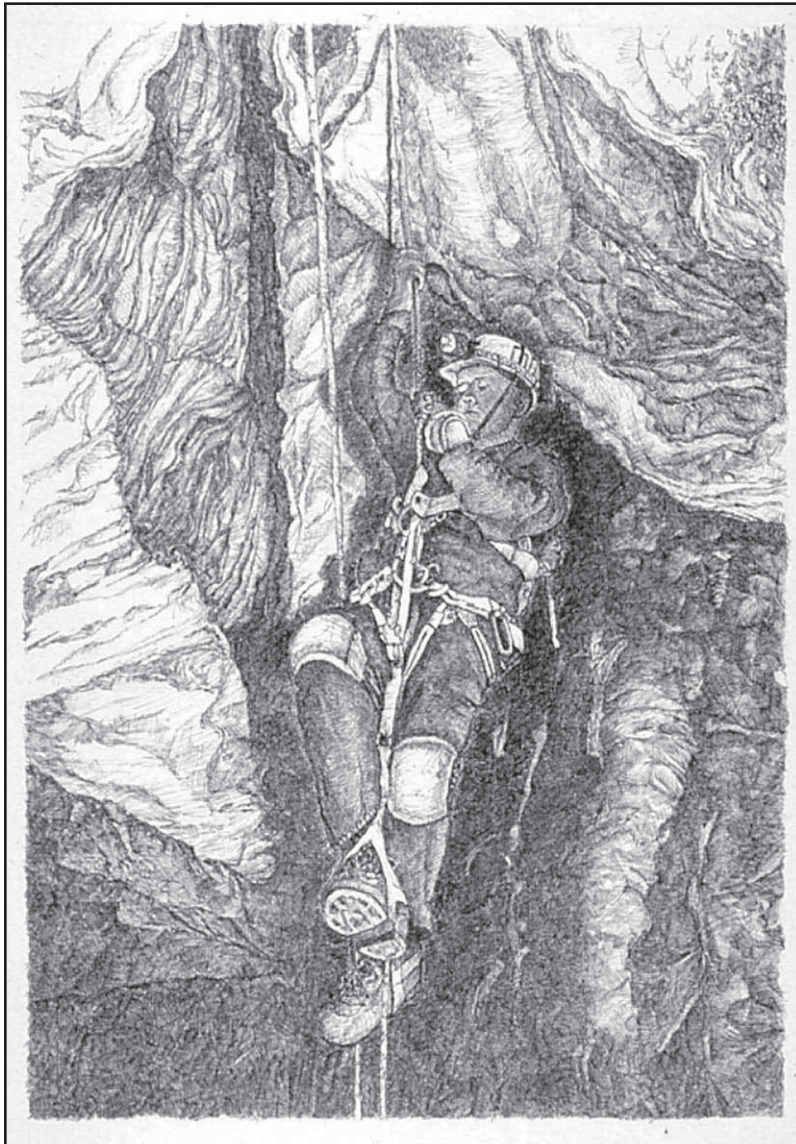
Section Officers

Chairman / Editor

Paul Steward -NSS# 35687
277 Clamer Rd.
Trenton, NJ. 08628
609-530-9743
pddb@juno.com

Vice-Chairman / Treasurer

John Tudek -NSS# 36021
320 Laurel Place
E. Rutherford, NJ. 07073
201-933-5327
hewhocaves@mindspring.com



Front cover

“Guadalupe Mountain, Guadalupe Cave”
by Lois Lyles.

This original scratchboard was inspired by the landscape (both outer and inner) of Carlsbad Caverns National Park, where Lois spends much of her time caving.

Inside cover

“Doug on Rope”
by Kenneth Storey

Back cover

“Islands In The Darkness”
by Jerry Wallace

Illuminations is the official publication of the Arts and Letters Section. Section SS-22 of the **National Speleological Society**. ”1998 for individual authors whose work appears herein. Contents published with their permission. Inquiries for reprinting should be directed to the authors; contact addresses will be provided upon written request of this editor. Opinions expressed in *Illuminations* are not necessarily those of the Section nor the NSS. Questions regarding membership should be addressed to the Treasurer. Material for publication should be sent to the editor.

Contents

Fiction and Humor

The Pit of Desire	by Lou Simpson	Page 2
Beginnings	by Paul Steward	Page 2
Letter to CEO of McDonald's	by Steven Cohen	Page 7
The Devil's Own	by Rob Knotts	Page 10
An Introduction to Ol'Goffer's Hermetical Dictionary of Caving Terms	by Andy Fluke	Page 13
The Caverns Deep within	by George Clappison	Page 16
A Tribute to Grandpa Jones	by Doug Plemons	Page 17
Old Cavers Never Die	by Stephen Clark	Page 18
Caving With Liza	by Laura Guyer	Page 26
Wink Wink, Nod Nod	by Steven Cohen	Page 28
You Might be Considered a Bad Ass Caver if...	by Lou Simpson	Page 29
Top Ten Signs You're a Sorry Assed Caver	by Lou Simpson	Page 29
The Legend of Mott Hole	by Bob Cohen	Page 30
Dark Water	by John Tudek	Page 32

Drawings

House and Cave	by Dave Hunt	Page 4
Cave Cricket cartoon	by Jerry Wallace	Page 9
Ancient Sentinel	by Kenneth Storey	Page 13
Rough Waters Ahead	by Jerry Wallace	Page 15
Cartoon	by Andy Fluke	Page 24
Dave Elliot in Giants Hole-UK. Cartoon	by Linda Heslop	Page 25
The Big Cheese-Entrance-Vancouver Island	by Linda Heslop	Page 29
Sky Pot Cave-Vancouver Island	by Linda Heslop	Page 31
	by Linda Heslop	Page 37

Poetry and Song

The Jackpot Saga Sonnet	by Juliet Bishop	Page 5
Thoughts on Cavin'	by Martha Hendrix	Page 6
The Room	by Nick Noe	Page 14
Meditation	by Tonya Smothers	Page 14
Pebbles	by W.C. Abernathy	Page 14
Stone Wolf	by Lara Storm	Page 17
A Caver's Dream	by Martha Hendrix	Page 28
The Hodag Song	by Jo Schaper	Page 29
To a Friend Who Quit Caving	by Andy Messer	Page 31
Onondaga Valentine	by Jo Schaper	Page 31

The Pit of Desire

by Lou Simpson

She chose him. Of all the others in the cave, Arachne, the seductively beautiful female, chose him for her companion. She was in heat. That had to explain it.

“Why me?” Webster wondered. “I’m surely not the strongest or the biggest of the males in the group. I’m actually shy, not really good with girls. In fact, I never had much to do with them. She must see the real me, the highly erotic, even sex-crazed, virile male behind the nerd facade.”

“Come down into the pit with me,” Arachne told him when he had followed her out of the hearing of the others. “We’ll rappel down in parallel and find a quiet place to get to know each other.”

She was touching him where no one had ever touched him, and it drove him wild. Already their legs were intertwined, and they were only getting started.

Arachne spun out her line below and started down. “Web” plunged down his own line, struggling to keep up. “They said she was dangerous, that she would ‘eat me alive,’” Web thought. “Well, I’ll bet they wish they were getting ‘eaten’ tonight instead of me.” He licked his lips lasciviously, considering doing some eating of his own when the opportunity arose.

Finally, they were on the bottom. Some, but not very much light penetrated this far, but he could see Arachne’s voluptuous body waiting for him. She was building a “nest” of twigs and leaves that had fallen into the shaft. Then, touching him again, and he doing the same, they embraced, clutching each other together hard, with all their arms and legs.

“I’ve wanted you so much,” she whispered, her sharp teeth catching a glint of light from above.

Web was only too happy to oblige, caressing her all over, intimately. Then, raising his body over hers, he entered her secret place, instinctively knowing what to do. They moved rhythmically, sharing ecstasy, exploding with pleasure.

Afterward Web lay beside her, gazing into her sparkling eyes. Suddenly, Arachne leaped up and giggled, throwing a line over him and wrapping it around him until he was thoroughly restrained.

“This is even kinkier than I expected,” Web thought. “I’ve fantasized about being tied up.” He kept thinking such thoughts as Arachne bit into his neck.

When she had mostly consumed her mate, Arachne, with her hourglass figure, the figure of an hourglass on her abdomen, rested for a while, then purposefully positioned herself over her nest and laid thousands of eggs. These would hatch into an equal number of little black widow spiders and so the cycle of life would go on. Later she followed her line back to the surface where the remaining males whistled at her, the fools, jealous of that naive Webster, father of her many children. Arachne smiled at them.

Beginnings

by Paul Steward

Bill’s eyes lit up as Tom walked into the grotto meeting. He greeted his friend excitedly, relieved he was still alive. Tom was known to disappear for days while caving alone.

“Where have you been? I’ve been worried sick about you all week,” said Bill.

“You’re not going to believe it, I’ve made a big discovery. I found a huge room. The biggest I’ve ever seen!”

“Where? How far away?”

“It’s out beyond the Forbidden Zone.”

Bill stepped back from his friend with a feared look.

“Are you crazy! No one goes out there. If the Elders found out you’d be stopped from caving forever. They may even report you to the State. And then, who knows what THEY would do to you. I could get in trouble just for knowing you went out there. Promise me you’ll never go back.”

“Will you just calm down. No one knows but you. Now, let me tell you what I found. It’s a two-day journey to an area I call Dome City. I finally found a narrow dome and climbed up into it. I climbed for an hour until I came up into a room. When I looked around I saw nothing and I mean nothing. With my strongest light I couldn’t see any

walls or a ceiling. It's huge! I was too excited to explore. I wanted to come back and get you.

"It sounds cool, but I'm not going out there. It's not worth it. There is plenty of cave right here to keep me happy."

Quietly, one of the older members of the grotto approached Bill and Tom.

"May I have a word with you two?"

His name was Wes. He was one of the founding members of the grotto and quite respected throughout the caving community. Together the three walked to a quiet corner of the room.

"I overheard the conversation you two were having. I know you both have a lot of energy and excitement for exploring, this is good, but I will advise you guys to stay away from the Forbidden Zone. That is a dangerous place.

"Have you ever been there?" Tom asked. "Do you know of the room I found?"

"I have never been there, but I have lost many friends who have tried. The room you speak of is just a legend, passed down from many generations."

"I was there! I have seen this room! I swear!"

"There is danger out there. Do not return to that place."

"It wasn't that dangerous I tell you."

"Danger comes in many forms my friend. Knowledge can also be dangerous. And with knowledge comes power. Some things are better left as they are. Do not go back."

"But, this could be the biggest discovery yet for our people."

"Leave that area alone."

With that said, Wes walked back to his chair and sat down. Softly, Tom whispered to Bill.

"I ain't falling for all that mysterious stuff. I'm going back to that room this weekend, before old Wes goes there and gets all the glory for finding that place. This is our chance to be famous. I was there. It really exists. I swear! Are you coming with me or not?"

"We have to plan this right," was all Bill answered.

Over the next several days, Bill and Tom gathered together all the gear they would need for their journey. They would return in six days, leaving two days to explore beyond where Tom had ended. Four days later, at midnight, so as not to be seen, they started on their journey.

On the afternoon of the second day they came to the area Tom called Dome City. After some searching, Tom found the dome he had discovered that day. Together they climbed, slowly making their way higher in the narrow fissure. Finally they reached the top and climbed up into the room. There they stood breathless and silent as their lights cut through the darkness, only to find more darkness beyond that. Their boots disappeared in a fine dust that covered the floor.

"What did I tell you. Is this the biggest room you have ever seen?"

"I can't believe it. Where do you think it will end?" asked Bill.

"We'll never know sitting here."

They hiked for hours, following a warm breeze with a fresh smell, looking for walls they would never find. They were the first, after hundreds of years, to once again explore the surface of the earth.



“House and Cave”

by Dave Hunt, NSS# 12295
oil on canvas, 1988, 40 x 30

The Jackpot Saga Sonnet

by Juliet Bishop

A many zillion years ago
The rain drops trickled down
To form a secret passageway
Extending underground.

The passageway became a cave,
The stream drained down below,
And only centuries would watch
The gypsum flowers grow.

The crystal passage undisturbed
Grew silent in the void,
Submerged in darkness inky black
Where humans never toyed,

And meanwhile, just a ridge away,
Some cavers sat and stewed,
Their mapping project long dried up,
Their jokes becoming crude.

They walked the ridge to look for caves
But most had lost all hope.
They tried to entertain themselves
In order not to mope.

They made some carbide cannon guns
And built some roaring fires,
Stretched sling shots from the trunks of trees
And braided rainbow wires,

But none of these activities
Could fully fill their need
To map a vast and virgin cave
And survey every lead.

But then as if the heavens saw
This match designed in hell,
These cavers found the Jackpot pit
And into lust they fell.

The trips were long. The endless scoops
Proved heaven had been found,
For who would guess that gemstones grew
So lushly underground!

The cavers marveled as the snow
From gypsum ceilings fell,
And to preserve what they had found
They vowed they wouldn't tell,

Could jealousy infect this group?
No, not with all this glee,
Yet some now spoke of "us" and "them"
And "we" had changed to "me."

So who can know about our find?
No need to spread it round,
We'll wait until we've surveyed more
To tell them what we've found.

So caver one to caver two
Would wink and nod a grin,
While caver three would rant and rave
And beg to be let in,

Until the group one fateful day
Held council in the wood;
The bickering, though frightening,
Was ultimately good.

A middle ground was finally met
But feelings still ran strong,
And jealousy was not yet whipped
But hope was strung along.

The problem comes in that a void
Can never be possessed,
And many wanted for themselves
A piece of nothingness!

And some just wanted fame's prestige,
The spotlight in their eyes,
Their name included on the map
And written in the skies.

In truth, the group was healing, though,
When suddenly a glitch:
Whose were those footprints in the pit?
The question made them itch!

This pit, they thought, was virgin cave,
So how were shoe prints here?
And did this prove their special cave
Unsacred, unsecure?

