

CENTRAL JERSEY CAVER

A Publication of the Central New Jersey Grotto



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Cover Photo by John Tudek. Floyd Collins' Home, Mammoth Cave National Park, Kentucky. November 5, 2004. Taken with a Nikon Coolpix 995.

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The following article was a research project for a recent English class. The assignment was to pick an author and document his or her impact on literature. I got an “A.”

Roger W. Brucker: Cave Explorer, Author by Paul Steward

The underground world is a mysterious place and, for most, the mere mention of a cave invokes claustrophobic nightmares of bats and darkness. Thankfully, a wide variety of books take readers to the farthest depths of the Earth from the comfort of their favorite chair.

One of the most celebrated authors of caving literature is Roger Brucker. His books, *The Caves Beyond*, *Trapped!*, *The Longest Cave*, and *Beyond Mammoth Cave*, document the most defining events in caving history: the National Speleology Society’s week-long expedition into Floyd Collins’ Crystal Cave, the entrapment and ultimate death of Floyd Collins, and the discovery and exploration of the world’s longest cave. His books have become the historical authority of these events and, most importantly, preserve what little history there is of the sport. Reading these books is a rite of passage into caving.

Brucker is not only an author; he is a world-renowned cave explorer and a prominent figure in the events that he writes about. For more than fifty years, he has been exploring caves. His writing shows the passion and dedication he has for caving.

It is not possible for someone to write an accurate book about caves or caving who has never experienced being deep underground and miles from the nearest entrance. Walking along a tourist trail with a guide is not the same as experiencing the isolation of far-out caving and having only a vague idea of the way back, or the thrill of discovering a place where no human or living thing has ever been. In a cave, the darkness becomes as tangible

as the walls and ceiling. It is a pure and absolute blackness that can be experienced only in a cave. And, of course, there is always the lurking fears of rockfall and getting lost or stuck. At times, astronauts on the moon have a better chance of being rescued than cavers do. These are the feelings and experiences that only cavers can put into words, and Brucker is one of the few cavers who writes well enough to produce books of this nature.

In 1954, American caving was in its infancy. That February, the National Speleological Society (NSS) sent a highly organized and equipped team of cavers into Floyd Collins’ Crystal Cave in Kentucky for a week-long expedition in an attempt not only to encourage publicity for the cave but also to explore its seemingly endless passages. This was the first time that cavers, using mountaineering-type tactics, explored from camps set farther and farther into the cave. Roger Brucker was an important part of this group and was offered the job of documenting the expedition for the book, *The Caves Beyond*, after a ghostwriter contracted by the NSS reneged on the deal. The much-publicized event caught the country’s attention, and first editions of the book sold out quickly (Lawrence and Brucker xi-xiv). This was Brucker’s first book, confirming his status as a first-rate writer and marking his place in the world of caving literature. After the expedition, Brucker and others continued to explore in Floyd Collins’ Crystal Cave as well as other caves in the Mammoth Cave area with the goal of connecting them to create the longest cave in the world (Lawrence and Brucker xv-xvii).

For mountain climbers, it was the challenge to find the highest in the world. In 1852, Mount Everest was awarded that esteemed honor. For cavers, it was to find the longest. Unlike finding the highest mountain, no amount of high-tech equipment can do the job. To accurately prove the length of a cave, cavers must physically map and squeeze through every inch. There is no other way.

In his book, *The Longest Cave*, Brucker documents his efforts and the efforts of a small group of cavers from the Cave Research Foundation to find the longest cave. For more than twenty years,

this group systematically mapped and connected one cave to another, culminating in 1972 with the connection of the Flint Ridge Cave System to the Mammoth Cave Ridge System, proving beyond any shadow of doubt that the now 144-mile-long Flint-Mammoth Cave System in Kentucky was, and would forever be, the longest in the world (Brucker and Watson 249). This magnificent achievement has been compared to the conquest of Everest (Brucker and Watson xvi). “*The Longest Cave* is an epic story of caves and cavers” (Conn 51). It is a story that could be written only by someone who experienced firsthand the endless miles of dark and twisting passages.

