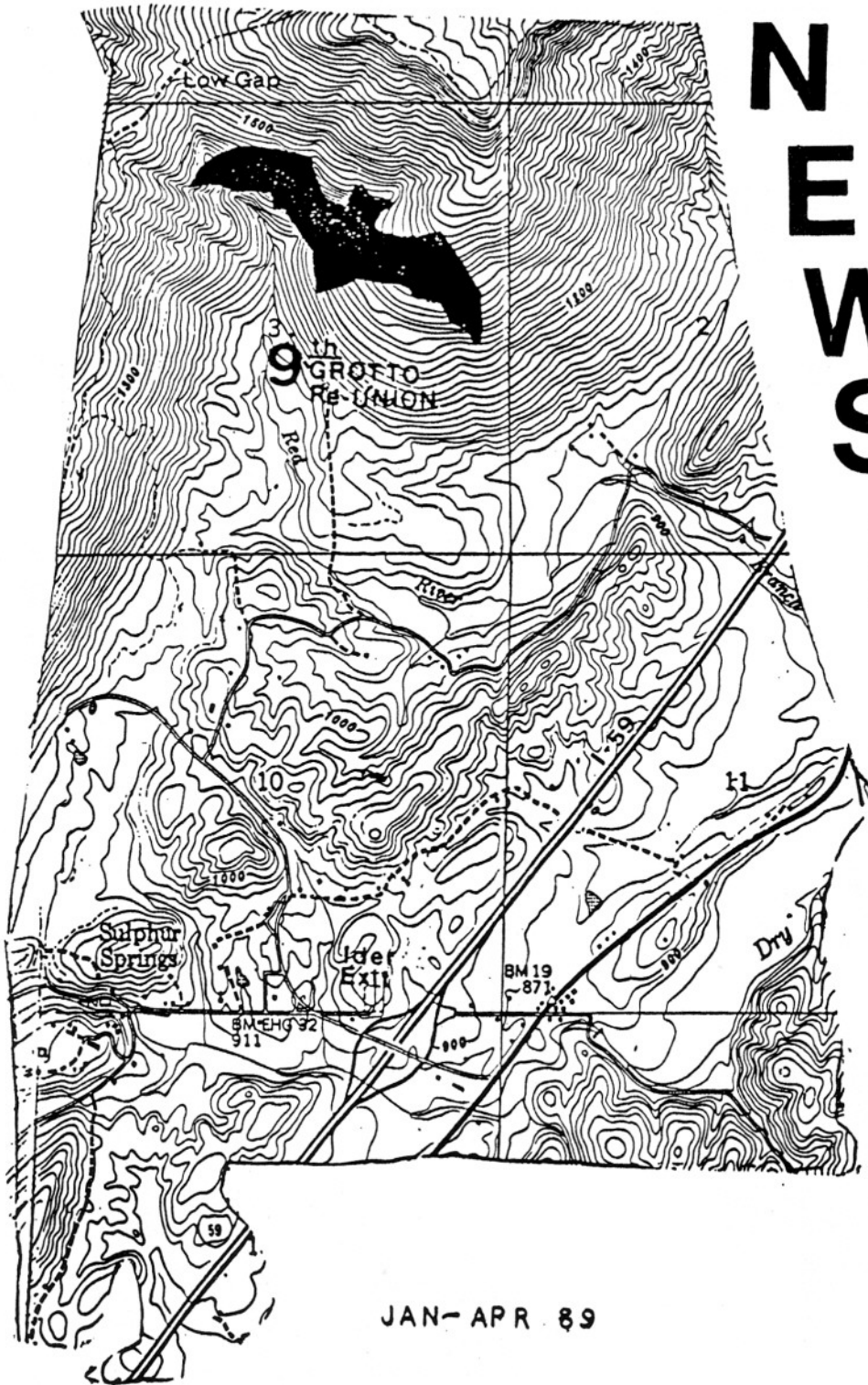




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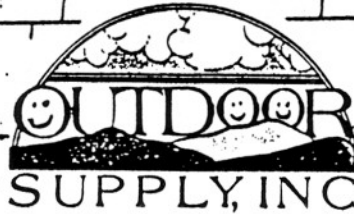


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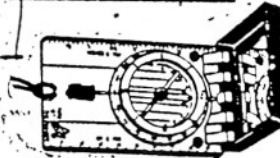
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Barbee Cave

It all began after Marion Smith, Alan Cressler, and I had checked the grim prospects of any future exploration of Haun's Impossible Pit. I left the hillside for reasons not worth mentioning. Marion and Alan decided to make use of the remaining daylight. That day of April 6, 1986 was to the beginning of another TAG success story in exploration.

