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Northeast Alabama Cave Digest  
— and —  
The Gadsden Grotto NEWSLETTER

**Caving Safely . . .**



*Through Knowledge, Awareness,  
and Attitudes*

**SEPTEMBER 1990  
VOL. 4, NO. 3**

# Survivors of cave sat quietly and quoted Bible, father says

Associated Press

HARRISONBURG, Va. — A man and his two sons lost in a cave for five days without food or water survived by sitting quietly to save energy and reciting Bible scriptures to remain hopeful, the father said yesterday.

"Toward the end, we figured we were going to die," Gary Lutes said. "We were happy it would be all three of us together and not just one. We figured that was better than continuing on like that."

Lutes, 37, a Tampa, Fla., land surveyor, and sons Gary Jr., 13, and Timothy, 9, were rescued from a West Virginia cave Saturday. They had been lost since Monday.

They were taken to Rockingham Memorial Hospital in Harrisonburg, Va., where they were listed in stable condition yesterday.

The search did not begin until Friday. Father and sons endured bats, dehydration and hallucinations during the wait for rescuers that began soon after their lamps went out while they explored a side trail, Lutes said.

"If it had gone on another day, it would've been a different outcome," Lutes said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press from his hospital bed.

Lutes, a member of the National Speleological Society, said it was the first time he had gotten lost in 20 years of cave adventuring.

He and his sons were exploring New Trout Cave in Pendleton County in eastern West Virginia, about 200 miles west of Washington, D.C.

The trouble began when Lutes put down his pack to squeeze through a small opening, intending to retrieve the pack on his way out. When their lamps later went out, he and his sons couldn't find the opening or the pack, which held food, water and extra flashlights.

"When the light started going out, I knew there was a serious problem. (The boys) got upset because they saw the look in my face, but it was basically calm from then on," Lutes said.

"I knew if there was panic or terror we'd be nowhere. We wouldn't have made it unless we were sitting and being calm," he said.

The search began after relatives in Powhatan, Va., contacted police when the Luteses missed a meeting, police said. About 25 experienced cave rescuers from Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland helped police search.

Using Lutes' parked car as a starting point, they began combing three sets of caves Friday morning.

They found the pack shortly after 12:30 a.m. Saturday and reached the Luteses about 90 minutes later, about a half-mile into a cave.

The three were caked in dirt and parched, but otherwise were in remarkably good condition, he said.

## Highly Recommended Equipment List

### Each Individual Should Have:

- clothing — strong, durable, fast drying
- boots — ankle support, deep lugs for traction
- helmet — good quality rockclimbing helmet
- primary light source — carbide lamp, electric light, miner's light, etc. Not a flashlight.
- secondary light source and tertiary light source — should be just as dependable as the primary source.
- container for spent carbide — if using carbide
- first aid kit — minimum of a roll of tape and gauze, betadine surgical scrub, Tylenol (similar to aspirin), Tylenol III (for intense pain prescription), notepaper, and pencil.
- food — quantity depends on hours in cave.
- water — for drinking (and possibly lamps) if cave is dry or stream is bad.
- wool or synthetic hat
- emergency telephone numbers in helmet

# Northeast Alabama Cave Digest — and — The Gadsden Grotto NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 3  
ISSUE 14

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## CONTENTS

COVER: CAVING SAFELY - N.S.S. Safety & Techniques Committee...	1
BLANCHE CAVE REVISITED - G. Hrepta.....	4
THE SAGA OF WESTSIDE STORY CHASM - J. Reeves.....	9
TRIP LOG 1990 - J. Reeves.....	13
PRETTY WELL - T. Pope.....	15
BLUFF RIVER - T. Pope.....	16
THE SHADOW - D. Wilson.....	18

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## BLANCHE CAVE REVISITED

George Hrepta

" Where there is limestone, there must be be cave," I thought when I first looked at the eastern flank of Alabama's Lookout Mountain as it was represented in the new Special Map 220 edition of the 1988 Geologic Map of Alabama. " Just look at all that mountain and almost nothing on it," I kept saying to myself as I checked the ACS printout a second time to make sure I had not missed any Cherokee County cave listings.

Something was wrong. I could tell. Only one or two possible caves? That was in late 1988 before I started a search for a new cave in this area. By early winter of 1989 I had obtained enough leads and people to start doing some serious work in this area.

At that time I had just met two new people at a Clayton County Caver's Grotto monthly meeting. John Perryam and Mark McLean were both living in Newman, Georgia at the time and they seemed anxious to do something and not wait for infrequent grotto-sponsored trips.