Brucker was also one of the first to realize that caves were not formed randomly. His theories of cavern development led to a better understanding of the system, which in turn led to more discoveries underground (Brucker et al Vertical Shafts).

Even after the monumental connection, cavers continued to explore, setting their sights on Roppel Cave in the next ridge. By 1983, a connection with Roppel would more than double the size of the Flint-Mammoth System to over 350 miles long. In his book, *Beyond Mammoth Cave: A Tale of Obsession in the World’s Longest Cave*, Brucker and Borden pick up where *The Longest Cave* left off. Brucker again documents the challenges associated with cave exploration, culminating in another grand connection. This time, Brucker was actually a part of the underground group that made the historic link.

For his book, *Trapped! The Story of Floyd Collins*, Brucker spent years researching the life of Floyd Collins and the events leading up to his untimely death. Floyd Collins is a legend among cavers. On his granite tombstone are the words: “Greatest Cave Explorer Ever Known” (Murray and Brucker 235).

On January 30, 1925, Floyd Collins became trapped in a tight crawlway while exploring Sand Cave in Kentucky—a cave he hoped would connect to nearby Mammoth Cave. For the next sixteen days, rescuers tried unsuccessfully to free Collins. The tragedy captivated the nation as the news spread across the country. “President

Coolidge closely followed developments” and “representatives and senators left debates on the floor of Congress to rush out and get the latest information” (Murray and Brucker 220).

The story of Floyd Collins is one of the most publicized events of its time. One *El Paso Times* writer said the story was “ranked the third largest news story between World Wars . . . topped only by Charles Lindbergh’s crossing of the Atlantic.” (Brucker, web page). Yet, more than fifty years passed before the full story was ever published into a book, most likely because it is a story that could be written only by a true caver—someone who knows the passion that Collins possessed, along with the excitement and risks of exploring alone, deep underground

To accurately research this book, Brucker and his team of cavers made six trips into the cave. They risked the same fate as Collins by returning to the very place where Collins died. It is a cave that few cavers would care to enter. Squeezing through passages nine inches high, they amazingly discovered a bypass through the breakdown blocks that stopped rescuers from reaching Collins. If this had been found during the rescue, Collins could have possibly been fed and kept warm until freed. The location of artifacts found in the cave suggested that rescuers may have lied and not gone in as far as they had claimed. Also, these artifacts would have surely been stolen had anyone else penetrated this far since the accident (Murray and Brucker 275-285). Brucker returned to the surface to rewrite history, dispelling previous myths and rumors that had persisted for fifty-four years. The book was also the inspiration for the Broadway musical *Floyd Collins*. Playwright Tina Landau called *Trapped!* her “bible” during the writing of the play (Anderson, par. 14). “Of the countless articles, books, TV shows and even a musical about Floyd Collins, none is finer than *Trapped!*” (Galvin, par. 4).

Many cavers admit that their interest in cave exploration is a result of Brucker’s books. They have influenced a generation of cavers and will continue to do so for as long as they can be found. One of the most famous landmarks in the entire

Mammoth Cave System is the Brucker Break-down—a huge, steeply sloped, 80-foot-high rock pile. Named for Brucker, this attests to his place in cave exploration and cave literature (Brucker and Watson 71).

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From the book *Cave Clippings of the Nineteenth Century*. Compiled by Russell Gurnee, copyright 1983.