Marion and Alan relocated Long Walk Cave, ACS 1857 and another entrance believed to be virgin only 200 feet away. The compelling attribute of both entrances is the amount of wind that is sucked into the cave. The two explorers concentrated their effort on the dry pit to find it to have a blind bottom with a side lead that would require blasting.

The Long Walk Cave was investigated to be only one third the length the ACS lists. The 50 foot long and 25 foot deep cave and been terminated at a grim dig and would require a return trip to complete the exploration.

The return trip was scheduled for the 20th of April. I met the crew, Marion Smith, Alan Cressler, Gerald Moni, Roy Siegal, and Marilyn Osterland, at the Bloodstone Cave parking area. Marion mentioned that the previous day had been one of great success in that "the crew" had linked up People Eater Cave to 4th of July Cave via a 25 foot dig in a stream crawl. This gave Jackson County it's newest realized 369 foot deep cave.

The 20th was over shadowed by weather forecasts that predicted

thunderstorms with 100% chance of rain. "All right!", I exclaimed. Speleo-Fundamentalism at it's best. "The Horror!", replied Marion. A hearty "Ho Ho! and Shoot I hope you don't drown", reported Gerald. Roy expressed real consternation of the predicted forecast. We crossed the streambed and dove into the ever thickening jungle. We swore at the vegetation and wished for a nuclear winter so we could ridge-walk all year around. We finally climbed up the steep terraces and slope to the area of the cave. The jungle covering obscured the entrance which is situated among a jumble of sandstone boulders. We suited up in full combat gear and hauled our seven push ropes to the entrance area.

Alan was first in the cave with hand trowel and hammer in hand. Below two squeezes and two climbs of seven and eight feet respectively, Alan labored furiously to remove gravel in an attempt to dig out a basketball size sandstone boulder from the floor. He gave up passing to the side of the boulder and pushed a body length into the low tight crawl to view a sharp left turn. He decided to rest a while and let some other earthy fool have a go at the lead.

I decided to give the lead a push. I climbed down to the dig site and saw that the path that Allen had cut was too small for me to pass through. I tried in vain to dig out that boulder, but decided to try to deepen the channel. With considerable effort I was finally able to reach the point that stopped Allen. I cursed a bit and felt my shoulders tiring so I backed up to rest. I continued with the effort dredging the sides of the channel and deepened the stream floor by 6 to 7 inches. Success! I slid through the the tight spot rounding the bend into borehole. Well, you know small walking

passage. I continued the crawl scooping cobbles from my path to the next obstacle. Ahead, a tombstone like monolith projected from the stream sediment thus barring my path. I had to dig out the sediment from around the base of the slab in order to be able to budge it. Eventually, I was able to vigorously shake it and lay it to one side. What a pain in the ass! I crawled onward to...you guessed it the mother obstacle. A huge 500 lb rock nearly plugged the entire passage. The rock touched the ceiling and left only an inch of space on either side between the walls. This was a formidable sight in the 3'x 2' passage. As luck would have it the boulder was not suctioned down into the mud. One side of the boulder was actually propped on a fulcrum thus allowing me to wrestle the massiff greco-roman style. A lot of muscle wrenching and undermining allowed the boulder to rotate and drop at least six inches. I was barely able to slide over "the cork" as Marion called it and on the other side I pushed it off the fulcrum with my legs. Finally, half worn out and half frozen as Marion indicated, he tried to rally the marines to begin the assault. Since there was confusion and no prompt response to the cry of booty, Marion insisted that I check the passage out. Well by God I did check it out! I thought it would never end!