January 7, 1989 started out as a typical Saturday trip. After digging into a small, unknown, and recently collapsed spring cave earlier that day, we decided to visit an ACS entry called Blanche Cave only a few miles away. At that time, my ACS printout listed it as 20 feet deep and less that five feet long. I had pre-plotted the entrance coordinates only to find that the location was not correct. The actual entrance was over a half mile away in someone's back yard.

After talking to the elderly landowner about this cave and other rumored nearby caves, we rigged the twenty foot entrance pit that looked blind from the top, rappelled down, slid through a small slot and into dry, roomy walking passage.

John and mark raced ahead in eager anticipation. I could hear them off in the distance when I stopped to let my eyes and glasses adjust themselves to the low light levels.

" Not bad," I thought as I spied a small flowstone column and other lesser, somewhat vandalized, formation close by. Following the passage into the mountain a short distance, I noted a few more clusters of intact stalactites that were out of vandals reach.

Abruptly, the passage turned into a short crawl over a large fill pile. " Aha...how nice - someone really knows how to cave," I chuckled as I crawled on a piece of plastic over the muddy floor of the crawlway. Popping out again into a walkable passage, I could still hear the Newman boys as I reached the end of this short segment. Once again, the passage ahead changed into a mud floor crawl that quickly ended. I then saw lights off in the distance and trotted into a large room.

I was met by a pair of big grins. Together again, we checked more passage off the large junction room in which we were standing. The branching passages didn't go very far before either pinching out in collapse or ending in fine sediment upstream. The one downstream lead had a very small trickle of water that disappeared down a nasty looking little pit estimated at perhaps

fifteen feet. We found a climbable bypass down to lower-level crawlway joining the bottom of this pit. It became impassable after about 35 feet ending all hope of a major continuation.

On the way out we stopped at several areas in the junction room side passages to examine some of the numerous small formations. Most were still alive and growing.

We had an excellent day in this part of Alabama. Blanche Cave was rediscovered and pushed to an estimated length of 730 feet and 35 feet of vertical relief. It would be a nice little cave to map but no one wanted to at that time.

Almost a year later, Brian Williamson offered to help survey Blanche Cave. Originally it was thought that a single trip would be sufficient to complete the project. A second trip was required, however, due to the discovery and excavation of a small side passage near the entrance that, of course, didn't go. Initial size and depth estimates were surprisingly accurate. True vertical extent increased to 40 feet while the length shrunk just a tad to 718 feet.

Surveying revealed a few minor surprises. There was what appeared to be an old NSS number dating back to the 50's smoked on the ceiling of a crawl in the most remote part of the cave. A name and date from the 1890's inscribed in the clay floor of a terrace above the main passage was also discovered along with others dating back to the early decades of this century. How the original printout data got garbled remains a mystery to this day.

A search for index fossils was hampered by fine mud that coated lower portions of the main passage walls. A fine *Platycrinus pinicellus* specimen was located and, according to Butz, is a Ste. Genevieve horizon marker within the Bangar limestone sequence. The mud may be associated with infrequent backflooding of the cave. No noticeable ripple markings were found in the main passage.

The pit entrance appears to be of fairly recent origin and has some vertically fluted areas indication minor water erosion. Deep deposits of fill and sediment mask the true size of the main passage segments and seem to indicate that the cave was once a spring-associated conduit emptying into Shinbone Valley. The fill pile sources originate somewhere above the ceiling and may be surface fed. Their size and shape compared to other cave features suggest a non-recent origin. They appear to have been modified at one time by running water. Evidence of limited re-excavation of previously deposited sediment with modification of original wall contours near these point sources of debris suggest water flow towards the entrance which is at the valley wall. Eventually this pattern changed as water was diverted during later development of a lower level, wet-weather, drainage route. This appears to have halted any further removal of sediment from the main passage and has allowed secondary mineral deposition to occur.