The Salem Observer Salem, Massachusetts Saturday Morning, May 13, 1848

Rattlesnake Cave, New Jersey

Curious Facts in Natural History. About the year 1748, some laborers in working a quarry in the neighborhood of Princeton, N. J. for the stone with which the college is built, discovered a cavern which contained the entire skeletons of an immense number of the Rattlesnake (*Crotalus*.) The bones were in such quantities as to require two or three carts for their removal. There can be no doubt that this cavern had once a small opening, which was afterwards closed by the accidental fall of a stone or some other impediment. This had probably been the winter abode of the rattlesnake for years, where many had died through age, and others in consequence of the circumstances just mentioned.—M. Humboldt, in the third volume of his Personal Narrative, hints at an occurrence somewhat similar to the above.—“I had visited the caverns of the Hartz, those of Franconia, and the beautiful grotto of Treshemienshiz, in the Carpathian mountains, which are the vast cemeteries of bones of tigers, hyenas, and bears as large as our horses.” Buckland in his *Geology*, has an account of a hyena skeleton, discovered in Derbyshire, in a cavernous rock. He supposes the cavern to have been open, & afterwards closed by stalactites; instances of which are common in Derbyshire. “Into this cavern, I conceive,” says he, “the animal had retired to die, at a period long after the existence of the marine animals which are imbedded in the surrounding rocks.”

Paul Steward and John Tudek's Excellent Adventure to Mammoth Cave National Park

Photos by John Tudek.



Cave Research Foundation bunk houses.
Where we stayed.



Cave Research Foundation property,
Hamilton Valley, Kentucky.



Floyd Collins' Crystal Cave Entrance.



Austin Entrance to Mammoth Cave.



Looking out Mammoth Cave, Historic Entrance.



Adwell Cave, Kentucky.



Paul in Short Cave, Kentucky.



Stage inside Short Cave, Kentucky.

Pennsylvania Cave Trip by Rachelle Burk

January 8, 2005

Goods Cave, Welsh Run Cave, Niswander Cave, Long Quarry Cave

It was one year ago that my daughter Alana, about to turn twelve, went on her maiden voyage underground to McAllister Cave. Though it was muddy, lacking any decent formations, and no bats to be found, she was smitten by the caving bug and begged to go again. So Allen's Pennsylvania cave-sampling trip was perfect. I found the sleepover at Ed Sira's house to be a wonderful opportunity to get acquainted with other cavers and finally put faces to the names.

Alana didn't seem to care that she was the only kid in the large group—rather uncharacteristic for my rather shy kid. I had spelled out two rules for her: She must strive to keep up, as I didn't want the group to be burdened with a slow kid, and NO WHINING—no complaints about being cold, wet, achy, tired, or having to pee. She not only kept her end of the bargain, but in the last cave she declined the option of turning back with the part of the group that had already gone to the end. Alana insisted on making it all the way. So with Amos, Francois, and Shawn, we pushed on.

Alana was particularly thrilled to see bats up close and personal, and surprised that they weren't bigger, black, and leathery. (No, Alana, you CAN'T have one as a pet.) I've discovered that in spite of her daintiness, there's a direct correlation between the amount of dirt she's covered in and the degree of fun she's having. She's already asking about "the next time." Thanks, Allen, for arranging this trip. And special thanks to my husband, Fred, for cleaning my car.

3 Different People, 3 Different Plans by Diane Reichert

The original plan was to kayak a river one day and kayak a cave the next. Due to weather conditions, we selected the river first as the following day there was a chance of electrical storms. This was agreed by all.

I won't get into the river trip much as that is a separate trip report. During the river trip we used much more time than anticipated on the first 2/3 of the stretch and completing the rest before sun down was sketchy. Half our group stopped at that point, Ralph being one of them (meaning that he will later be well rested). For the rest of us, we ran into one problem: we didn't kayak the river, the river kayaked us. Rob has the scars to prove it. Then we had to hike through the woods, stickers, and poison ivy with our kayaks, tried and failed to paddle another flooded river upstream, and then one last long walk with the kayaks.

It was Ralph, Rob, and I that were to kayak the cave the next day. Worn, sore and conquered, Rob had the fantasy of staying in a chair at camp with cold beer in hand. I, feeling the same, had a strong vision of going to the movies and maybe bowling if later feeling energetic. Ralph, who was in the physical shape of superman, had it in mind to go caving. The whole ride to the cave I stared at the sky praying for the storm. The sky was promising but never delivered.