The answer is irrelevant,
The lesson is the key:
The footprints proved what words could not,
And spoke so all could see.

But since I've led you to this point,
I'll tell you what took place:
It all goes back to politics
And caving in a race.

Another group, another cave
Connecting with their lead,
And whose place was it now, they asked,
Their voices tinged with greed.

The footprints proved that no one owned
The essence of the void!
Group one could not begrudge group two
The trips they had enjoyed.

And when they settled down to think
About the cave's true worth,
The wise ones came to comprehend
A cave is no one's turf.

No one can own the bliss that comes
From doing what they crave,
And those who learned that lesson are
The ones that Jackpot saved.

And then the naughty poet came
To taunt them with her rhyme.
The group just chuckled to themselves.
They'd pay her back in time!

Thoughts on Cavin'

by Martha Hendrix

My boyfriend took me cavin'
In the winter of ninety four.
A whole new world took hold on me
And left me craving more.

My old friends think I crazy.
When they ask about my day;
If I tell them I've been cavin',
They just don't know what to say.

My mother thinks I've lost my mind.
She ask of anyone around,
"Why is my 40 something daughter
Off somewhere underground?"

My children think it's rather strange
That I've started this new life.
"Why can't you be like other moms,"
They ask, "and be somebody's wife."

Most people just don't understand.
If fact I'm still not sure
Just what it is that makes me go,
The caves are a powerful lure.

The caves they challenge the body and mind.
Can I make this climb? Can I squeeze through?
As you push a lead each obstacle calls,
"There are beautiful sights awaiting you."

The trip is over and you leave the cave.
You're tired, sore, bruised and muddy.
You go pitch a tent and sit by a fire
And swap stories with a cavin' buddy.

All those who are cavers will know what I mean
And those who aren't won't care.
All I know is that I'm hooked.
The caves are calling, "Come if you dare!"

Illuminations

John Lowry
CEO McDonald's Corporation
Cross Road Business Center
1 Cross Road Drive, Building A
Bedminster, NJ 07921

October 25, 1994

Dear Mr. Lowry,

One of my many interests in life is the sport of spelunking, or what we practitioners of the sport simply call: caving. I have been caving since 1975, and since then I have lost count of the many caves I have visited throughout the country. Like mountain climbing, caving requires specialized equipment, skills, and a level of planning proportional to the complexity of the system to be explored.

This past October, I had an experience which I have never had in all my years of caving, and this brings me to the reason why I am writing you this letter, and, as the CEO of what is perhaps the largest fast food chain in the world, no doubt, you are one of the few people walking the planet who can truly appreciate what I am about to tell you, which is a true account of the events which occurred on Saturday, October 8, 1994, somewhere in southern Tennessee in the late afternoon, several hundred feet under the ground. Cave expeditions can vary anywhere from a couple of hours to several days. Typical sporting cave trips I have been on have run between four and sixteen hours, and by the end of a long trip I have sometimes had to go to the bathroom. I have always been able to hold it till I got out of the cave, though. On a general note, cavers, being more ecologically conscious than average people, are like minded in their desire to keep the entire environment clean, as well as to keep the caves in as pristine a condition as they were before visitation to these delicate ecosystems. In fact, part of our motto says: "leave nothing but footprints."

But when you got to go, you got to go! And, as traumatic an underground dilemma as this was for me on that day in October, my internal biology held the trump card, and no environmentally sound desire in the world was going to allow me to leave only footprints this time. With escaping gas that could have filled the Hindenburg, perhaps twice, I nervously excused myself from the group and crawled down a two-foot-high stream passage, back to a large room, and with God as my witness, I dropped my pants, positioned my back against a rock with my legs spread wide apart supporting me like a tripod, and proceeded to take the most satisfying dump not only in my nearly twenty years of caving, but perhaps my entire life.

And these were not well behaved mathematical shapes with specific three-dimensional geometric boundaries, like what you might find on urban sidewalks. This was a viscous mess—more like a catastrophe—something between the consistency of axle grease and a milkshake, perhaps a McDonald's milkshake; but this is not the reason I am writing you. Wait.

Anyway, I didn't even want to think about how I was going to handle this horrible mess after I finished. I mean, ecology or no ecology, I wasn't planning on taking it out with me, or anything weird like that. But you see, and this is personal, so I wouldn't want it to get around, I have hemorrhoids, and due to the irregular shape of the exit nozzle, the extrusion patterns often take on the most bizarre shapes and peculiar squiggly patterns imaginable, and due to the viscous nature to begin with, I faced an interesting challenge for any sludge processing engineer worth his salt. But salt was not the issue here. As I was approaching completion of this satisfying but awful task, I began to look around at the various naturally

Illuminations

occurring rocks and mud, which were about the only raw materials I had to work with. After all, this was a cave I was in. Apparently, this was going to cost me dearly, at least psychologically, I thought as I looked at my hand, realizing that something had to be sacrificed, and it wasn't going to be me. My hand looked back at me in protest, but I shook my head in sorrow, and I think my hand knew it would never be the same after its collision course with destiny.

But then, almost as an afterthought, in defeat, my poor hand instinctively crawled into the breast pocket of my caving jacket, and it removed two mind you, two complete McDonald's napkins, and they must have been rotting in there for at least a year. These were the two most welcome McDonald's products I ever saw in my life! I was giddy with excitement, like that reprieve from the governor as the executioner's hand reaches out to touch the switch.

Well, the battle was not over, because due to the precise nature of the problem, this was still going to present a bit of a challenge even with two entire napkins, and the same level of planning that had gone into this caving expedition would be required to handle the beginning, middle, and end game of my unavoidable detail. On a philosophic note, it is interesting that when resources are so limited, as obviously was the case here, ten percent of the resources go toward ninety percent of the job, and the remaining ninety percent seems to go to the last ten percent. But this is not what I wrote to tell you, even though I, priding myself in my ability to plan in spite of this small subterranean miscalculation, coupled with my above average physical prowess, got the job done, and with almost a half-napkin to spare.

I must confess, and this is the point, that throughout the years I have had less than savory things to say about McDonald's, not that your company doesn't produce a competitive cost effective product for the demographically targeted population; it does, and I applaud this achievement in the greatest free marketplace the world has ever known. And while not the culinary focal point of western civilization's greatest gastronomic creations, I have learned that there is much more to an eating establishment than simply what's on the menu. The little details are as much a part of the big picture as the main course, so to speak. After all, what goes in must eventually come out, even if it happens to be hundreds of feet under the earth in a cave, almost 900 miles from home. In any event, keep up the good work. No doubt, McDonald's and I will be seeing more of each other.

Sincerely yours,
Steven Martin Cohen
National Speleological Society # 28,322



THOSE LITTLE CAVE CRICKETS? NAH! THEY WON'T BOTHER YOU!

The Devil's Own

by Rob Knotts

I had little known I would be the chronicler of these events, nay even that they would be told, other than legends around the camp-fires as in times passed. Had I, greater effort might have been given to preserve their memory, even as it occurred. What follows, such as it is, remains indelible upon my mind.

Our journey began at the bequest of M'Lord Dawson. He took a fancy to exploring certain small holes beneath the ground, narrow fissures in the cliff-tops near his castle, even several small pits the commoners threw trash into. He had fashioned special equipment to assist such undertakings, and as his valet I had little choice but to go along.

And so it was that we descended into the abyss beneath his castle a force thirty members strong, our recent forays mere practice for this, the main event. M'Lord Dawson had known of this underground canyon since the days of his youth, and always fancied its distant chambers might somehow lead to a foreign land. At the head of the column were twelve armed warriors, pikes and halberds held ready, followed by myself and Lord Dawson with his constant companion and life-long friend, Ciril of Brinnington. Bringing up the rear were fifteen hearty lads from the nearby village, their bulging packs filled with necessary supplies and trade-goods; should we find the route to those distant lands.

Our progress was so slow as to be painful at times, thirty men burdened heavy and carrying lamps could hardly frolic. And yet, the wonders which met us at every juncture stifled the pain for awe. Towering columns of purest white dollops of stone piled one atop the other like a fancy cream desert. Great draperies of translucent spears clung to the ceiling, dripping water, seeming ready to fall at the slightest provocation. And the silence, the silence was deafening, no sound at all save that of our own design.

After three days travel we came to the junction of a great rolling river. M'Lord Dawson divided the force at that point, sending six of the soldiers and half of the porters upstream with Ciril, the rest

heading downstream with us. We followed the river for three more days as it flowed straight into the bowels of the Earth, never deviating from its path, neither left, nor right, until it disappeared entirely in a maelstrom of swirling water a half a league across. A dry passage continued beyond, and we pressed foreword into the unknown.

The cavern had become more stark by this point, and rumbles coursed through the porters of approaching the gates of Hell. Indeed, it did seem to be warmer at times, and the earlier decorations had all but disappeared, a single tiny spear tuck to the ceiling here and there, perhaps a battered muddy column, but no more of the glory we had first encountered. Aiding in the porter's contention were our diminishing supplies. Two, maybe three days remained, no more. At last the passage ended, on the brink of a precipice that surely seemed to be the very edge of Hell itself. During the course of the last day's journey the walls had been steadily closing in upon us, until near the end three men could stand finger-tip to finger tip and touch either wall. I felt certain we would turn around immediately at that point, and retrace our steps to the entrance, and could scarce contain my joy. M'Lord Dawson had other plans.

He motioned one of the porters foreword, and from his pack withdrew and a large coil of rope. Then turned to me and smiled, and I knew my fate was sealed. As the smallest member of the party it was obvious whom they intended would descend, despite my protests to the contrary, and three of the strongest lads held me down as the knot was tied. Never was there so great a fear within me as they lowered me over the edge, my body spinning slightly as I held a flickering torch aloft; one of the last four remaining in the party, although there were still half-a-dozen oil lamps. All around was total blackness, my puny flame the only circle of light. Above me their lights soon disappeared into the darkness as well, and finally I was alone.

How long it took, or how far I descended I know not, only that it seemed an eternity until my feet finally touched the bottom. I hailed those top-side of my position yet they seemed not to hear, and in fact, the rope continued to pile at my feet until, in one whooshing moment, the whole of it came spilling from above.

Oh, the terror of my situation was indescribable, a total and complete surrender into madness that consumed my very soul. I lay atop the abandon rope sobbing, wailing to those above to lower another line and save from this heinous fate. My cries went unheeded, there was no answer, not even a flicker of sound.

My torch had burned a quarter of the way through when I finally roused myself from the fit of melancholy and proceeded to look around. At first I thought to scale the sheer walls of my prison, and thereby put myself on top, but soon abandon that as futile. The only other remaining egress was one tiny slot in the corner of the pit, scarcely wide enough to accept my body while turned to one side.

I squeezed myself into the fissure, holding the torch out in front, and proceeded to move snake-like down the narrow corridor. Certainly it must have been the Devil's own path, for who else but a serpent could navigate in such a space? The trail trended ever downward, never up, and even though it soon broadened into a sizable tunnel I found myself trembling for fear of meeting one of Satan's spawn. When I first heard the voices I thought them a figment of my imagination, for who else could be in these dark passages, except by accident, or one of the Devil's own? But then I heard them again and knew it was no wishful thinking, but a thing real and true, quite possibly M'Lord's fabled land for the accent was strange and many of the words unfamiliar.

"OFF ROPE!" A loud voice proclaimed.

A fainter voice answered, whose words I heard not, only that they were there. Then a light so bright as to be that of a wizard flashed before me and I knew I was saved. No demons can exist in so brilliant a light as can only be produced by the Almighty himself, even small children knew that, and I was nearly fifteen at the time. I scrambled down the passage to catch the bearer of such a light, running head-on into the most amazing person I had ever seen.

He was clothed head to toe in shimmering yellow fabric, almost like tights, only looser—fit a single piece garment that was like a robe with legs cut into it instead of a skirt. Around his waist was a belt of gleaming weapons like none I had ever seen, shiny metal devices clipped hither and yon, connected by yards of bright-colored ribbons and matching cord. But the light mounted on his hel-

met was how I knew he was an angel of God. It was a beam such as one reads about in the accounts of the Second Coming, so brilliant and pure, white like the soul of an angel, piercing the darkness like God's own word.

"Bloody hell!" The angel said when he first saw me. "How'd you get down here?"

So I told him of M'Lord's expedition beneath the Earth, of finding the river, and then my own misfortune. He shook his head in disbelief.

"Looks like we've got a bit o' company, mate!" He shouted this to an unseen companion.

That's when I first noticed the rope dangling from above. It danced and jerked like a live creature, and when my eyes followed its course heaven-ward I saw the second angel sliding down its length to my rescue. I noticed then, too, that the shiny devices were tools, not weapons, tools to aid in the descent of a rope. So finely-crafted and precise, certainly not made by human hands. I was overwhelmed to be in such divine company and could scarce keep my knees from folding in homage.

His companion greeted me also in disbelief, after signaling the heavens the same "OFF ROPE," message as before. I realized then their signals were some holy ritual, undoubtedly practices by angels and other lesser minions of the Divine.

"So what," the second angel said. "Are you into some kind of speleo-anachronism, or something?"

His brilliant light blinded me as he peered into my face. And so I shared my tale yet a second time, sparing no details, perhaps while I am able to remember so clearly in these my waning years.

He too, did hardly believe it, and so instructed me to lead them to the pit. Which I did, retracing my steps through the Devil's constriction until we stood at the pile of abandoned rope.

"You came down that, on bloody sisal?"

The angels shared a look that chilled my bones. Perhaps sisal was unholy ordinance, practiced only by Satan and other evil spawn? How could I have known, not practicing much religion during that time of my life?

"Can you spare me, oh holy ones?" I pleaded for my very life, knowing full-well they alone could spare me from the pits of Hell. They shook their heads in the manner of priests administering last rites to a non-believer; again a chill coursed through my bones.