# Blanche Cave

ACK # 957

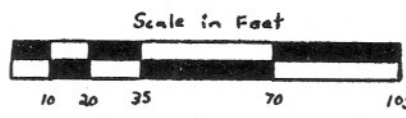
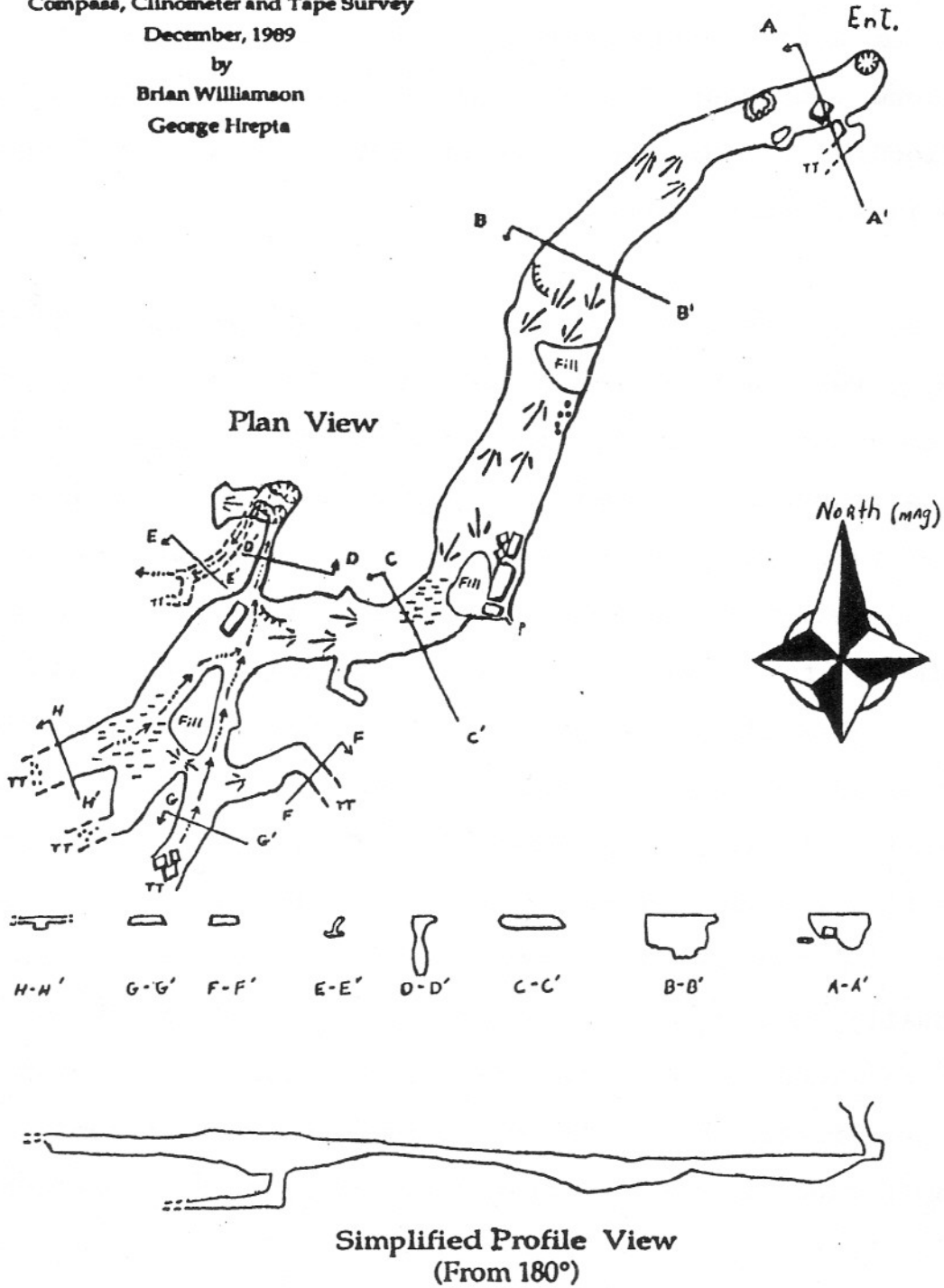
Compass, Clinometer and Tape Survey

December, 1989

by

Brian Williamson

George Hrepta



Cartographer - Brian Williamson

Total Surveyed Length This Map : 718 Feet



## THE SAGA OF WESTSIDE STORY CHASM

Jerry Reeves, NAG Chairman  
a.k.a. "The Old Rockeater"

The story opens in an ultimate place in TAG - on the west side of Sand Mountain on a Sunday evening while solo ridge walking in a jungle of sawed-down timber. I was walking the log road to gain elevation. I had walked to the contact line when a small sink at the right side of the road caught my attention. A closer look revealed a narrow pit. I rigged to the only thing available - a stump. I rigged into a solo rappel into virgin cave... a nightmare for some - a dream for others.

A fifty-one foot rappel stopped at a borehole passage. It was twenty-five feet high and continuing into the darkness. I removed my rack and seat harness and headed down, going cave. The borehole passage ended in about one hundred fifty feet at a thirty-five foot high dome. It had a small water drip on one side and a sheer, vertical wall to the right. I left Westside Story Chasm with it in the back of my mind - knowing I would return with bolting gear and invade the "Story" again.