Ralph had already warned us of a short portage. I didn't have binoculars on me, but just the same, the cave was too darn far away for even the binoculars to help. Rob cautioned Ralph as he went over a broken, rotted wood, low bridge to keep his weight on the supporting beams vs. the middle of the planks. It was already too late as the words were heard, but I hushed Rob regardless reminding him that a fall through the bridge could be our last hope in getting out of this trip. Ralph continued crossing on the middle portion of the bridge with no incident.

We hiked, we hiked, and we hiked. Ralph explained that he didn't recall it being this far. Rob and I gave each other glares that clearly weren't directed at each other. We hiked, we hiked, and then we struck barbwire. We climbed the barbwire fence, and I desperately turned to Rob to see if he had his OJ Simpson knife that he keeps attached to his life jacket. To the luck of our energetic leader, Rob had left it in the car.

So here we are. To get to the cave you have to kayak under a very low bridge with more barbwire on the other side. We were scoping it out. We still had to go all the way back and return with the kayaks.

After three seconds in the cave Rob was ahead, I next, and Ralph immediately after. I called to Rob, "Don't tell Ralph but this is really cool." We had a blast paddling through the cave. No one tipped. As we approached the entrance on the way out, we all turned off our lights to paddle the rest in darkness. Once out of cave Ralph decided to take a short cut out and paddle through a drainage pipe. He made it through unscathed, so Rob and I followed; that was pretty fun, too.

As we made it to our car and started to pack up, it started the rain started. I was grateful that it didn't storm earlier as I had wished or we would have missed a great unique trip.

Misadventures in Caving by Amos Mincin

Martin Luther King Weekend was a Dom Di-Gioia and Central New Jersey Grotto trip to Lewisburg, West Virginia. Buzz Rudderow lead a trip to Organ Cave. At the parking area, I discovered that I had two left boots. So Buzz insisted that he drive me back to the motel for two right boots (now I had two pairs to select from). Buzz and Dave Borger lead us back to the Waterfall Room, and it was really flowing well—very impressive. Many Photos were taken there.

The Sunday trip was to Norman Cave where the water fall was roaring. We went to the extremely decorated upper level of the cave and took many photos. At the Mud Formation Room, Ellen Hofler started a mud fight when she and a fellow caver Crystal Gadd thought it would be fun to mud up Amos. Eventually Rob Augustinus, Dave, and Dom were pulled into the muddy mix up. Some of the mud sculptures unfortunately did not survive the rough housing. This was caving softly at its worst, as far as the mud sculptures were concerned.

After getting out of the cave it was snowing lightly and cold while changing. When Buzz went to get his keys he discovered they were locked in the car. Now it was pay back time, so all eight cavers and gear were piled into the "Montana" which is more than just a mini-van. Back at the Roadway Inn, I took a shower while Buzz and Rob used Dom's car to rescue the Buzz vehicle (his spare key was in the room). Before they returned, I left for home around 5 pm.

A snow storm ensued. Interstate 81 was a parking lot due to five separate accidents. I got off I81 and saw yet another accident. Then there was a white out while driving through Virginia. I pulled over and caught forty winks (or more). After the snow slowed down, I hit the road and made it to Pennsylvania before another white out and another sleep. I got home around 5 am and arrived at work for 8 am duty.

Surprise/Mystery Cave, Cave Rescue

Cuddebackville, New York,
January 15, 2005.

by Carl Heitmeyer, with some
facts contributed by
Kevin Psarianos.

It was Saturday night, January 15, about 8:15 pm., when the phone rang from an unknown number. "There's a cave rescue going on; someone had fallen in Mystery Pit." I'm thinking "the cave is closed." I thought back to how cold and tired I was when I did Mystery Pit in August. It's twenty-five degrees out now! This could be bad. I told Chuck Konecki I'm on my way, and with help from my son, Matthew, I rolled out of the driveway at 8:30 pm.

At 10:20 pm., I'm on what is usually a lonely road, but tonight there's a line of cars on the side, three times longer than the parking area. I walked up to the fire trucks and ambulance where a lot of people were standing. Joe Levinson greeted me and filled me in, but the news is nothing new except that Tom Oaks (of Met Grotto) along with two other cavers have gone in to help.