I crawled ahead 100 or so feet to stooping passage then on to walking canyon to a 7 foot climb down. I passed a side interfluer that was most likely the other entrance route into the cave. It looked tight. Walking on, a side dome was passed to the beginning of a tight canyon. As I soon discovered the lower stream section of the canyon was total horror, I scaled the canyon to the highest level to where the going was a bit easier. I was hot as hell in a farmer

-john wetsuit. I could just hear Torodes voice, in his slow ribbing style, "you boy's don't need wetsuits in this cave". Your damn right! I thought.

The canyon passage finally forced me to drop to the stream level where I found a bath tub to cool down in. If you call it cool. I felt like I was laying in warm piss. 100 or so feet of stream level passage lead to the first pit. I was finally shafted. I felt kind of bad running off and scooping so much booty without the others. I guess I felt like a convict in a whore house and just couldn't get satisfied by stopping short of something I couldn't free climb.

I made my way back through the canyon wishing that all of this redundancy was not taking place. Like a dying man in the desert I found my way back to the others. I met Marion, Alan, and Roy who had traversed all the way to the beginning of the canyon with 7 ropes and my caving pack. Marion cried out, "you were only suppose to check out the first 100 feet of cave and come back". I don't remember that all I remember was him saying was, "sic'em boy!"

I thought normal travel through the canyon was miserable, but carrying equipment and trying to avoid losing anything in the canyon was of paramount concern since it would be a major inconvenience to retrieve it. The canyon finally ended once again for me and Alan and I rigged what looked to be a 20 foot pit. I descended first and shouted for the others to follow. Spacious passage lead to a couple of climbs and to the next pit. On the ramparts of the pit we could see out into a chamber 70 feet. The second drop, a 30 foot wet pit, appeared to end in breakdown and the best out was up and over a 30 foot tall talus slope. At the top, the passage continued to the left and to an upstream lead that ended in a pit,

and to the right in the down stream direction. We walked down 5 foot tall by 25 feet wide for a 100 feet to the top of a huge diameter pit. The 70 foot diameter pit sounded to be as deep with the toss of a rock.

I rigged in for the first descent since no one else was ready. Once over the lip, I could see loose horror all over the walls to either side of where we had rigged the rope. This near vertical slope could have been dubbed "the Rocky Horror" if the rope had been rigged anywhere else.

On bottom of the pit, Marion and Alan measured it's depth at 64 feet. 20 feet of vertical was lost down the slope to the top of the next climb. The climbdown was at least 15 feet to two possible routes. Both of the routes wound up connecting and dropping at least 10 feet. Steadily descending, clean washed stooping to walking passage lead to a 6 foot climb followed by a 12 footer. This was easily freed to 100 more feet of walking passage. Alan sat waiting for the rest of us to catch up. He had stopped at certain horror for a backup crew. Alan crawled into the loose breakdown and down to two three foot steps to view the bitter end. The end of the passage terminated in a cobble fill with no air movement. When all other leads were exhausted we decided to head to the surface.

With the entire crew nearly up the 64 foot pit, Alan and Roy took three ropes and split. Marion and I derigged ending up with 2 ropes apiece. We both were starting to suffer from over heating, but we had not begun to cook until we hit the canyon. Marion was suffering more than I was and I was croaking. He began to complain that he could only move 10 feet at a time otherwise he was going to

puke. We stopped sporadically to "warm down" so to speak. Then behind me I could hear Marion gag and wretch. This started to worry me as this cave was no place to suffer from heat prostration. We finally got out of the desert and got back to the stream and eventually surfaced. Our trip lasted 6 hours and 45 minutes. What a relief it was to peel out of our weight reduction suits! In the end we estimated the cave's depth to be 325 feet and the total length to be 2,500 feet.

In the end, I felt it was Oztotle, the Mayan Cave God, that saved our lives that day. If the cave had continued as usual we would have found a couple more drops and the long belly crawl at valley floor level. As it were we just did make it out of the cave and to the car before the deluge hit! We later decided that the map of Long Walk Cave didn't fit what we had seen so Marion dubbed the cave as Barbee Cave in honor of a civil war saltpeter miner.