“Not Bloody likely,” the first angel admonished, his face the texture of stone. “I reckon that’s about the stupidest stunt I’ve ever heard of, dropping a pit like this on braided-sisal twine. You’re damn lucky to be alive.”

With that I had nothing but agreement, and told them so. Their stony looks never softened, but I knew, eternal damnation would wait another day. They shined their heavenly lights around the chamber, spotting yet another passage that had escaped my feeble torch unawares, and we began ascending together single-file, myself in the middle position.

We were nearing what I thought must have been the top of the precipice when the lead angel turned to me.

“Bollocks,” he said. “This passage’s damn tight.”

He squeezed himself into a small depression along the side, handing me one of his tiny magical torches as he did.

“Go ahead and push this lead a bit, lad,” he instructed. “See if it goes anywhere before we wedge our fat arses in there.”

I did as he instructed, so amazed at the magic torch I could scarcely walk. It was just a tiny cylinder of metal, and yet it glowed brighter on one end than any normal torch I had ever seen, and produced no heat, save that of my sweating palms. I squeezed through the narrow crack above us, coming out in a jumble of boulders that were strewn across the floor of the Spartan passage that I remembered being just before the pit of my intended doom.

As I stepped onto the floor-level of the larger passage my foot rolled a huge boulder into the crack, plugging it forever. Of the angels there was no more sign, not a breath, not a sound, not a flicker of light, save that of the magic torch in my hand. This I contributed to their holy mission being accomplished, even the rolling boulder being of their design, the better to block Satan’s spawn from coming into our realm.

I rushed back to join my companions, eager to share the news of being spared by divine intervention, only to find the main passage blocked by a wall of hanging blankets. I ripped the blankets aside, moving toward the precipice. As I did an abandoned torch smoldering on the ground burst suddenly into

flame, a fact I realized later was Satan himself trying to spirit me away.

The members of M’Lord’s party lay about the floor in disarray, as if sleeping, though nary a breath escaped their lips. Their faces were blue, as if from choking, and yet no marks were about their necks. It was the Devil’s work, of that I was certain, and I fled the place as if Lucifer himself were nipping my tail.

The magic torch had nearly spent its powers by the time the river-junction drew nigh. Off in the distance I could see the flames of several pitch-bound torches, and I broke into a joyous sprint at the sight of them, falling to my face on the rubble scattered across the floor next to the river; dropping my torch and watching it sink into the depths of the murky water. It was no matter, I was saved.

An Introduction to Ol' Goffer's Hermetical Dictionary of Caving Terms

by Andrew Fluke

I was hitchhiking through the caves of western Virginia when I tripped over an errant greenbrier vine and tumbled into one of Ol' Goffer's semantic mudslides. Perched like a drunken owl—hooting like the same—on one of the rough hewn wooden benches out front of the Old Mill Road fieldhouse, the Ol' Goffer was rolling lugnuts between his lumpy fingers like overripe black cherries, plopping them into a hubcap from his truck.

Now the Ol' Goffer is not the type to greet you, in fact he's more likely to pick up—exactly—on the end of the last conversation you had with him. He's a savant in this way. It's as if the last two years had been a long trip to the cooler to hunt down a Moosehead lager and now you were back to continue arguing the philosophical significance of using jungle boots in an environment so UN-jungle-like as to be absurd.

Add this idiosyncrasy to his uncanny ability to seemingly maintain a comfortably continuous beer buzz, even though his last bottle may have come two days earlier at one of the honky-tonk taverns outside Blacksburg, and you shouldn't be surprised when he looks up at you, analyzes your face and suddenly says something like "It's a shame you don't see Travertine in stores no more."

At least I wasn't...

"You see," he continued. "When the Ovaltine people learned the Travertine PR Machine was planning to attack Ovaltine's market dominance by emphasizing Travertine's high calcium content, not to mention its non-dependence on milk—hell, it's soluble in water—Ovaltine knew they had to do something. How could they compete? Travertine was cheaper, healthier (well, it has a higher mineral content, anyway) and you don't need to buy something else just to use it. 'Course, blowing up their Flint, Michigan plant on Employee Appreciation Day was a bit extreme—but, hell, it was the sixties

and everyone was doing it. Glad I took the day off, though."

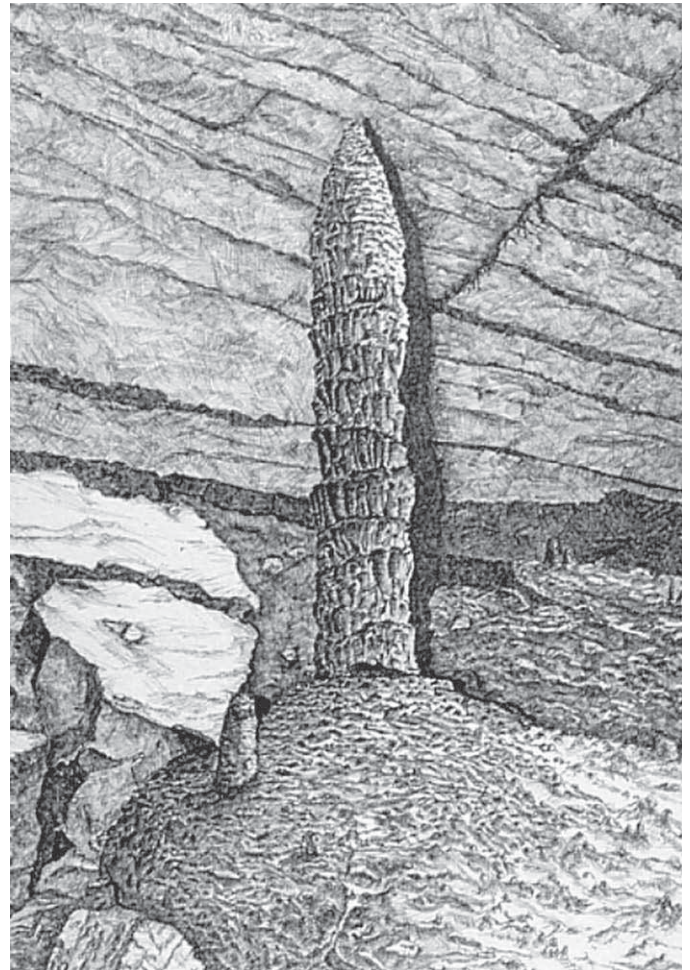
There's no correcting Ol' Goffer. It just does no good—here, I'll show you.

"Uhhh, Goff, travertine is simply flowstone—re-deposited calcium carbonate."

He nodded his head, thumbed the brim of his weathered hat, and lit a homemade cigarette.

"Good point. Ovaltine did put a stop to all that ungodly mining."

And with that, the Ol' Goffer gathered up his lugnuts, reattached his rear tire, and tossed his personal reality like a flat tire into the front seat of his truck—right alongside his wide-brimmed hat, his walking stick, and a half-full bag of quick-drying cement—and took off down the weed-choked lane, splashing through a mud puddle as if it were the Library of Congress.



The Room

by Nick Noe

Though we've bayed at the moon from a
campfire or two,
and squeezed through some places known
only by a few,
and created some passage by using "Kerboom."
The old place is empty, now that you've left
the room.

I never dreamed you'd be the first to go.
Happy go lucky, what did I know?
Use up your nine lives, and then hit "resume?"
But it just ain't that easy, now that you've left
the room.
I suppose I'll get by with consolation from friends,
saying "one passage begins where another
one ends."
We always sought joy, in preference to doom.
And that makes it harder, now that you've left
the room.

I prefer to believe that you've gone on ahead,
setting up stations, so the we may be led
to a brightly lit chamber with no trace of gloom.
And find you there grinning—first in the room.

Meditation

by Tonya L. Smothers

I find peace in the womb
of the earth.
In the dark I crouch alone waiting
for rebirth
of my soul—clammy, restless.

Deep into my lungs, cave
I inhale.
It is balm for the wounds
of the hell
of my existence—clammy, restless.

Pebbles

by W. C. Abernathy

In passages of stone, deep underground
Lives a little old man, eyes big and round
Can't speak anymore, not even a sound
Once in a blue moon, he comes into town

Up to the surface, he silently creeps
Slips through the fields as the farmers all sleep
Glides along hedges, scattering the sheep
Past the town gate, then up the main street

Stops at the crossroad, knarled hand upon chin
The Moon shining down, upon his gray skin
Under deep furrowed brow, a mischievous grin
Nods silver-haired head, then moves on again

How he makes up his mind, is not very clear
He chooses a house, then quickly draws near
From a little black pouch, eyes glisten with tears
He takes tiny white pebbles, cave pearls so dear

Placing them gently, on the damp window sill
In perfect alignment, placed precisely with skill
Over each little pearl, he cries quietly until
Little bag now empty, he stands perfectly still

Raising his head, tears stream down his face
Looks up at the Moon, then into deep space
He stares for a time, old mind starts to race
Starlight fills those eyes, revelation takes place!

Deep satisfaction now floods the old soul
Quick now! Return! While I have become whole!
As happens each time, when he's back in his hole
The Light leaves his heart, replaced with black coal

If you arise early, and climb from your bed
You may catch a glimpse, of his hoary head
His eyes will be shining, while yours are all red
His heart will be soaring, your soul will be fed



The Caverns Deep Within

by George Clappison

Ancient Americans used caves for many reasons. Their shamans taught that the underground is a realm inhabited by creatures both physical and immaterial. A journey to the underworld could present great danger, and incredible insight. Not unlike speleologists, the shamans were revered for their immense courage, for not just anyone could venture underground. And today those who enjoy caves are few, and seen to have a strange pastime indeed.

The native American shaman had to prepare in many ways for the sojourn. Many believed that it was possible to become lost, unable to return to the land of the living. So they prepared maps. Not only to guide their return, but to elucidate their function within the tribe. Similar to speleo-map makers who endeavor to reach virgin passage while providing necessary pre-trip information for others. Sometimes shaman maps would simply show a linear course; A representation of the goal to be achieved. More often, the maps enabled these spiritual cavers to comprehend a sometimes confusing array of experiences. Modern cavers prepare maps for many reasons too. To most it is an interesting and needed function, carried out in a scientific method using instruments that precisely measure distance, incline, and orientation. But others participate for the sheer joy of spending long hours wrapped in darkness and silence, smelling, feeling, and even tasting the earth.

Just as shamans risk becoming lost while projecting their spiritual bodies toward subterranean goals, cavers risk injury and death if proper equipment, preparations, and attitude are not considered. Unlike speleo-travelers, the shaman does not take supplies or equipment, but instead begins the journey naked, almost a re-introduction into the womb of mother earth. And in both realms safe caving demands that no one venture underground alone. The shaman travels with their animals for safe and insightful subterranean experiences. As do physical cavers travel in groups for safety and fun. Both types of cavers also know that underground journeys require that our physical needs be tended prior to de-

parture. A trip while ill or hungry will detract from the experience, or could even be dangerous.

Both spelunkers and shamans must synchronize their departure and return. The physical reality of caving forces the timing of an excursion to consider the teams individual capabilities, responsibilities, societal obligations, and even weather. But to the out-of-body caver, the only temporal consideration is that, the time be right. Once the journey has begun, time loses all meaning. What may seem to be hours or even weeks in the neatherworld has no bearing on chronological time.

The size of the caver is usually the determining factor as to the actual opening one chooses to enter. The shamanic journey is not limited to any physical constraint. where the caver girth and even air must be accommodated, shamans gain access at any underground opening such as a rabbit hole, a spring or well, or even active volcanic tubes. Just as each cave and cave expedition is unique and valued for knowledge gained and peace-of-mind renewed, each shamanic journey is appreciated for the qualities and frequencies of energies encountered. Both look upon their respective excursions fondly. All physical journeys include caving are external to the traveler, but the shaman view underground peregrinations as into themselves as well as the earth.

The catharsis that affect both the speleologist and shaman serves to rebuild the soul. They both come away from their experiences with awe and wonder; sometimes raising more questions with the answers acquired, all looking forward to the next quest. In the caverns of our minds the mystery of the Earth Mother will remain for all times; constantly whispering, calling for the return from whence we came.

A Tribute To Grandpa Jones

by Doug Plemons

If any of you old timers remember and will actually admit to watching “HEE-HAW,” then you will remember Grandpa Jones routine called “Hey, Grandpa, What’s For Supper?”

Here is a caver’s tribute to a very nice, decent old man.

“HEY GRANDPA, WHERE’S THE CAVE?”

“There’s a big ole sink with a little bitty hole,
And between here and there, a bull by the fence pole,
If you can get over without losin’ your skin,
You’re a better man than me . . . just crawl on it!”

.....”Yum, yum!”

“HEY GRANDPA, WHATZIT DOOOO?”

“I’m a-lookin’ down a rift with a three inch crack,
Squeezed underneath a scary breakdown stack,
Layin’ here fellin that blast of cold wind,
It blew out my petzl...bring the bang on it!”

.....”Yum, yum!”

“HEY GRANDPA, WHERE’S THE CAVE AT?”

“Just park behind the gate at the end of the lane,
And put on your coat ‘cause it’s a-fixin’ to rain;
Sneak past the moonshiners with their shotguns level,
There’s a bad dog a-comin’ so, run like the devil;

Navigate a swamp and crawl through the briars,
There’s a big patch of dope and sinkhole full of tires;
There’s a buck tooth cuzzin’ on the porch with a grin,
That got left over from that Deliverance film;

Past there is the mud bog and a pig pen too,
Don’t forget the poison ivy that you gotta
climb through;
Then straight up the mountain ‘bout two miles or more,
And down the other side to the valley floor;

There’s a sign at the crossroads that points nine ways,
You’d better choose right or you’ll be up here for days;
There’s bears in the woods and the Klan’s in the corn,
And a few devil worshippers settin’ fire to the barn;

It’s a little ole hole ‘bout two foot square,
You could walk right by it if you didn’t know it was there;

N’ if you get turned around, you might as well prey,
Cause there ain’t no Hillbilly Cave Survey;

But just keep goin’! Don’t you give up now,
Or you won’t find the borehole anyhow,
Just keep goin’! I hope you don’t miss it,
But by the time you get there you might just wish it;

I think that old farmer might be stretchin’ it a bit,
He throwed in a rock, waited for it to hit;
Well it musta been deep, that’s all I can say,
Cause he’s still waiting on that rock today;

Well don’t worry about me, I’ve done my time,
There’s nothin’ wrong with cavin’, it ain’t no crime;
Just keep goin’! I’ve done broke on through...
I’m already there and I’m a-waiting’ on you...”