A plan was formulated to send in an initial response team prepared to treat for hypothermia, and most importantly, get an up dated report out. The only information so far was the initial call out, which by now was three to five hours old. Kevin Psarianos arrived about ten minutes after me and agreed to be part of the team. As soon as we began to dress, John Gumbs arrived. About 11:10 pm., Kevin, Allan (I missed his last name), Mitzi Kaiura, and I, began the hike up to the cave with pretty much the same plan we had suggested when we arrived. After a very difficult climb up the ice-covered trail, we entered the cave at 11:30.

It was great to be in a nice warm cave! By midnight, we had found the patient (Matthew

Johnson) with Tom Oaks and two unknown cavers sitting just uphill of the fossil pits. Matt explained that around mid-afternoon he had fallen down the Mystery Dome while trying to rappel. He was in the process of transitioning from the muddy crawl at the top of the pit to the free drop. While doing the transition, he lost contact with the rope (single point of contact while setting up the rack). That means he fell at least twenty feet to a ledge and probably bounced another five to eight feet to the bottom. With his one good leg, Matthew was helped up the pit.

He stated that he could not use the bad leg at all, but thought he could work his way out of the cave by sitting and crawling. Mitzi began doing a patient assessment. Even with his cave suit on, you could see that Matt's knee was badly swollen. Kevin began writing an update report and I tied a Swiss seat onto the patient. Tom Oaks was wet with mud from head to toe and looked cold. Allan, who came in with us, agreed to exit with Tom and get the updated message out to command. Mitzi was able to put an Ace bandage on Matt, and a few Advils were handed out.

We began to move with the patient. As we worked our way up the flatter but tighter high route, Matt was able to scoot along on his butt with us pulling occasionally on a 30-foot piece of 9m rope attached to his seat harness. Kevin suggested we lower him down a pit at the Round Room. This lower route would bypass a short awkward crawl and a down climb. I found a suitable boulder to use as a friction device and the lower went fine.

On the way to the stream passage, and along part of it, I worked the short rope as belay on Matt due to the moderate fall exposure. Because the Bypass would be too torturous for Matt with his injuries, when we reached the stream passage, Mark? and the other rescuer who went in after Tom Oaks, were sent ahead to request a haul system be set up in the Entrance Pit. When we entered the stream passage, John Bernegger, in a wetsuit, joined us, and I suggested a three-man extremity carry through the streambed. This kept Matt dry at least until he hit the Entrance Room.

By 2:20 am., we had Matthew at the bottom

of the entrance drop in surprisingly good spirits. Kevin put a garbage bag on Matt to help keep him dry while we waited for Peter Welles, Wayne Russell, and Andrew Judd to finish building a haul system to lift Matt up the Entrance Pit. Mitzi was able to use the communication phone to update the surface on Matt's condition and our plan to go back and get our gear.

By 2:35 am. Matthew was almost at the top of drop. Kevin and I went back to the fossil pits to retrieve our packs and rescue gear. By 3:30 am., we were back at the Entrance Pit and grateful that the haul system was still in place to bring up about ten different packs and rope bags.

Coming out of the entrance crawl of Surprise is always annoying. The route is uphill, tight, and full of turns. Add to that the fact that we were so wet, and the cave was sucking such cold air, that our cave suits and gloves were freezing and sticking to the rocks! The stitches of one of my gloves ripped at the thumb when I yanked my hand free.

Outside, we were offered rides down on snowmobiles. This was a first for most of us to leave a cave entrance by snowmobile.

By the time I reached the car I was shivering. My cave suit was frozen stiff. I stood in my suit with my leg next to the car exhaust pipe to thaw it out enough to get to my bootlaces. These thawed out quickly, and I was sitting in my car with the heat blasting by 4:20 am.