I returned once again in January, 1990, to look at the wall one more time. There was a lot of air moving around the dome. I left thinking that I would do a solo bolt climb, or maybe bring help. In the meantime, I walked more in this area and found two more pits - both measuring one hundred feet in depth. I named one pit, "Rocks-A-Lot" and the other, "N.A.G. Well."

On May 20, 1990, I decided to show Lin Guy my cave. I met him at the truck stop in Sulphur Springs. Soon we were heading across Sand Mountain to Island Creek Cove. Along on the trip were also Glenda Fleming and Richard Lentz. In no time, we were walking up the mountain to the cave. One-by-one, we rappelled into the narrow chasm. From the bottom we walked toward the dome. We noticed a climb-up before we got to the dome. We went up and tried to dig a ledge around the wall to the top of the dome but came up twenty feet short. We had to stop because it was too dangerous and loose.

Richard and Lin mapped the cave while I placed two bolts to anchor a belay for a future climb. The future arrived the next weekend.

On Saturday, May 20, 1990, Robert Crumley, Steve Turner and I went back to Westside. I took enough bolting equipment to do the job. After eight hours of bolting and rigging, Robert and I had it rigged to the top. As I went over the top, trouble happened. I took a fall and was barely saved by a Jumar. Westside Story won again.

On the following Saturday, we were at the bottom of the dome again. This time the party was composed of Robert Crumley, Marion Smith, Kieth Lee, David Teal, Steve Turner and myself. They all sat and watched as I started up the wall. I went all the way to the top without a rest. The "Story" was not going to hold me back this time. When I got to the top, I rigged into the belay, with Robert on the other end. I went for hand-holds and foot-holds,

and squeezed around the edge and up through the crack in the ceiling that I had been looking at for many months. This was it - this was what all the work was about. Marion and the others waited for me to yell, "virgin passage, come on up." But not this time. The small room facing me lead to...nowhere. Westside Story finally gave up, but not without a fight and almost a casualty. But as for the area around Westside, the story continues.

#### CAVING ETIQUETTE

1. First in should be first out. However, experience of the group members may dictate differently. If novices are along, the experienced members should be at the bottom during rappels and he should also be the first to climb.
2. When it is your turn to climb, be fully prepared and ready to go. When the rope is clear attach your ascenders to the rope and immediately begin climbing.

Taken from (On Rope Vertical Potporri, page 276.)

# WESTSIDE STORY CHASM - AL

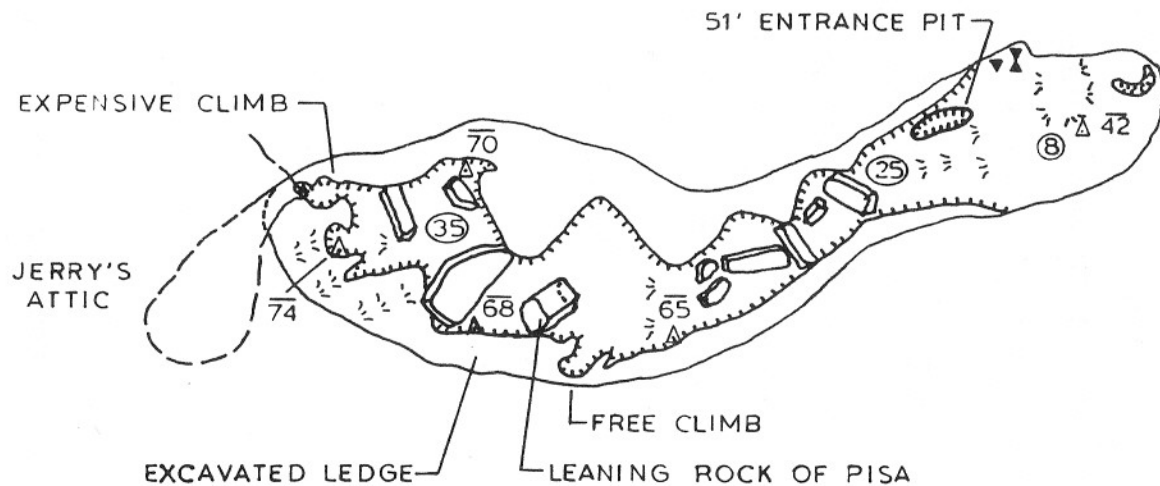
0 20  
FEET

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METERS



TAPE AND COMPASS  
SURVEY (grade 5) BY  
LIN GUY  
RICHARD LENTZ  
OF THE NSS  
MAY 20, 1990

LENGTH: 157 FEET  
VERTICAL EXTENT:  
74 FEET



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1990 TRIP LOG FOR NAGERS AND GAGERS