.....”Yum, yum!”

Stone Wolf

by Lara Storm

The wolf howls,
And with
Flowstone tongue,
Licks stone lips
As saliva drips
From yellow limestone teeth,
Into rimstone dams beneath.

The wolf breathes,
And with
Canyon lungs
And crawlway veins,
The air sustains
The vein-filled maze
From which respire an icy haze.

The wolf thirsts,
And with
Open mouth,
Lets in the rain,
Corrosive, to enlarge his veins,
While scalloping the stony walls
And plunging over waterfalls.

Old Cavers Never Die

By Stephen Clark

*Article From the Nashville Journalist,
March 10, 2046*

*Police Report Probable Explanation on Anderson
Case As Reported by Lorilynn Benepe*

Police here in Nashville dramatically released today what they openly admit to be a possible, if controversial, explanation in the disappearance case of former Governor Michael Anderson, reported missing by family members over eight weeks ago and prompting an extraordinarily intensive and concentrated search by State and Federal officials, as reported by this news journalist over the life of the story.

State police and local FBI agencies, convinced of foul play since the beginning, have focused efforts in investigating imprisoned, acquitted and unprosecuted members of the mostly shattered terrorist-political organization which called itself Confederacy Reborn, whom then State Governor Anderson had publicly and privately committed to demilitarize, criminalize and dismantle beginning early in his first term.

With the investigation dead-ending over the past two weeks and police admitting that they were running out of leads, it was reported that family members suddenly came across the following entry in an older, half-forgotten series of journals kept several years before Anderson turned to politics in a bid to escape, what he described often during his years in the State House as, “his years of apathy, hopelessness and anger.” It is thought that police officials, running out of clues and baffled, asked the family to review all personal papers relevant to the case and that this insight was uncovered late last week.

Combined with the unconfirmed rumor that ex-Governor Anderson is suffering from a terminal illness, a rumor constantly prompting “no comment” refusals from State officials since the manhunt began, this obscure discovery might possess more credibility than many first believed. Though there remains a majority who condemn this suggestion as evidence of police helplessness and incompetence,

several ex-aides and family members who were close to Anderson have admitted that it does seem to have a ring of truth to it, but refuse to justify their beliefs any deeper before cameras.

The ex-Governor was known to be an enthusiastic supporter of the State’s underground wilderness and before entering politics Anderson was known to his friends as an “aggressive caver.” Occasionally during his Governorship he was known to amuse and frighten his aides and the press by taking them on wild trips inside the State’s uncommercialized caverns as well as display Cumberland Caverns in “shirt and tie tours,” as the Governor would call them, to visiting dignitaries.

Considering the immense controversy surrounding this “clue” we provide the actual text as released this morning by State Police General Hampton and allow you to be the judge.

(The following eighteen year old account, extracted from the personal journal entries of Michael Anderson, then a disillusioned 35 year old, was released this morning to the press with the complete consent of his surviving children.)

June 17th, 2023

Too many people I know would describe my chance meeting in a heartbeat as something pretentiously New Age. It was destiny they’ll claim; or the fates were looking at us; or some hogwash like it. My born again, fundamentalist half brother would swear it was “Godly ordained.” But I guess I’ll never know proof-positive because I haven’t told anyone about it. Ever.

I’ve even held back in recording the event in my journal, until now. I promised him I wouldn’t breath a word of it and frankly I owed it to him. He saved my life once upon a time early in my caving experience, but it was much more than that-it ran deeper than a simple life debt. The summation of my interest in him was far more than some cliché line out of a cheesy, weekend war film. Strike up a token for loyalty, but that’s about as sentimental as I can get.

So why bother writing it down? Just forget it—I’ve tried—people die all the time; what’s so special about him? He simply was able to chose when, how and where, which is a hell of a lot more than most of

the inhabitants of this god-forsaken world can say.

I guess the real clincher is that, as guys go, he meant a damn mite more than an average friend. He seemed full of life all the time, even when he was dying. He never lost his youth; always tried to see the world, above and below, with the eyes of a first love or like a new-born lamb during its first Spring. Always the spiritualist; constantly looking for the meaning of himself far underground, through darkened limestone, it was a bitch to read his mystical, over-described trip reports in local grotto rags and listen to his enthusiasm on jaunts.

He claimed every trip was a two-folded adventure. He loved his friends, he would say, and he loved the mystery of caving—and we would make fun of him. Most would simply tease—all in good fun—but I would purposely include paltry, but resentful barbs that would slice that pretty little world of his and bloody that irritating, adolescent sense of wonderment. What really would piss me off was his habit of trying to mix caving with art and philosophy. While the rest of us were shooting up oxygen stims or enjoying a homemade, deliciously illegal, bottle of whiskey after a tough day of caving, he'd be on the porch with his guitar scratching out ancient James Taylor or Joni Mitchell dirges, reading Thomas Paine and Martin Luther King fairy tales dreams, while sipping some fruity tea concoction, for God's sake.

The man used to talk about has-been cavers like they were demi-gods or something. I never met any of them, either they were dead or they dropped away long before my arrival, but every time we used to cave somewhere along the 42 miles of the Black House Mountain System, he acted like some war veteran on a forgotten battlefield leading a tour. Everybody else in the group used to gather around whenever he launched into one of his "I remember when such and such and I" stories. Me? I usually went to check a side lead or go on ahead.

I grew to hate the names of cavers that I never met; people that were only figures and amusing faces in antediluvian photographs. Just to satisfy my anger and get a rise out of my crony, I nearly stopped at one particularly "sacred" grave site, which we visited once in awhile, to piss on the plot and maybe jack off on it too for that little "twist-of-the-knife" emphasis. Strange for me, I never had the guts.

Maybe it was that respect, that hidden little piece of grudging, always-in-denial, seed of admiration I had for him and his forgotten friends. That's why I would bleed him like a hundred paper cuts every occasion offered.

But damn his nobility, he rubbed off and grew on me like a fungus, slow at first. And I've always detested mushrooms. So what's the answer to my question? I guess it comes cut and dry in two parts. One is that I miss him; a man missing a man?—is that too much for a bitter closet homophobic to admit? The second reason is that the day I ran into him, now six years ago this weekend, he was calm and cheerful, gazing forward to the next four or five days with appreciation. It wasn't only the fact that he was arranging his own death, but rather it bedeviled me then, and still does, that he was choosing to be the self administrator of death. Total acceptance was written all over his face. It wasn't a mask of a coerced decision that he wore, but one of joy that, in his last days, he was allowed to apply for dignity in death from some unseen force and be accredited.

Self acceptance of life, let alone death, is something I still cannot understand, nor gain for myself. And so you see therein lies the haunt. And maybe for his courage alone it merits that I record this in my Journal, but remain vocally silent on behalf of his memory.

It was around Father's day in June, 2017. I remember well because my old drunk of a Dad called me the day before to give me hell because I had forgotten to deliver his annual twelve year old scotch bottle, as if the black market didn't charge a life's savings for since neo-prohibition—I didn't forget actually, I just didn't care anymore and I was flat broke.

Anyway, I had been leading a trip into the Black House Mountain System in Fentress that weekend for a group of new snots who wanted a tourist's hitch. Everybody had gone back to work and family—It was Monday afternoon—except for me that is; I didn't have any Mondays. I was unemployed at the time (not unusual), having gotten fired two weeks earlier for "sexual misconduct on the job." Translation? I got caught screwing my bosses' toy secretary in the men's on my break. Nothing uncommon for that place mind you, but old Dumbo Ears was pissed since he'd been trying for months

without even a bedroom wink to unzip his fly. Since he wasn't getting any, why should I? At the end of Josh Patton's pasture, just outside the boundary of the State Park, I was dragging my feet to get back to Nashville, slipping into procrastination packing and searching for some survey gear that I had somehow misplaced in the tall grass. It was second hand, but I couldn't afford to replace my laser-surveyors and echo ranglers. I was just beginning to seriously consider staying an additional night, when I looked up to see a figure approach my camp from down the dusty road. A wide brim slouch hat kept his face in shadow, so I didn't recognize him at first, but the guy was a caver, judging from all the obvious equipment strapped around him. I remember the figure stopping dead in stride when he noticed my camp—just stood there, frozen, looking my way, startled, thinking. There wasn't a doubt in my mind, whoever it was didn't expect to find anyone around.

Suddenly, the man's shoulders relaxed in a wave of resignation and he approached me. As soon as he took four steps I knew by his walking posture who it was. Over the past ten years I had followed that half-dancing shuffle of his to know. I was surprised to see him, but amused, since he had been using flimsy pretexts to stay away from caving in the last several months.

"What in the hell brings you here? You always said never cave solo. Did I catch a hypocrite?" I fired his way, knowing fully well that I was the actual hypocrite since solo caving was old hat for me. I followed it up with another barb as he drew nearer, asking him if he had come to contemplate life's meaning with Plato inside Temple Falls.

My old friend smiled into my face, with soft eyes, just like a thousand times before every time I jabbed him. "Look's like I can't keep any secrets from you, huh?"

Looking over his gear I could see he really was prepared for a serious underground excursion. His ever faithful, ancient side pack hung from his side, freshly washed and fully stuffed. The faded lettering of the forgotten maker, on a white and blue patch, stood out.

"Who was Karst Works?" I asked him one day, long before this encounter. He just looked at me with that storytelling twinkle.

"Are you sure you want to know?" He chuckled.

"If it's another one of your Olympian demi-friends, then forget it." I snapped back.

Most of his caving equipment was original museum pieces, though not much had been improved since the turn of the century in caving equipment, except he did wear the newly developed semi-cold fusion head lamp system. It cost a fortune then and still does, but it was said to provide up to forty hours of bright light on a single charge. Except for the actual lamp itself, which traditionally hung on the helmet's frontal lobe, the entire energy compartment and wiring conformed snugly along the upper inside liner of your helmet. Completely internalized and protected from shock, abrasion and wire hang-ups.

I asked him if he was meeting up with someone and I looked beyond his shoulder, down the winding road, half expecting some vehicle to appear and wondering why he was on foot, but under that permanently calm face of his, my friend hid a festering secret. I could tell. The puzzle lingered there shouting out in a bold, though partially gagged voice that clearly betrayed its owner that no soul was coming up that path.

Clearly dejected, he side-stepped the entire question and began making small talk.

"Did you hear about the latest bombings in Utah and California?" He asked, as if anyone left in the States hadn't been besieged with news from universal laptop televisions. I pointed to mine off to the side laying silent and closed.

"Oh." He smiled embarrassed.

He tried again, "Do you think a real Constitutional Convention will actually solve all the problems?"

He was reaching.

"Politics are people and people are liars." I snarled back. "Now are you going to tell me what is wrong with you and why you're here on a Monday with no back up and dressed to kill a scoop?!" I was getting furious.

With nowhere to go conversationally—I have that effect on people—my trapped chum drew in a long sigh and began to slowly unravel a long, bitter tale that I had hardly expected.

He paced around like some lost fool explaining to me how he had been diagnosed with a rare cancer several months ago. No one caught it in time, he

went on, because of being used to fatty cysts all over his body anyway no one thought anything about a few more until it was beyond easy repair. My friend told me about some introductory treatments that he had gone through and how they had kept him sick and immobilized for days, and worse yet the cancer was unabated.

“It’s a normal reaction, sometimes we don’t see any improvement until after stronger doses of chemo.” He was told as explanation, but he knew it was hopeless, my friend added.

After a gut wrenching night of contemplation and prayer, he called his doctor and boldly announced that he wouldn’t be accepting anymore treatments.

“I don’t want to fight some glorious rearguard action only to end up surrendering my dignity.” I recall him saying.

The doctor resisted, he recounted, giving all the standard reasons for hope or chance, but the sufferer would have none of it.

“Well, if you insist there’s nothing I can do about it, but without treatment the cancer will kill you in three months.” The physician had bluntly informed him.

“I spent a month with my children and grandchildren, saying good-bye without ever actually mouthing the words. I never told them of my decision—I knew they would be violently against it and make my last few weeks hell trying to alter my choice.” He went on. “And then without telling anyone I made some covert plan to come down to Fentress and here I am.”

I was confused. “You mean with a flat month to live you’re here for a nostalgia tour or something?” I stammered.

I’ll never forget that look of his. It was full of disgust that after all that time together I still refused to understand him. I didn’t want to. My mouth dropped and I waited for him to deny it, but he didn’t—just that damned look on his face. Finally I spat it off.

“You’ve come to die, haven’t you?”

He nodded his head in perverse relief.

“Have you lost your frickin’ mind?” It was the best I could do on the spur of the moment. I started to argue with him. Telling him what a fool he was—actually what a bigger fool he was. At first he tried explaining himself, then curtly shut me off and told me that though he liked me, I was to “piss off.”

Now that was a personality mask I had never seen before—he’d thought it through all right.

It was his life and it would be his death, he shouted at me and began stalking off in the general direction of the Temple Falls entrances. He turned suddenly after a few steps, wearing an enraged face. “And I had hoped for better from someone like you.” He fired at me before resuming his pace.

I stood there dumbfounded, completely speechless—a rarity for me. Abruptly I yelled at him to wait up and grabbed my muddy coveralls, my helmet and a light pack and ran after him. He hadn’t stopped, but did slow his gait to allow me to catch up by the tree line.