I've never been so cold, tired, and hungry; I just wanted to be home, but forty minutes later I was still uncontrollably shivering so badly that I don't dare drive. Finally, just after 5:00 am., I stopped shivering and began the drive home. Now, I was so tired that I kept falling asleep at the wheel. I stopped at McDonalds for a quick breakfast and coffee. By 7:30 am. I was home, and after a quick hello, under the covers.

About two weeks later, I received a medical update on Matthew Johnson's condition. He had fractured his kneecap, had a torn ACL, and there was evidence that there might be a slight or partial fracture of his upper leg bone as well.

**NEW JERSEY INITIAL RESPONSE TEAM
SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS**

P.O. BOX 2153
BRANCHVILLE, NJ 07826
NON-EMERGENCY TELEPHONE 570-409-0394

January 22, 2005

Cave Rescue Mission Report
Surprise/Mystery Cave Incident
01-15-05

Time line is approximate.

The NJIRT received an Officer page at approximately 1930. Returning the call, I talked with Wayne Russell and was informed that there was a cave rescue situation in Surprise Cave. Wayne said he had been contacted through Julie by Joe Levinson that someone was stuck on rope in the Mystery Dome section of the cave. I was given Joe's cell phone number which was called. Joe informed me that there was a situation in cave and it involved a person on rope in Mystery Dome. I advised Joe that we would respond.

Due the potential serious nature of a prolonged "hang" on rope, the IRT was paged at approximately 2010 and asked to respond to the incident. NJIRT Rescue and K9 Captains assisted in initiating a call out to members not having Team pagers. I also contacted the NY State Police (due to the fact that I did not have a 24-hour contact number for NYDEC) and requested that they send a patrol to the area for coordination and communications and asked that they advise the NY DEC Ranger-In-Charge of the situation.

At that time I requested a single unit (limited response) be dispatched until more information was known about the situation and resources required.

We arrived at Surprise Cave approximately 2230 and found local fire/rescue, NYSP, NYDEC had been dispatched and had set up operations along the roadway. Wayne, Carl, Peter and Kevin were already on scene and were gearing up. John and Jennifer Bernegger who are EMT's and have caved with us were also on scene.

I was informed that Joe Levinson was acting rescue coordinator and met with him and the Incident Commander—Westbrookville Fire Department Chief Lou Tunno. I was informed that a patient update had been received and that the patient had actually fallen off rope to the floor of the dome—a distance of approximately twenty feet—and had injured both ankles and one knee. At that time Joe and I agreed that more caver/cave rescue personnel were needed.

There is no cell phone coverage at the cave site so Jennifer Bernegger was tasked to go to the Westbrookville Fire house and begin contacting New Jersey cavers through Carolyn Psarianos (who was en-route to the scene and could not assist). I also asked Joe to contact Doug Moore who is the National Cave Rescue Commission Eastern Region Cave Rescue Coordinator and advise him of the situation. I believe a call was also made to John Evans who is the Northeastern Region Cave Rescue Coordinator.

An Initial Action Plan had been discussed prior to my arrival to deploy firemen to go into the cave with Wayne Russell to access the patient. That did not happen. A second Action Plan was formed to send two cavers to the patient (task is unclear). These people entered the cave—time unknown.

When I arrived on scene, Joe and I discussed the rescue and created a third Action Plan. I was unaware of the second action plan at that time and thought only members of the caving party were underground.

A four-person hasty team (Task 1) consisting of three NJIRT members (Carl Heitmeyer, Kevin Psaria-

Central Jersey Caver—February 2005

nos, and Mitzi Kaiura) and one local caver (Alan ??) were tasked with locating the patient, assessing his condition/medical profile, and dispatching runners to the surface with an updated patient report. Carl Heitmeyer was Task Team Leader and Mitzi Kaiura (EMT, WEMT) was medical control. The initial hasty team headed toward the cave entrance at approximately 2245.

Cave entrance control was already set-up and functioning.