9th Grotto Reunion and South Fox Mountain by Dave Teal

Our hearts go out again to Russell White for hosting our 9th Gadsden Grotto Reunion. As with the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 8th, the 9th promises the same North Alabama woodland beauty we all love so dear.

Surrounded by 350 - 700 million years old limestone, in the shadow of Lookout Mountain, rises Fox Mountain. Known to contain such underground treasures as Moses Tomb, Hambricks Pit, Kudzu Cave, Hurricane Cave, Byers Cave, Rustys Cave and The Reunion Tomb and many other sub-surface wonders.

Who knows what other undiscovered wonders lie in this area of Fox-Sand and Lookout Mountain. Could the deepest cave or pit lie under these rolling slopes?

TRIP REPORT

D. WILSON

On Saturday, July 9th, 1988, members of the Gadsden Grotto went on a pit bouncing excursion to Jackson County, Alabama. Grotto members on the trip were David Teal, Steve Hodes, Ian Rains, Alex Baugh, and David Wilson. We arrived at Gotian Hollow at 10:00 a.m. where we parked the vehicles and started the two mile walk up the mountain in 95° weather. Our first destination was "Val-Hala", a 227 foot pit with a little over a mile of cave at the bottom.

During the hike up we found a pickup truck about a half mile from the pit. There was a supply of food and other articles in the truck that led us to the conclusion that the missing occupants were cavers.

Upon arriving at the pit, the group rested for a while before David Teal and I rigged the rope. After helping Dave rig the rope, I took pictures of the area while the others made preparations for their decent into the pit. Pucker factor was high as David Teal was first over the lip to make the long trip down. Ian was next "on rope" followed by Alex and Steve.

While in the pit, Dave and Ian found two copper heads, a ringneck, and a garden snake. The snakes were placed in a bag to be removed from the pit. It was decided not to push the cave so the crew readied themselves for their ascents. Alex was first, then David and Ian. Steve, who brought up the rear, ascended the pit "Texas Style".

Once everyone was on top, Dave and I pulled up the rope, with the snakes attached, while alex coiled the rope. After all the equipment was secured and everyone was ready for the hike down, Ian released the snakes retrieved from the pit. On the way down, we ran into Mike and Jeff Barrett of the Clayton County Georgia Grotto. They were the owners of the truck we found on the way up to the pit and we would like to give a special thanks to them for giving us a ride down the mountain.

Our next destination was "Mega-Well", but due to time we decided to go to "Never-Sink" and save the trip to "Mega-Well" for another day. The trip up the hill to "Never-Sink" was not as long as the one to "Val-Hala", though it seemed much worse at the time.

We arrived at 2:45 and rigged the rope for a dual decent. Dave, Alex, and Steve went down the pit while Ian and I explored the surrounding area and took some pictures. Dave and Alex made several trips on rope to practice change overs. We departed the pit around 5:00 and went to Western Sizzlin for a steak, a little rest, and great quantities of tea. While there, the days events were discussed and plans were made to take some new cavers through "Guffey" cave in Grant, Alabama.



THE HISTORY OF BLUFF RIVER CAVE by Bobby Whorton

David Mulkey
Gary Stewart
Bobby Whorton
Polly Jones

This adventure began to unfold Saturday morning, September 25, 1988, when a friend, Gary Stewart, an employee for T.V.A., living in Bridgeport, dropped by for a visit. Gary had met a fellow by the name of David Mulkey on his job who enjoyed hiking the mountains and streams looking for Indian artifacts. This guy had found a bluff cave entrance a year or two prior and had turned Gary on to it the week before. Gary had become very excited and told David he wanted to introduce him to a friend of his in Gadsden, who is a member of an Alabama Cave Survey group who would probably be very interested, so David told Gary to "Hey get us together it's bound to party!" Well that Saturday, the 25th, I told Gary that the T.A.G. fall Cave-In was coming up and could the three of us get together then. He said that sounded good, he had been wanting to purchase some of his gear and that would be a great opportunity. Gary called me back the following Monday night to tell me the trip was on, fantastic.