Neither one of us spoke a word as we traveled the overly familiar spoor that now formed part of the State park hiking trail. I still couldn’t get used to the signs every once in a while that “asked” citizens to stay on the path to avoid damaging the foliage. To break the strain between us I laughed at the next sign. It worked. My friend relaxed a little and began his typical story-telling.

“Yeah, I remember the old crew taking machetes into the woods during ridge-walking and blasting every opening we thought would go somewhere. Good thing we broke into the connection passages before the State finally bought out the logging companies.”

After some small talk, I finally got up the courage to ask him the tough questions. He explained to me that he had realized that he would need to rely upon a dignified suicide after refusing treatment, but that he did not want to upset his family, nor draw them into the drama of finding a body. He really wanted to face death alone and independent of the traditional grieving and funeral theatrics. Caving was the perfect vehicle, he explained. He would enjoy some serious exploration and fun and prepare to end his mortality in solemn dignity.

Looking into my eyes he answered my next question. My friend had seen to it that a trusted ally had prepared an oral tablet, several times the strength needed, for the final plunge. It was quick and painless. As if I couldn’t get enough of his morbidity, the man added that he had packed a body bag, modified to allow him to zip and seal from the inside, to act as his “casket.” He didn’t want any possibilities of someone tracking him down from the odors. Least

of all the State rangers. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It was fantastically morose and eccentric, but I didn't dare argue.

We arrived at the April Fool's Entrance to Temple Falls. He threw his twin packs down on the lip of the sink and laid down on the late Spring grasses.

"You know, I recall coming here for the first time a month after it was discovered. This was the entrance that really opened up the system to us." Usually I'm seething about this time about worn out memories, but I didn't say a word. I was too numb to feel anything.

We sat there for a good hour. He was sucking in every last color from nature; breathing in the aromas for the last time; listening carefully to the birds, to the breeze; recording cloud shapes. He spoke of life in general; of philosophy; colors; dumped thoughts like a water sprinkler everywhere. I didn't bother to take out my umbrella, I simply allowed him to rain on me.

With a stretch he suddenly sat up and announced that it was time to go, reaching for some small container in his light pack and popping some small white pill. I began to turn white.

"Don't worry, it's just a pain killer—I have to take them every four hours now with the increased pain and all. What did you think? That I was going to leave you a body before your eyes?" He laughed at me for a good minute.

After recomposing myself, I told him I would follow for as long as he wanted. He smiled at me and said that would be nice.

We advanced into the huge entrance hall and went immediately right. I was wondering which way he intended to go—it was Temple Falls proper. We climbed down a yawning shoot, which used to be tight before the blasters got to it, so they tell me, and emerged into the vast Castlemountain Room. We stopped for a while looking at Cathedral Falls and then visited a couple of other sites that had special importance for him. He didn't bother to relate the stories attached to them—I had heard them all, several times, but I held back from my usual barbs. I knew he was paying homage like some religious pilgrim for the final time. I wondered if he believed his old caving friends were surrounding him, escorting him to whatever site his insanity had picked out.

Following a much traveled route up Blankenship's Dome to the Second Floor and on into a series of belly crawls that took us through the Toothpaste Tube, into walking canyons and finally out into the airy freedom of The Goepel Subway Tunnel, we emerged into Ayer's Paradise, a large wing of the system that had been discovered in the final year of the last century and yielded six miles of huge passage alone. The entire addition, against typical caver humility, had been labeled throughout using the names and pet peeves of my friend's ancient companions. There was such goofy labels as The Wonderful World of Todd, Warthman's Beer Keg Dome, Lugannani's Spaghetti Passage, Simpson's Lucky Crawl and of course The Clark Family Parlor. I knew them all, as did every caver who tramped around the system.

Walking down the main trunk we took a sharp right into a canyon—I knew this area well. It went for a couple hundred feet before terminating into a deep pool with no continuation. Why were we headed this way was beyond my comprehension, maybe he was going to drown himself, I mused to myself. Once we arrived at the water's edge he threw down his packs to take another breather.

"This is where we part company Michael." He announced, popping another pain killer.

"I thought you said you planned on exploring for a few days before taking the big trip." I scolded him.

He pointed over to the far right in the pool and explained that there existed a sump that no mortal knew about, except himself and one of his ancient chums. "And I doubt that he could recall where it is after all these years." He reasoned.

I watched my friend dig around his larger pack and pull out a lightweight wet suit and a scuba mask. After changing he donned the scuba mask and poked around the large pool to relocate the sump.

"It's three feet down but only about a half body length long, but it comes up into a large continuation and from there just gets sweeter and sweeter." He related after breaking the surface. He said that no one had been back, since that afternoon two decades earlier, being unable to get anyone to swim the sump.

"The others simply said we would get to it another way—well, we never did. With the system

opening up dramatically back then the lead was forgotten for more secure findings, until now. It fits my needs perfectly you see.”

My friend grinned at me and a frigid shiver leaped up my spine. He then passed his larger pack through the sump and then returned to retrieve his second. Inside I was all in a panic. What was I watching? I wanted to say something, but I was out of practice.

He looked at me with those sentimental eyes of his. “Michael, I know you don’t approve, but I have made up my mind. It’s better for me, it’s better all around. All I ask is that I be allowed to die as I have lived, doing what I loved best. Next to my family and friends, caving has always been my love—it’s natural that my crypt be here.”

I didn’t say a word.

“Well, you take care Michael—I sure hope you discover some peace of mind for yourself.”

He then started preaching to me.

“People aren’t the enemy, Michael—it’s the animal inside each of us. Tame yourself and then you’ll see that people are worth saving that you’re worth saving.”

He added a request. “By the way, for me, please don’t ever mention to anyone that you saw me today. It would defeat the whole meaning.”

He turned his head and prepared to swim out. I suddenly thrust my muddy gloved hand out to shake his and emotionally grunted. He took it and squeezed firmly, giving me that fatherly smile.

“Remember Michael, the world is rich in cynics, but impoverished when it comes to visionaries.”

He let me go and with a splash disappeared under the pool. I watched his body edge over to the rock wall some three feet below and pass through the sump.

“He’ll be back.” I heard myself say. I still refused to believe that anyone could willingly surrender their life for philosophy’s sake. People are known to kill their neighbor’s children before they will give up their own lives—it’s a dog eat dog world. And this prima-donna was no exception. Once he got lonely and chilled

I don’t know how long I waited there by the pool and in the main passage, but finally I had to leave on my second and last set of batteries. As the devil’s advocate, I remained camped out in Patton’s field, day after day, positive that I would see my

friend come walking out of the trees, filthy and exhausted, an embarrassed expression on his face and then I would claw into him like an avenging lion. On the fifth day I returned to the surface entrance and just sat there, hiding from State trail hikers and the occasional park ranger on electric ATV’s.

Finally on the sixth day I accepted the truth and packed up. I went home and tried to forget what I had witnessed. When caving friends called me over the next few weeks to “reveal the shocking news” that our joint companion was missing, I pretended mild surprise. When the police questioned me about the disappearance, as they did several of his friends—after finally finding his abandoned vehicle in Somerset, Kentucky—I lied convincingly. I lied for him and suddenly I knew I had changed already, for I never lie for anybody except for myself.

I attended his memorial service some months later after he was officially declared deceased, considering his doctor’s testimony. Without a body they couldn’t call it a funeral could they? People cried and carried on about how they were sure he was there among them in spirit; but that his mortal death had been lonely and among strangers, his logic and reason lost, in severe pain, I wanted to agree with them, but I knew it wasn’t so. My friend was somewhere else entirely. I guess he might have stopped in briefly to love on his children, I don’t know. I recall the shock the following Summer while during a cave outing inside Cornstarch a caving friend put forth the humorous theory that the missing body was somewhere in the system.

“Well wherever he may be, it isn’t on the survey.” I replied tongue in cheek.

Six years later I still can’t forget. I’ve changed a little. Started reading and went back to school. I’m taming the animal inside that he talked about and working to see visions. I even put a handful of hours in at a local boy’s club and found myself voting the other day in local elections for the first time in my life!

Actually, I guess I’ve changed a lot, but, without handing out promises, I’ll give anything a try once.

Officials here in Nashville are suggesting that a second major news conference, held tomorrow, will not only support this assertion, but provide strong, if not convincing, proof that Mr. Anderson has taken his own life in a similar fashion. Undisclosed

sources for this journalist have stated that Governor Anderson's medical file will be made public at that point and will show that the Ex-State Executive was facing terminal illness in its advanced stages.

Asking State Park officials if they had any plans to try and search the extensive caves inside Pickett State Park for the Governor, or attempt to retrieve the body mentioned in Anderson's account, we drew a "no comment" from several we contacted, but one senior ranger disclosed that the entire wing described in the extracted journal entry was completely inaccessible due to the damage caused by the New Madrid earthquake of 2029.

With this new insight being made available to the public and considering there is no way of knowing which cavern might have been used, it appears that a body will never be retrieved and a hearing will eventually be convened to decide upon the ex-Governor's status officially.

(Biographical Reference)

Michael Dean Anderson was born in Somerset, Kentucky in 1988. Coming from a dysfunctional family background, the future Governor admitted later that he was a rebellious, cynical and highly explosive young man, involving himself in petty crime and thrill seeking, moving from one job to another and barely finishing high school. Finding an outlet in caving, Michael devoted much of his early adulthood to underground exploration, but later in his life entered college life and after graduation, politics. Characterizing himself as a brutally honest, self-made commoner challenging the stagnant society of politics, Michael stunned traditional politicians by narrowly winning the Nashville Mayoral race in 2028 and overwhelmingly endeared the citizenry the following year when, in the aftermath of the 2029 New Madrid Earthquake, he forsook his mildly damaged office to work in the devastated streets with city crews and citizens in clean up operations. After serving a successful second term he was swept into the Governor's office by a landslide vote as the "people's candidate" during the elections of 2036.

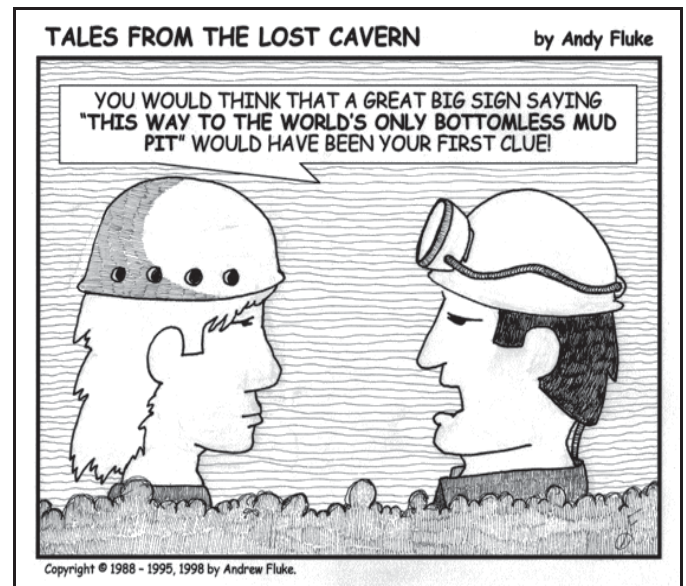
Accused early on as being dictatorial by political critics, Governor Anderson resorted to little known provisions in the State Constitution to retain con-

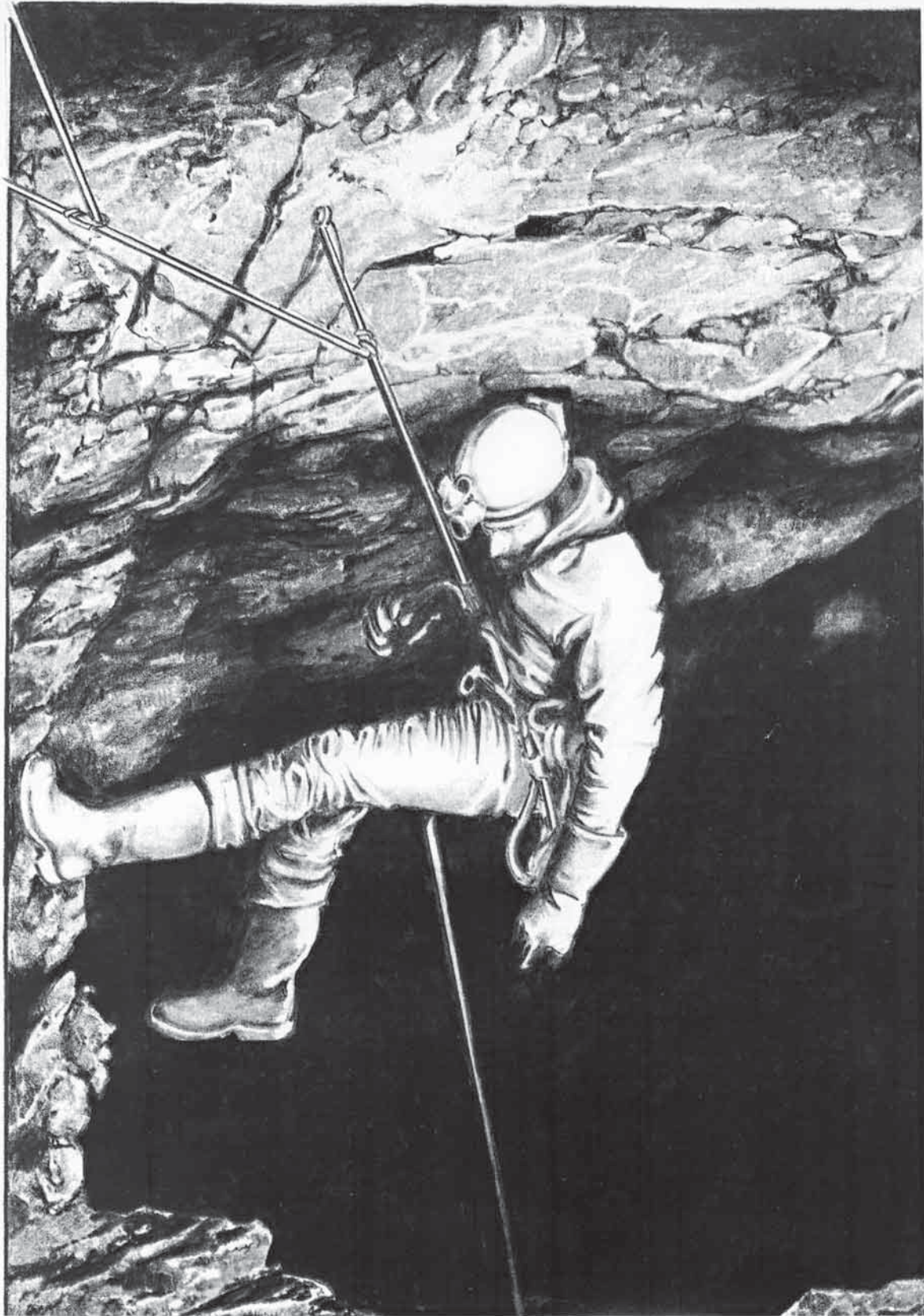
trol over a hostile State Assembly dominated by the secessionist group Confederacy Reborn, frustrate a vote on separation and keep order statewide in the years after the collapse of the National Constitutional Convention of 2037 and subsequent Federal disorder and partial dissolution of the federal union throughout the late 2030's and into the early 40's.