The weather was cold (temperature approximately 12-15 degrees). There was a four inch snow pack covered with about a half inch of ice and another one inch of crusty, packed snow covering the entire mountain, which made walking impossible. Local fire/rescue had been working on chopping steps up the path to the entrance and had set hand lines to assist climbing. Fire/rescue/DEC had also requested a local snowmobile club to assist in transporting equipment and personnel to the cave entrance via an access road. The ice pack prevented the snowmobiles from operating and a snow cat from a nearby ski area was requested. The snow cat established a track that the snowmobiles could use and was put on standby for transporting the patient down from the cave entrance. This transportation was functional by about 0200.

Task 2 was formed to handle rigging the 37-foot deep entrance pit and to establish communications utilizing military field phones from the entrance to the cave stream. Peter Welles was Task Team Leader and was assisted by Wayne Russell and John Bernegger. Andy Judd had arrived at the staging area and would join them as soon as he geared up. Fire/rescue provided manpower to move rigging and como [communication] gear up the foot path. The rigging/como team was at the cave entrance at approximately 2330-2345.

I established radio communication between entrance control, myself and Joe using IRT Team radios operating on our tactical frequency which did not interfere with local fire/rescue communications.

At approximately 0015-0030, message runners were dispatched from Task 1 with patient update information. Message read “right knee and both ankle sore. Left ankle swollen. Patient took Tylenol, pulse 126. Moving from near side of fossil pits. Injury time approximately 1600. Request decommission team.”

At approximately 0130-0145, runners sent by Task 1 (Allen and Tom) arrived at the cave entrance and reported that the patient was not seriously injured. The patient had injured both ankles and his knee but could move with assistance. They also reported that the patient was located on the near side of the two-hundred-foot crawl to Mystery Dome which made moving him much easier. This message was given to Joe either directly or via entrance control. I was unaware of specific message content but was given the general information with an ETA to the entrance pit of about two hours (where this ETA originated is unknown).

At approximately 0220 the patient arrived at the bottom of the entrance pit. Due to possible a misunderstanding of ETA to the pit, rigging was not complete and a delay in moving the patient occurred. The patient was hauled to the top of the pit by about 0245. Kevin and Carl went back into the cave to recover their gear. Mitzi and John B moved with the patient toward the entrance and were assisted by Andy.

I had established a rope system into the cave, down the entrance tube and into the first chamber to assist the patient up through the crawl. The NYDEC Rangers set up a Ferno 71 style litter with hypothermia packaging just outside the cave entrance. They and local fire/rescue had also established a pathway from the cave entrance, across the flowing stream, to the snow cat staging area for patient transport. Footing was very poor due to ice.

Once the patient was secured to the entrance rope system, six or seven local fire/rescue personnel plus the NYDEC personnel were utilized to direct haul the patient up and out of the cave. This operation was hampered due to rope rub (high friction) of the rope pathway (rope set-up for assist only) and the fact that the patient was freezing and sticking to the rocks in the crawlway (the cave was breathing in and most of the entrance tube rock was well below freezing). The patient exited the cave at approximately 0315. Medical control was transferred from Mitzi through me, to the NYDEC Rangers. I requested that the NYDEC

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Rangers ensure the local BLS crew would completely strip the patient to better evaluate injuries and to allow for warming him. The patient was very wet, cold (shivering uncontrollably) and was immediately packaged for transport and then carried to the waiting snow cat for transport off the mountain.

Task 3 was formed (names unknown to me) presumably by Joe (and after a discussion with me), to go into the back of the cave (Mystery Dome) and bring any equipment to the surface. They entered when the some of the initial in-cave team members from Task 1 and Task 2 exited.

I brought Wayne Russell, John Bernegger, and Mitzi Kaiura to the bottom of the mountain via the footpath and assisted them in getting them into warmed vehicles. I also met with Joe to better discuss and coordinate remaining activities.

Entrance control was changed to allow Izzy to warm up.

Local fire/rescue began to remove equipment from the scene. We were informed that the snow mobiles would also be leaving shortly. Both Joe and I requested (to the IC) that they be kept on scene until all personnel were off the mountain. We were informed that the snow mobiles needed to leave soon.