The following weekend flew by. I spent my time preparing for T.A.G. weekend to follow. Then came Friday of the T.A.G. weekend. I had everything packed in the old truck and began my pre T.A.G. warm up while waiting for Polly Jones. Polly finally got home from work and we were off and running.. We arrived at the campgrounds just after dark and proceeded to set up and get primed.

The morning came, Gary and his buddy David rolled in about 9:30 or 10:00. David Mulkey and I were introduced, we spent a couple of hours or so purchasing gear and socializing, then we were off for a new adventure for me. To tell the truth I wasn't really expecting a great surprise, having chased a few leads like this before. Whatever the outcome we were going to be primed for a good time so we, Gary, David, Polly and myself loaded our stuff into Gary's car and took off to David's house, which is near the Narrows, and transferred our gear and goodies into David's van. We then headed for the cave, it was easy to reach and much to my surprise turned out to be a wonderfully awesome walking passage with many beautifully decorated sections.

Con't. from page

We spent about 4 hours poking around high and low till we got to the back where we looked into two small formation rooms high in the back of what is a very large breakdown room about 90' high and about 100' + wide on an incline. It didn't take very long to get back to the entrance. We headed back to the van, compared topographical maps to find that there was not an A.C.S. dot, I had updated my Hytop quad the week before, so it was time for a little celebration. By this time it had gotten dark so we headed back to Gary's apartment in Bridgeport for even more celebration then it was time to drive David Mulkey back to his place then go back to T.A.G. camp to grill steaks and continue the festivities. It's fantastic when plans fall together "Just Right!"

The weekend after, Gary, myself, and David Mulkey decided to call the cave Us & Them after a tune by Pink Floyd because of the echoes we could hear as we through singing this particular tune. At the time we humorously thought ourselves as the "several species of small fury animals and gathered together to groove with a pict, another old tune by this band". Throughout the next week nobody else seemed to catch the jest of this catchy name, I too was undecided and wanted to do more exploration for the second time to see what, if anything else, I could think of. So maybe a second trip might be in order, and I was sure there would be.



Bluff River Cave by Bobby Whorton

Bobby Whorton
David Teal
Jim Loftin
Laura Campbell
Ian Rains
David Wilson

Two weeks have gone by since I first saw this cave and I've been dying to go back to spend more time exploring. David Teal gave me a ring at the first of the week to ask if I would be interested in taking a crew into the cave the following weekend and of course all I could say is sure. We, David and myself were to meet with Jim Loftin and his friend Laura from Atlanta, here at my house by 7:00 a.m. on October 22, 1988. Everyone was on time. We were to meet Ian Rains and David Wilson at Highway 35 and I-59. We arrived in the cave area without any problem. The streambed was dry so we had no problems parking, nor a long walk.

We hiked to the entrance. It wasn't so far up as it seemed the first time. David Teal got his altimeter out to get a true elevation reading. I made a note from the compass and after exchanging a few complementary comments about the Bluff and entrance we headed in for a tour. We didn't get very far into the cave before different members of our group were telling me how impressed they were which made me very happy. To me it didn't seem as big as it did the first time but I was still as pleased.

We began to try naming different formations and passageways. The main interest was to poke around for unexplored leads, see the back of the cave, get an idea of the overall length, and size. I had told the guys it was big.

We spent 4 to 6 hours in the cave. The conclusion was the cave is probably about 2500' + in length, averaging 30- 40 ft. ceiling height and 40-50 widths. The elevation is 760' with the entrance facing north. I agreed the cave was long enough, large and well decorated to deserve a good name and A.C.S. number. Discussions resumed on the trip home and only David Teal had nay ideas I liked, but still I had the problem of naming it for sure.

Con't. from page

Before we got back to Gadsden the name River whatever was ok, it was definitely a river cave. I thought of the entrance, it was a Bluff so when I got home I looked at all the river names on the A.C.S. there wasn't one called Bluff River so that problem was settled. The only thing left, mapping! David Teal and myself decided to start the next weekend. That ended another good trip.