With the near miraculous restoration of Federal authority during the Autumn of 2044—after the climatic Siege of Denver, secessionist military defeats in Utah, Texas, Kentucky and Ohio and an election of a national Congress the following Spring, the first in fourteen years—the splintered nation to began to heal. With Federal authority reestablished inside the State, Governor Anderson shocked his admirers by announcing his resignation and left office in December 2045 after serving two and half terms as the State's most controversial leader.

Early in January of the following year the Ex-Governor was reported mysteriously missing by his daughter and later that same day his vehicle was discovered in the parking lot of a downtown Nashville restaurant.

Michael Anderson would have turned 58 this week.





“Dave Elliot in Giants Hole-UK”

by Linda Heslop
Pencil drawing

Caving With Liza

by Laura Guyer

Last year I became Liza Minnelli's official archivist. Recently a grotto member suggested that I should ask Liza if she would like to go caving, so I did. While visiting with her backstage one evening after the show, I broached the subject during a lull in the conversation.

"Say, I was wondering if you'd like to go cave exploring with me?"

She gave me that wide-eyed look of hers and asked, "Is that anything like spelunking?"

"Exactly," I replied, reluctant to try and explain the difference.

She looked at Lisa, her assistant Pappy, her conductor, and Matt, her director. Then she turned to me and said cheerily, "Sure, sounds like fun."

Lisa rolled her eyes, Pappy shrugged, and Matt just stared. Doug, who plays keyboard and had just gone bungee jumping, gave me a thumbs up sign and said, "I'll drink to that." Billy, who plays the piano while she dances on top of it, threw up his arms and frowned. Gary, her road manager, asked how much it would cost. He seemed happy when I said it costs nothing. Liza just smiled innocently.

The next day dawned warm and sunny. I stepped out of my motorhome to see an ultra stretch black limo parked beside it. Liza poked her head out the window and said brightly, "You ready to go caving?"

"Uh. . . yeah," I stammered. "I'll just get some gear." Grabbing helmets, lights, and clothes, I stepped into the limo and gaped at its elegance. I sat opposite Liza on the plush velour seat and took in her outfit, black turtleneck, black stretch pants, and black boots. It was pretty elegant compared to my mud-covered thrift store boots and ratty coveralls.

"Uh. . . you might get a little muddy," I volunteered.

"That's okay," she said, looking down at her outfit. "These are old anyway."

After a quick stop at McDonalds, I directed the chauffeur to a nearby cave. Liza took the helmet and light I offered her, but dismissed the baggy coveralls. Can't say I blame her. A girl has to protect her

image. Suppose the National Enquirer happened to show up. After sending the limo away, she stared dubiously at the black hole in front of us.

"We going in there?" she asked.

"Just think of it as the New York subway without muggers," I suggested.

Mollified, she started toward the hole, then suddenly halted and turned to me.

"What if it collapses?"

"It hasn't yet," I replied. "Trust me."

She shrugged and plunged into the darkness with her usual exuberance, only to crash headfirst into a low spot in the ceiling. Reeling, she staggered backward and bumped into me. I steadied her and suggested, "Slow down and let your eyes adjust to the dark."

Helmet askew, she said, "Now I know why you wear helmets," and adjusted hers to its proper un-tilted position.

"Hurt your head?" I asked.

"No, just my pride," she answered. Eventually we moved on, but much slower, and out of the twilight zone. Suddenly she stopped again.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"There's something furry on the ceiling in front of me," she said slowly and deliberately, pointing upward.

"Oh, it's only a bat. Just don't disturb it. And don't step in the guano." Her big brown eyes grew even bigger.

"The what?"

"Bat shit," I whispered, pointing at the pile on the floor.

She looked down and made a strange choking sound. "I wouldn't think of it," she said, ducking under the creature and stepping gingerly around the guano. We moved on until the passage dropped to a crawlway.

"Wanna go first?" I asked as she bent over to examine the dark orifice.

"In there?" She gestured toward the black hole.

"We don't have to," I said.

"Why not? How long is it?"

"About a hundred feet." I lied.

"All right, no sweat. Let's do it." She dropped to the rocky floor and crawled forward. I followed, amazed at her eagerness. After about 500 feet, she turned to me and said, "This sure is a long hundred feet."

“Almost there,” I said, glad she wasn’t looking at me closely enough to see the lie in my eyes.

At 750 feet, she said suspiciously, “You know, the stage at Radio City Music Hall is 130 feet across and this seems a whole lot longer.”

“Just a few more feet,” I gulped.

Finally we popped into walking passage lined with glistening white draperies. Liza gasped and stared in awe.

“Now isn’t this worth a thousand foot crawl?” I asked nervously.

She fixed me with an icy stare, pointed a finger at me, and said coldly, “I’ll get you for this.”

I must have looked dismayed because the icy look evaporated into a cheerful smile.

“No, I’m just kidding. This is wonderful and I wouldn’t have seen it if you’d told me it was a thousand foot crawl. Thank you so much for bringing me.”

“Stand there and let me take your picture with that formation growing out of your head,” I said, pulling my handy dandy paper camera out of my pack.

She turned, looked at the stalactite, laughed, and took a step sideways. I took the picture.

“If only Mama could see me now, “ she mused softly. We wandered up and down the passage marveling at its magnificence. Finally Liza asked, “Is this a pretty good cave?”

“One of the best,” I said.

“Then I guess I won’t have to do this again.”

“Do you hate it?” I asked.

“No, it’s marvelous. Now enough of that. Let’s get out of here while we’re still young, before we turn into bat food.”

“Bats only eat mosquitoes,” I said.

“Terrific!” she said and with renewed energy plunged into the crawlway like a human dynamo. Considering she wears a 45 pound dress on stage, I shouldn’t have been surprised. My only consolation is that she’s younger than me. I’m still not sure how I kept up with her.

When we reached the entrance, she looked at her muddy clothes and asked, “How do we get this stuff off? Or is it permanent?”

I pointed down the hill. “See that creek down there? Just slosh around in it.”

Her eyes grew wide again and she said, “Then we’ll be all wet, and Ralph will kill us if we drip all over the limo.”

“Relax. I brought dry clothes,” I said, dragging them out of the trash bag I’d brought and left at the entrance.

“Perfect!” she exclaimed. “Where do we change?”

“Right here. Unless you want to go back in the cave.”

“No, thanks. I’m just starting to warm up.” Hastily we changed and waited for Ralph. He arrived propitiously and took us back to town without comment on our state of disarray. Liza looked as disheveled as she does after her concerts. Pappy and Lisa were waiting at the motorhome.

“We were getting concerned,” Pappy admitted, looking her over carefully.

“I had the best time!” Liza gushed, hugging him. Then she hugged me and said, “Thank you so much!”

Just then the alarm clock went off and my caving dream ended. But it sure was fun while it lasted.

Wink Wink, Nod Nod

by Steven Martin Cohen

As I was on my way to work in New York City one day, this leather and iron Nazi pansy-boy walked up to me after seeing the locking carabiner with the rusty spring clipped to a belt loop.

“I know what your up to,” he said, wink wink, nod nod.

“Oh, do you now,” I replied. He was looking at me with that knowing grin, and his penetrating eye contact was periodically broken with glances at the carabiner. This was starting to make me very uncomfortable.

“I know what you’ve been doing,” wink wink.

“Oh, what have I been doing?”

“Seen a little ... action lately?” wink wink, nod nod.

“Why yes. Just last weekend I tried to do the Lipps-Organ connection, but we weren’t up to it. So instead we did Clover Hollow, Murder Hole, Links, and Tawney’s,” wink, nod. His interest piqued.

“Who are they? ... ooh, Links, and Murder Hole ... It sounds real kinky.”

“Well, if you consider using harnesses and hundreds of feet of rope kinky ... a ...”

“Ooooooh, where’s the aaaaction. I thought I knew where all the hot spots were.”

“Why, down in ol’ Virginia. Where else? I go down when ever I get the chance (wink wink) ... crawl through a little mud ... do a little squeeeeeze ... slip into my custom designer harness ... maybe do a little hauling ... know what I mean? Work up a sweat ... Why I could take you places where the .. sun .. don’t .. shine,” wink wink.

This guy was busting out of his pants. He was panting like a nation of Pit Bulls in heat. He was almost panicking with anxiety, only moments from ventricular fibrillation. How long could I keep this going?

“How soon can I go? It sounds toooooo goood to be true.”

“It is; let me assure you,” wink wink, nod nod.

“Is it safe?”

“You bet. We use every safety precaution necessary. We even belay each other,” wink wink.

“Is it a private club? I mean, can anybody join?”

“Yeah. All you have to do is ... pay your dues and you’re in,” wink, nod.

“Dues! Oh, I just love to pay my dues. How soon can I join?”

“The sooner the better.” I reached into my bag and handed him one of those NSS forms. “OK guy, I have to get to work now. Know what I mean,” wink wink, nod nod.

“Will I ever see you again?” he pleaded.

“Maybeeee.”

At work I sprayed a little WD-40 on the old spring inside the carabiner’s gate. Good as new. I think it was Freud who said, “Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.”

A Caver’s Dream

by Martha Hendrix

Water rushing down the hill.
Disappearing. A caver’s thrill!
A small hole; will I fit?
Digging may get into it.
Once inside where will it go?
If I don’t try, I’ll never know.
I can hear the water flowing
And I feel cool air; it’s blowing!
Dig and squeeze, squeeze and slide.
Just a little more—I’ll be inside.
This may be it. My claim to fame.
Virgin passage—think of a name.
Finally in! A small tight crawlway.
Alarm clock rings; Alas, it’s Monday.

You might be considered a bad ass cover if...

by Lou Simpson

1. You know how cave crickets taste.
2. You've taken off all your clothes to get into a scoop in a cave.
3. Your skin has become transparent and your eyes have atrophied from nonuse.
4. A member of your caving party died in the cave and you kept on surveying.
5. You have floated through a near-sump on your back with your nose in a ceiling crack.
6. You've been shot out of an entrance by flood waters.
7. On a three-day cave trip you don't bother to take off your wetsuit to go to the bathroom.
8. You don't bathe after a cave trip.
9. No one will sit next to you at a grotto meeting.
10. An NSS award was named in your memory.

Top ten signs you're a sorry assed cover

by Lou Simpson

10. The ass is torn out of your coveralls.
9. Your reamer breaks off in your lamp.
8. You put M and M's in your carbide lamp.
7. You attempt to eat carbide, and burp acetylene for several hours and flames shoot out your nose.
6. You follow a map into a cave and get lost because it is a map of a different cave than the one you are in.
5. Your 4WD breaks down on the way to cave.
4. Your 4WD is an International Scout.
3. All your lights fail before you even enter the cave.
2. When you finally chip away the rock blocking your way, the ceiling slab, which was held up by the rock you chipped away, descends.
1. The cave you are in, which you are certain hasn't flooded since the great flood of Noah, floods.

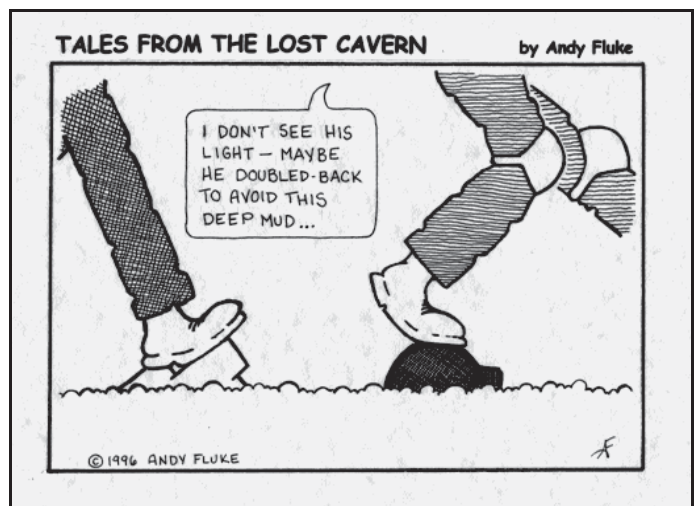
**The Hodag Song
Apologies to Dr. Suess**

by Jo Schaper

Who speaks for the caves?

We do, said the hodags, tripping the cavers
Causing rockfalls, slips and light failures.
We speak for the soda straw underground.
It was so peaceful before you came down
Clanking equipments and churning the clay
Turning pristine dark into imitation day.
We stand between nature and the mark of man
Muddy footprints wherever he stands.
We speak for the cave, as cave critters die
Salamanders are squashed, the last bat flies.
We wish you no ill, as only by our tricks
Will you learn to be careful, and start to fix
The destruction you've caused, and only you can
end.