At approximately 0350 Carl Heitmeyer, Peter Welles, Kevin Psarianos, and Andy Judd were out of the cave and by 0410 had been transported off the mountain via snowmobile. All were very wet and cold and went to personal vehicles to undress and warm up.

At approximately 0500 most IRT members leave. Most of the fire/rescue equipment and personnel have left and the snow mobile group is packing equipment to leave. There is still Task 3 personnel in the cave and there are two NYDEC Rangers and cave entrance control still at the cave entrance.

All local fire/rescue personnel have left.

At approximately 0530-0545 the last of the group including Task 3 personnel has walked down off the mountain and are all accounted for. We are informed that the last sweep team (Task 3) did not find any gear in the cave. This situation might have been the result of a combination of factors. I am unsure if they were instructed to follow Task 1's reflective markers or told to go to the "fossil pits." I remember some discussion (in-between a whole lot of other happenings at the cave entrance) about route, mission profile and (maybe) looking for markers. The markers had been removed from the overall route by Kevin and Carl on their back-track trip to retrieve their personal gear (markers had been left with the gear)—believing the decommission task team (Task 3) would know the cave (the route to the fossil pit area is generally considered a "tourist route") and it is possible Task 3 was not as familiar with the cave as they indicated. My feeling is Task 3 was not overly familiar with the cave from talking with them at the entrance. Either way, gear was left in the cave. We pack Team gear into our truck and prepare to leave the scene.

A trip into Surprise Cave on Monday to retrieve equipment is authorized through NYDEC Ranger Luke Evans. A four-person NJIRT Team (Kevin Psarianos, Carolyn Zangara, John Tudek and Chuck Chapman) enters the cave and retrieves packs and gear on Monday 1/17/05.

COMMENTS

The event went reasonably well. There was good cooperation between local fire/rescue and NYDEC personnel and cave rescue personnel. Some issues surfaced that might have been prevented if there had been a rescue pre-plan in place for the cave and a coordinated response. Those issues will be addressed through the NYDEC and local fire/rescue.

The scope of the rescue was appropriate based on the information initially available concerning the situation underground. Many rope/jammed gear situations result in a very unique injury profile (harness hang syndrome) for the rappeller. Length of time trapped and the general physical condition of the person on rope are both significant factors in predicting a rescue outcome. Inappropriate actions by rescuers dealing with problems of that type can create a much more life threatening event than previously known. The actual mechanism of injury (MOI)—a fall of approximately twenty feet—was not known until much later

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in the event time line. That MOI could have resulted in serious injuries—including internal and cervical spine injuries. The fact that both ankles and a knee were injured could be a distracting injury profile which might mask more serious (but less obvious) injuries elsewhere. Competent medical evaluation was indicated for either of these presentations to help ensure proper evacuation protocols were utilized.

The actions taken by the local fire/rescue and NYDEC were absolutely necessary to coordinate activities and resources, assist rescue personnel in getting to the cave entrance, and expeditiously evacuating the patient to waiting medical transport. Without these resources, any access to the cave or rescue operation would have been almost impossible.

DISCUSSION

There has been discussion concerning the fact that a como team did not go in with (or as part of) Task 1. The rationale to support sending a hasty (fast moving) team in to assess the patient was due to the fact that we (on the surface) did not have any “real-time” report on the patient. In addition, the extent of the injuries we were aware of could not be assumed to be correct due to the lack of medical knowledge of the reporting party. The scope of the rescue hinged on the actual injuries and condition of the patient so getting that information quickly was considered (by me) more important than establishing como as the first (or combined) task. Como and rigging were the next priorities and went into the cave a short time after the hasty team.

A litter (SKED) was not sent into the cave after the hasty team entered due to that fact that peoplepower was in very short supply and the actual patient’s injuries were still unknown. A SKED/OSS as well as advanced medical gear and hypothermia supplies was immediately available and these could have been moved into the cave reasonable quickly if they were needed. Again, complicating factors where there was not sufficient peoplepower available to make up a competent evacuation team until much later in the event time line.

Signed:

John F. Gumbs
Chief, NJIRT