The Primal Lure of Firelight

ONE DARK NIGHT on the edge of winter in a national park, I saw fires glimmering in every campsite. They were small but earnest fires, lofting sparks into the trees and barking like angry terriers at the shins of campers. All about them stood people warming cupped hands, watching the flames and talking. In summer, the campground would have been full of amplified music and the harrumphing of camper generators producing heat, light and noise.

But there was no bottled music here, no gray glow of television. People were bathed in the healing yellow balm of firelight, at peace with one another and the night. They had come to the mountains for this ritual of fire and reveries and shared story. They had come for the fragrance of wood smoke and the holy warmth.

Man has always wondered at fire. Early peoples put it on the edge of nature, believing that an ancestor, like Prometheus, stole it from the gods.

We still approach fire with near religious devotion. We choose wood carefully. We lay it out according to

rules. Perhaps a green maple log for the back of the fire, to burn slowly and support other logs through the night. Kindling is carefully stacked in ricks over crumpled newsprint or pine shavings. Ash, yellow birch or oak is pyramided on top, perhaps with some apple wood for aroma. It is a ritual as rigid as communion. A firestarter is like a priest, and it is a breach of decorum for anyone else to tinker with his fire.

We are finicky and ritualistic because fire is unusual in its power over our minds. Fire is a strong stimulus to dreams and poetry, the things that make us human but are often locked out of our minds by our avidity for wealth and power. Fires loosen the hold of events and open the gates of feeling. We look into the coals, where flames are flirting into blue, and wood is changing magically into light and smoke. We grow heavy-lidded watching the pulsing translucence of velvety embers.

Perhaps our minds are adapted to firelight the way our eyes are calibrated to the sun. When the fire flares up, we feel something familiar and ancient. The English essay-

ist E. V. Lucas wrote: "The smoke of the open-air fire is charged with memory. One whiff, and for a swift moment we are in sympathy with our remotest ancestors, and all that is elemental and primitive in us is awakened."

It is not the primitive of tooth and claw, the fear of animals in the night, but the primitive of reverie and companionship. The warmth of a good fire is remarkably like the warmth of love, and makes us think about our connections with one another.

Staring into the flames of a winter blaze, we lose the meanness of the day. It is hard to be critical or aloof by firelight. Fires are for romance, friendship, talk and song. "The wisest counsels are offered beside the fire," wrote Lucas. "The most loving sympathy and comprehension are there made explicit." It was around the fire that the household gathered, that mankind perfected speech, made up songs and explored the mysteries. It was around the fire that our ancestors sacrificed to their gods, and smoke that carried prayers heavenward linked religion and domesticity.

That link between fire and faith has been broken in modern times. The break began when medieval alchemists, seeking to transmute base metals into gold, put fire inside furnaces, where they could no longer see its dazzle and sensuousness.

By the mid-18th century, household fires were being enclosed as well. A stove kept more heat in the

room and sent less up the chimney. From stoves, men moved on to furnaces and hot-water pipes. Fire lost its hypnotic power.

"Who could be witty, who could be humane, before a gas stove?" laments Lucas. "It does so little for the eye and nothing for the imagination." In his book *In the Image of Fire*, religious scholar David M. Knipe writes about a friend's belief that "the destruction of sensitivity in modern life was largely due to the loss of open-hearth fires in homes. Hearthless homes have no 'center,' no focus, and they provide nothing to gaze into for that reverie which is essential to every human."

As working fireplaces were found in fewer homes, we adopted depressing substitutes: the ceramic log that cleverly conceals a gas jet; the fireplace of fake flagstones and celluloid, lit from behind by amber-colored electric lights. We still want to look into flames.

Perhaps the attentiveness carved in our minds by millennia of firewatching is what makes us stare vacantly for hours into the television screen. A software producer capitalized on this by marketing a video fireplace. You just pop a cassette into your VCR and curl up next to a blaze crackling on your television screen! No smoke. No ashes. No heat, either.

But fire will never lose its hold on those of us who seek its contemplative glow—and find within its dancing flames a renewal of our faith in one another. *****