These caves are my home, my friend
And you humans are my guests—
Do you go visiting and leave the place a mess?
We speak for the caves, the hodags said
This is our hearth, our parlor, our bed
And if you don't listen, we'll trick you dead.



The Legend Of Mott Hole

By Bob Cohen, Guru and teller of mostly-trues

Over the last six months I had the pleasure of exploring Mott Hole in Monroe County, West Virginia about three times. These trips were Met-Grot-to-extravaganzas.

Mott Hole is a multi-drop vertical system with the chance of some virgin stuff off a lead. This is mighty enticing by itself, but the cave seems to have a special mystique that draws us to it, like a moth to a flame.

The story of Mott Hole goes as follows: Jane Mott, a young red-haired woman, who lived at about the time of the Civil War, was abducted in some sort of love-ransom plot and thrown down the pit that now bears her name.

This cave has been known for some time but is seldom visited now. Nearby Scott Hollow is the hot system that draws all the visiting cavers. The strange part about Mott is every time we mention it to the local cavers, the response is, "Why would you want to go to that place?" Their accompanying look of disbelief is standard. We have invited many to join us. We say, "We have a vertical cave with virgin leads!" This is usually enough to draw cavers out of the woodwork. Once the name Mott Hole is dropped, "No thanks," is the answer.

A well known caver down there was also under the impression that the part of the cave we were interested in may have some virgin areas. He pointed out that everybody goes to the obvious route listed in the Davies book. We found no map of the side we were pushing. As usual he would not join us. He wanted to know our finds but suggested we keep quiet about it. I'm not sure if our silence was to protect the cave or to keep us safe from some unknown greater power.

I never felt anything supernatural about the cave, but I wondered why most local cavers wanted nothing to do with the place. Conversations would grind to a halt with the mention of Mott Hole. Maybe the memory of the Mott murder was deeply ingrained in the area. There was a rumor of an older W.V.A.C.S. member dating the Mott girl in his youth. Whatever the cause, folks just fear the place.

One time when I was trying to cross a knot on-rope in Mott Hole, getting soaked with winter melt, it all became clear to me. All caves put out some immeasurable field of waves or particles that makes you stupid. I call this phenomena, "Cave Brain Drain." Following years of exposure, it takes its toll. Just thinking about caving lowers the I.Q. After the first caving experience, why would one go back? Most cavers I know say that caving feels so good when it stops. This makes as much sense as slamming parts of your anatomy in a window.

Mott Hole must have a particularly strong brain-dampening field. During one winter trip, we came close to freezing on rope, both on the way in and out. On another trip, we actually left some of our rope back in the car for safe keeping. We ended up having to tie two short lengths together in order to proceed. The result, however, forced us to cross the knot in frigid water-spray. The next time, one of us packed in a dynamic rope by mistake. The result was a bouncy, scary ride up and down. On every trip to Mott Hole, there was a problem that could be attributed to weak minds; we either forgot equipment or remembered the wrong pit lengths. On the last run, much time was spent rebelaying a rope out of a waterfall. And with all our efforts, the rope's new position pinned us deeper in the water's path. On one of our visits, our Russian "frog" expert friend rigged the cave European- rebelay style. He had special German static rope with 7% stretch (dynamic has 8%). Although all was safe, it was back to a scary, bouncy ride.

The locals may not have figured out my theory of "Cave Brain Drain." They must have enough instinct to just say no to Mott Hole. We keep going back for more. No brain no pain!



To a Friend Who Quit Caving

by Andy Messer

You used to love the sounds of the cave,
The hollow echo of rock striking rock underfoot,
The rhythm and melody and harmony
Of falling water and polished limestone.

There was a time when you had to follow every
passage,
The less inviting, the better,
The harder the going, the greater the joy
Of reaching whatever lay beyond.

You once told me you loved the heights,
That you never felt fear while hanging by a thread
in a deep pit,
Only the elation of flight,
Of abandoning yourself to the dark and empty air.

I never believed that, of course,
Any more than I believe now that you really don't
want to go back.
But I wonder:
Do you ever dream of damp, cool darkness
And awoken to the sound of leathery wings reced-
ing into the distance?

Onondaga Valentine

by Jo Schaper

Hollow heart in the white flowstone
waterdrop dependent from its point
what causes your tear? In the midst
of such awesome dripstone stillness
there should be no reason for sadness
the heart around an emptiness
which only centuries will fill.

I cannot probe the darkness there
a knothole in that flowstone wall
an opening into which to peer
and see no light. Is an essence hidden
so sacred and beating, beyond the grasp
of passing tourists? Salamanders stand guard
against the probing fingers of unwelcome guests.

Far within that heart burns a carbide lamp
still turned down to a bare blue glow.
Perhaps the tear sliding down the rocks
will one day cause that gas to flame
light the heart and passages around
show the world of glories underground
and warm the damp of that heart's soul.

Dark Water

by John Tudek

It was often joked about the village of Gilliam's Measure that there were more letters in the village's name than people in its borders. A single row of homes on either side of a single lane road was both the beginning and the end of this tiny town. No general store, no post office, no mayor and no police had been included by the village founders. All in all, less than thirty people called Gilliam's Measure home.

These two dozen plus scratched out a living in the limestone foothills under Big Black Mountain. Living in one of the most remote sections of the counties, they went about their lives untroubled for years on end. Only one event ever occurred in Gilliam's Measure that merited even passing notice to the outside world. And it happened every five years.

"Dark water? What's that?" Scott was reading the Sandleford Gazette, the only real paper that had the courage to serve the counties. Bob looked up from where he'd been playing with his daughter. "What was what?" he asked absentmindedly.

"Dark water. There's some story about it. Do you know what it is?"

"Oh, dark water. Yeah, I heard of it. Is it that time already again?"

Bob stopped playing with his daughter to read over Scott's shoulder. His daughter pouted at losing her father's interest. Then the sight of a butterfly outside the picture window caught her attention and she just as quickly lost interest in her dad. With a pleasant cooing she toddled over to the picture window and pressed her nose against the glass.

"Let me see the article," Bob asked.

Scott flipped back to the page with the article in question. It was a small story, easily passed by if one wasn't paying close attention to details. It's headline was what caught Scott's eye. It read 'Dark Water Returns to Spring'. A few brief lines followed which Scott read out loud.

"The Dark Water for which the tiny hamlet of Gilliam's Measure is most famous for has returned according to Andrew Rivenburg. Mr. Rivenburg, on whose property the infamous Dark Water origi-

nates warns everyone in the community not to drink any of the water which is shaded or tinted by the spring. The Dark Water oozes from an otherwise crystal clear spring on his farm. The spring is located at the base of what is appropriately called Devil's Hanging Hill, a small knob of rock jutting out from Big Black Mountain. Local legend claims that over a hundred years ago the cave located on that hill was the home of a witch who, when caught and hung by the townsfolk, cursed the stream. The stream feeds the community and while the effects of the Dark Water last, most of the villagers will seek refuge with neighbors in more distant towns."

Bob nodded. "Yep, that's the Dark Water I remember. Right down to the cave. I remember last time it came around, there were a couple of people who refused to leave. When the rest of the town returned, they found that the few who stayed had disappeared. It was all very weird. There's something in the water, I suppose, livestock wouldn't drink it."

"Have you ever seen it?"

"The Dark Water? No, the last time it came around I wasn't even interested in caving. I don't think I've ever given it a passing thought in the years since then."

"Want to go check it out?"

"I can't see why not. I suppose we'll be safe as long as we don't drink the water."

Three weeks later, Bob's battered jeep was making the long haul to the remotest reaches of the counties. Scott wanted to go earlier, but Bob assured him that there was no real rush. The Dark Water could be counted on to be around for at least a month.

"I wonder if anyone decided to stay around this time?" Scott asked with a hint of concern.

"I don't know. I'm a little worried about that too. I'm thinking more of bandits or squatters, though I'm not sure what there is to steal up there. Gilliam's Measure is one of the poorest areas of the counties. The tax collectors don't even make the rounds up there anymore. In a lot of ways the whole area is right out of the Middle Ages. You'll see when we get there."

Scott began to understand when they reached the first foothills. The roads became bumpy, then gravelly, then just two ruts in a field. Houses lost whatever style they had and began to look more like the one roomed shanties Scott recalled from history

books. As they drove by, the locals paused with their labors to look up a moment before continuing with the monotony of their day.

“We still have places like this?” Scott found himself asking. “This looks like its just out of the Civil War. No electric lines. Bob, these people have no electricity.”

“I know. No electricity, no running water, no flush toilets, no refrigeration, no air conditioning. Nothing has changed here in at least a hundred years. It’s like stepping backwards into time.”

As they drove through the region, they began to notice an increasing number of farms and homesteads were recently abandoned. Abandoned not only of people, but of horses, cows, mules, sheep, cats and dogs. In short, anything living that belonged to these people left with them. A chilling quiet descended over the nearby fields. No birds or animals could be heard either. It was as if the whole of creation was staying away from this blighted zone.

“We’re nearing the spring,” Bob announced. “Its completely quiet. Can you hear? Total silence. It’s like life left.”

They passed through a small wood and came out into a large clearing. The land around here was quite hilly; the low, rolling hills that came to mind whenever Scott thought of the Three Counties. Looking ahead, Scott could see the road winding along the base of one hill towards a distant farmhouse on the crest of a ridge. To reach it, the road now paralleled a stream along the base of the hill. Bob slowly brought the car closer to the farm, his eyes more interested in the water than the road ahead.

“Whoa, watch it,” Scott commented after Bob nearly drove them off the road and into the stream. “What’s the deal? Are we close?”

“Very. We can’t get too close, though. I have a funny feeling that the disappearance of those people has something to do with the water.”

Scott watched the stream. As they drove along it, a dramatic change began to occur in the water. Globby patches of blackness, spherical in shape, began to float in the water. As they proceeded further, the balls of darkness grew larger and more frequent, sometimes merging together to form more intricate shapes. Scott expected the balls to be carried downstream, or for the water to break up the clusters. Neither of these things happened. The balls hung

there motionless, oblivious of the rushing stream around them.

“This is really bizarre,” Scott commented. “What makes it do that?”

“I don’t know. No one knows. But it’s so deeply ingrained in everyone’s mind around here. When the Dark Water comes they move away. Scott, look up ahead.”

Scott trained his eyes forward, and took in a most remarkable sight. The headwaters of the stream could now be seen; a low hole leading into the side of the hill. The spring let out into a small duck pond. At other times of the year this pond would be teeming with life as fish, frogs and fowl shared its waters. Now it was one big black pool; still and frightening. Something else was odd too. The ground around the pool was ripped completely bare as well. Grass, trees, shrubs were all missing. The dirt at the waters edge had been turned up, as if some backhoe had moved everything.

“Now how do you account for that?” Bob asked.

“I don’t know. It looks like something tore all the ground up.”

“Now you see why I don’t want too get near it. Who knows what it could be?”

Scott nodded in agreement. He looked at the hill that lay on top of the spring. It seemed normal. “Lets park away from it a bit and climb the hill. Maybe we can get a better view from above.”

Bob turned a bit queasy at the thought. “I really don’t want to get too close to it.”

“Look at the hill. It’ll be safe. We’ll turn around at the slightest sign of danger. I’m just a little curious, that’s all.”

“Okay. But the first sign of anything weird and we’re out of here.”

Bob followed the road up to a house and parked the car on the farside. The screen door at the rear of the home swung open in the breeze, a chilling sign of how quickly some people packed and left. They passed the empty house quickly and made their way to the base of the hill. A well worn path crawled up the slope and they followed it. It wound away from the spring before going back towards it. The path was rocky now and the two were forced to choose their steps more carefully. As they neared the summit the path bent to the very edge of the hill and offered a magnificent view of the countryside. For

Scott and Bob all the fields and farms below them now opened up for their enjoyment. They saw the gravel road they traveled to reach the spring. They followed the stream as it receded into the distance, picking up feeders and becoming ever larger. Following the stream back to its source, its crystal waters darkened as it neared the hill and became an oozing black mass, as if the earth itself were spilling out asphalt.

"I'm going to continue up the hill a bit and see where the path goes," Scott announced.

"Okay. I think I'll stay here. Keep watch on things. I still don't trust this stream, you know. Don't be long."

"I won't." Scott grinned and set off up the path at a dead run. Bob hoped his friend would stay safe.

As soon as Scott left his friend, the path turned into the hill. Trees clustered around him and he was soon shrouded in shadows. The air chilled, making the hairs on Scott's arms rise and a wave of cold raced down his back. But he had an idea where the path went.

The path grew even steeper and he was now climbing, using his hands and legs and grasping for holds. In some places, stones had been thoughtfully placed or hammered into the hillside, giving some semblance of a crude staircase. All too often he was simply scrambling over broken ground. He wondered how high he was now. At least a hundred feet farther, he guessed. He supposed he was more probably on the ridge than on the hill now, and might even be climbing Big Black Mountain itself. Still, the path led upwards.

A few more minutes of the steep climb left Scott at barely a crawl, trying to catch his breath. How much more, he asked himself? He knew he would have to turn back in a minute anyway, simply because he and Bob were becoming far too separated. There was still danger around here. He picked his head up to see whether the road ahead looked promising.

It did. Maybe fifty feet farther up the slope, there was a sudden dip and the path disappeared. His resolve enhanced by the unknown, he doubled his efforts up the hill. The climb was excruciating now, but he somehow managed to climb up the last five feet. Exhausted and breathing heavily, he pulled himself over the lip and looked to see what the de-

pression contained.

A hole. Maybe twenty feet wide and thirty feet high, it looked as if the side of the mountain had been blown away, leaving only darkness behind. The hole lay in the farthest recesses of the depression, angled downward into the mountain. Scott slowly rose to his feet and moved towards the entrance. As he walked he became more aware of his surroundings.

There were bones here. Bones, bleached white by untold summers of exposure; some with the rags of clothing still attached and some that were obviously livestock. Scott picked up a very human skull and went over it with his hands. Someone long ago had died in this remote place, and by looking around the depression, it was several someone's. The skull was scraped and scratched, in some places cracked. Morbid thoughts of his own mortality began to overwhelm him and he promptly tossed the skull to the ground. He picked his way closer to the gloomy entrance where he noticed the skull of something different half buried in the ground. Long, strong and with big grazing teeth, he guessed it must be a horse. But what horse could make it up the steep slope to this remote site, and why? He continuing search led him to more equine bones and finally to a saddle trapped among tree roots. He reached for the saddle, thinking it would make good evidence to present to Bob. When he tried to pull it out, it refused to give. He spent a few minutes clearing away the roots and gave another fruitless tug. A further tug showed him it was still attached to something deeper in the ground. Putting the saddle down, he dug at the spot where the leather was still buried. A cord wound its way into the earth and he followed it. The cord connected to a large piece of leather with a protruding handle and he gave that a yank. The first tug proved fruitless, as did the second. Planting his feet he pulled as hard as he could. He heard a snap and saw a flash of polished steel before all resistance gave way and he flew backwards, tumbling across the ground and coming to rest in a heap of bones. He shook the dust and dirt from his hair and sat up. The handle was still in his hand and he brought it up to see what he'd pulled out. When he saw what he held, he nearly stopped breathing. It was an exquisitely carved longsword, maybe three and a half feet long from blade point to hilt. Even though it had been in the ground for ages, it looked perfectly new. Scott ran a finger along the edge of

the blade, and winced. He inspected his finger and found a neat cut down the side with blood oozing from it. Well, he thought as he sucked on his finger, it's still sharp. But what is it doing here? Getting to his feet, he walked over to the saddle again, and found the battered scabbard that had protected the sword until he'd yanked it clean from the ground. The clasp that held the blade in its scabbard was torn clean, but otherwise it was still serviceable. Feeling maybe just a little too much like a knight errant, Scott clipped the scabbard onto his belt. He would find a better home for his sword later. Satisfied with himself, he turned his attention back to the cave.

The entrance was as cold and wet as he expected. Scott dug his flashlight from his pocket and stepped into darkness. As he proceeded inward daylight faded into eerie blackness. The cold air chilled him to the bone and he began to shiver. I'm not dressed for this, he thought. I'd better make this a short recon. The cave walls around him were rough and sharp, as if the cave itself had never been quite finished by God. No, he corrected himself. Not God. This cave feels all wrong to be a creation of his. Something older made this.

The passage bent leftwards and abruptly ended at the edge of an immense pit. Scott looked over the side, but it was too deep to see clearly. He shone his light down it and could vaguely make out a floor sixty, maybe eighty feet down. He located a fist sized rock and heaved it over the edge, following the stone with the beam of his light. When it landed, it didn't create the sharp crash of rock hitting rock. Instead it left a dull thud almost a splat. The sound puzzled Scott and he searched the floor of the pit with his light, trying to figure out what could cause such a noise. As he squinted, it seemed for a moment that the floor of the pit was rushing up towards him, but dismissed the idea as ludicrous. A moment later, he realized it wasn't. The floor was speeding up at him, very quickly now. All at once he saw tan flowstone, nubby stalactites and helectites as thick as a man's arm racing upwards. Then the floor ripped itself apart and Scott saw two rows of dagger sharp stalactites hovering above two rows of equally sharp stalagmites. As he watched, the rows of stalagmites dropped away from the stalactites. There came a stench of rotting flesh and something red and slimy between the stalagmites. A breath of hot air hit him and it all clicked together; a gigantic

jaw! Scott watched the jaw spring back and something resembling yellowish phlegm fire out from it. With fear coursing through his veins, Scott sped for the entrance as the phlegm struck the ceiling behind him. There was a shower of pebbles followed by the all too familiar sound of acid eating through rock. Next came an ungodly roar that reverberated through the passage, shattering formations and causing small rocks to rain down upon him. Dodging the deadly hail, Scott flew clear of the debris and escaped the cave completely. Only then did he pause for a moment to catch his breath and steal a glance rearward to see if the beast had followed him. That was when he heard Bob's yell.

Scott bolted down the steep slope, sliding partway down before tripping over the sword and tumbling the rest of the way. He came to rest at the bottom, wondered for only a second how he survived without breaking anything before resuming his sprint. Bob's voice carried though the trees as Scott raced to him.

"He's trying to steal my jeep! Where the hell are you?"

Scott broke into the overlook clearing just as his friend left the other side. Scott paused to check for his friend's jeep below. He could see the unsavory character trying to pry his way into Bob's car. Catching his breath, Scott set off down the rest of the hill after his friend.

He burst out of the woods with Bob almost fifty yards ahead of him. Somewhere along the line, Bob had picked up a heavy stick, because now he was waving it like a lunatic, shouting at the man at his car. The man looked up and saw Bob charging him, stick in hand. Quickly he backed away from the car and against the house. Scott held a brief moment of hope that that would be the end of it, but the man reached down to pick up a long metal pipe. Now he held the pipe menacingly, beckoning Bob onward.

Bob, in turn, had slowed down considerably, now that the stakes had evened up. The man could see Scott coming up fast though, and decided it probably would be best to deal with Bob before he was outnumbered. The man closed the distance between them and sent a heavy swing at Bob's skull. Bob blocked it, but the force of the blow stunned Bob, shattered his stick and sent him flying. Satisfied with the results, the man sized up his next opponent.

Instinctively, the sword came out of its sheath and into Scott's hand. He charged the man, sword flashing in the summer sun. The man's eyes grew wide as he watched this crazed individual brandishing steel hurtle towards him. He backed up, slowly at first, then faster until he was backpedaling as fast as he could. Still Scott continued to close the distance between them. Then Scott was upon the man and he let loose with a vicious slash. The attack was clumsy and the man deflected it with the pipe. The fields rang with the sound of iron on steel as the two met blow for blow. Scott pressed his attack, driving the man across the road and down the ravine until the dark water was at his back. Forced between being cut to pieces by the sword or being engulfed in the unholy pond, the man chose neither. He dropped his pipe and tried to escape along the stream bank. Scott was too quick for this and with a great lunge he tripped up the man's legs with the flat of his blade. The man stumbled on the very edge of the bank, desperately trying to regain his balance when the return cut of Scott's sword glanced him. The additional push by the sword tipped the man's balance. The world slipped out from underneath him and he fell headfirst into the pool's inky slime. There was a squishy splat as half of the man's body became instantly trapped in the black ooze. His legs flailed for a moment or two before all movement ceased. Slowly the lower half of his torso sank into the ooze as well, making a sucking, gurgling sound until his entire body disappeared with a final, satisfying pop.

Bob had come up while the man was still sinking and watched him disappear into the muck. "Yuck. What a horrible way to go."

"I know. Well, better him than either of us. Is the jeep ok?"

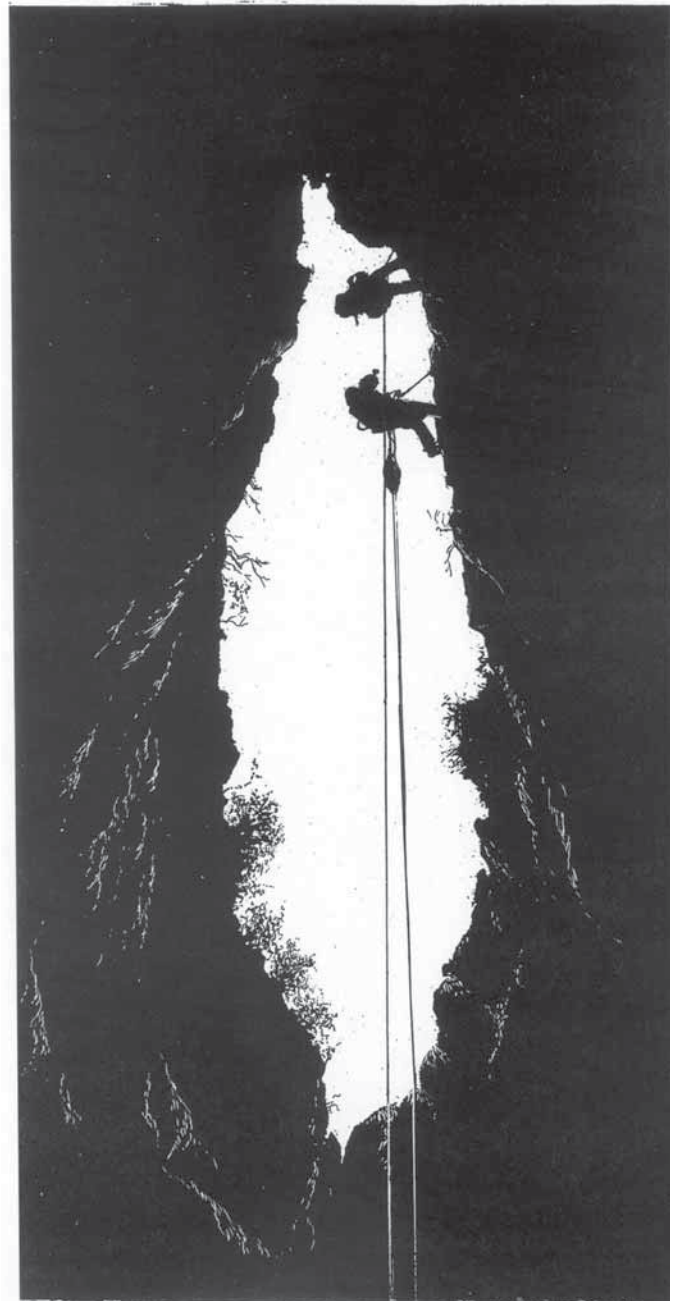
"I think so. It didn't seem like he actually got inside." Bob's eyes glanced for a moment at the sword. "Where did that come from?"

"Up on the hill. There's a pile of skeletons up there near the entrance to a big cave."

The cave, Scott thought. Suddenly all the terrors of the beast inside the cave came back to him. "We'd better get out of here," he said, sheathing his sword. "I'll tell you all about it on the way home."

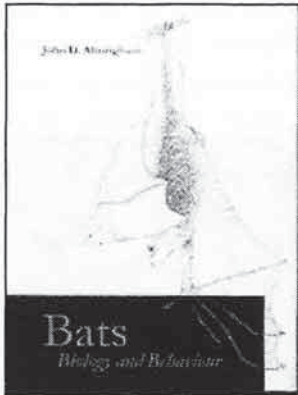
Bob nodded without saying anything. The two made their way back to the jeep and began the drive back home, leaving the farm as empty as the rest of the world around the dark water. However, deep in

the heart of Big Black Mountain an enormous reptilian head reached out of an even more enormous cave. It yawned and twin rows of sharp teeth, each the length of a man's forearm, glistened in the afternoon sun. The beast sniffed the air above him and then the pile of human bones before him. As it passed over a worn, overturned saddle it paused. With the very edge of its snout, it pushed the saddle around, then backed up to inspect it. Immediately it knew exactly what was missing. It sniffed the air again and caught a scent that it recognized. It catalogued it away in its massive brain for future reference.



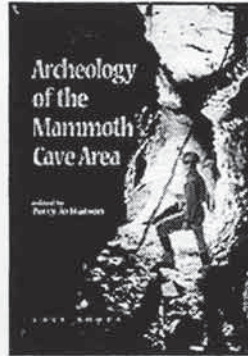
LINDA HESLOP © 97

New Books!!



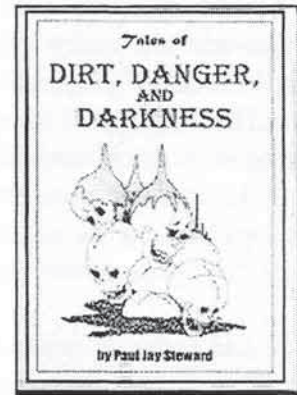
01-0412 (PB)
\$30.00

A valuable reference for bat enthusiasts and an excellent contribution to the literature on the biology of bats.



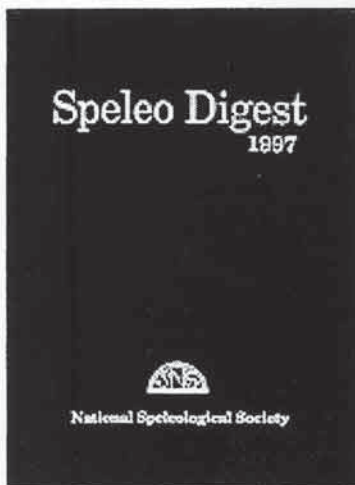
01-0411 (PB)
\$24.95

For cavers and Archeologist who want to learn about the best cavers anywhere-ancient Native Americans. This is a reprint of a classic.



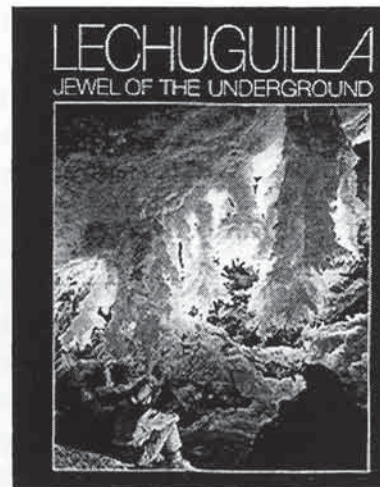
01-0413 (PB)
\$8.00

"I don't know where I went wrong. He was such a nice boy until he started crawling around in caves and writing all those weird stories."
Catherine Steward, Paul's mom



05-0025
\$19.00

On time and a must have!
1996 also available (05-0024)
\$19.00



01-0408 (HB)
\$56.00

Revised 2nd edition. More stunning photos. Highlights of 1991-1997 discoveries plus 3-D maps. New chapters!

National Speleological Society
2813 Cave Ave
Huntsville AL 35810-4431
nss@caves.org and www.caves.org



J. WALLACE
© 1993