DATE	PLACE	FOLKS
Jan 12	Neversink Pit & Diggings Pit	J.Reeves, G. Bell
Feb 3	Neversink Pit & Tumbling Rock	J.Reeves, G. Bell D.Teal, D. Wilson S.Turner,R.Crumley
Feb 10	Bucks Pocket	J.Reeves, D. Teal R.Crumley, K. Lee T. Pope
Feb 17	Stevens Gap & Pipside Pits	R.Crumley, K. Lee S.Turner, D. Teal
Feb 25	Stanley Carden	J.Reeves, D. Teal R.Crumley,J.Loftin and members of DCG
Mar 3	Moses Tomb & Rockeater Pit	J.Reeves, D.Teal R.Crumley,T.Pope G.Bell, K. Lee J.Loftin
Mar 10	Star Driver Well & Bat-in-the-Pocket	J.Reeves,D.Teal K.Lee, T.Pope
Mar 23	Rocksalot, Chock Stone & NAG Well	J.Reeves,M.Smith G.Bell
Apr 27	Kagle Chasm & Fiery Top	J.Reeves,D.Teal K.Lee, D.Wilson T.Pope
Apr 14	Clodhole, Willwell & Rhonda's Well	J.Loftin,S.Turner T.Pope, J.Reeves
Apr 21	Pretty Well	J.Reeves, T.Pope K.Lee
Apr 28	Bluff River & Brownsfield	NAG & GAG Mbs.
Apr 29	Bucks Pocket	J.Reeves, R.Crumley
May 5	Devil's Dungeon & Cracker Pit	J.Loftin,D.Teal J.Reeves
May 12	Hall's Pit & Harbin Pit	J.Reeves,D.Teal R.Crumley,K.Lee S.Turner,M.Jenkins

TRIP LOG 1990 (cont.)

May 20	Westside Story	J.Reeves, L.Guy G.Fleming, R.Linx
May 26	Westside Story (bolting)	J.Reeves, S.Turner R.Crumley
Jun 2	Fern Trip - The 404	J.Reeves, D.Teal T.Pope, A.Baugh
Jun 7,8,9	SERA - Sink Hole & Wynn's Pit	J.Reeves, D.Teal T.Pope, M. Adams
Jun 13	Cracker Jack Bolting Trip	J.Reeves, D.Teal K.Lee, I. Raines
Jun 15	War Eagle	J.Reeves, D.Teal S.Turner
Jun 30	Westside Story - bolting comp.	J.Reeves, M.Smith D.Teal, R.Crumley K.Lee, S.Turner
Jul 7	Natural Well & Hooper's Well	J.Reeves, M.Jenkins D.Teal, R.Crumley D.Lill, S.Turner J.Loftin
Jul 14	Atlanta Trip to R.E.I.	J.Reeves, D.Teal R.Crumley
Jul 21	Bucks Pocket	J.Reeves, R.Crumley D.Wilson, D.Teal L.Guy, W.Ledbetter
Jul 28	Indian Rock & Charlie Potter	J.Reeves, R.Crumley J.Loftin
Aug 4	Gross-Skelton & Scottsboro Pit	J.Reeves, R.Crumley G.Fleming, D.Teal S.Turner

## PRETTY WELL

By: Tim Pope

As the driving rain pelted my car I thought about this thing I was about to do. Committing myself to a cave trip with J.R. in the rain had to be a mistake. And even though I knew in my heart that no person alive hates being wet more than this man, if there was one thing he would get wet for it would be to bounce a pit.

As I walked into the restaurant for breakfast, I didn't see another familiar caver's face so I sat down at a booth and waited for Mr. Reeves to arrive. Just then I saw Keith coming toward the table, I had over looked him when I came in, and as I turned to greet him I caught a glimpse of the blue machine sliding into the parking lot. He strolled in, sat down, and as the rain puddled on the sidewalk he told me of his plan to conquer Pretty Well.

We loaded our gear in J.R.'s Colt (R.I.P.) and headed for the pit. When we got to the parking spot we sat in the car for about twenty minutes and after a while, hiking in the rain didn't seem as bad as sitting in that car any longer so we organized our gear and began the hike to the pit.

The drop has an unusual entrance, and the rigging point maximizes the depth (the rappel begins about ten feet before you go under ground) so we lowered the rope into the aperture and prepared to descend. Because of the heavy rainfall that day and the previous night we were somewhat concerned about drainage into the pit, but it looked and sounded as if there was a

minimal water flow, so I was more intrigued by an owl hooting his head off about a hundred yards from us than I was worried about water. Then, just as Jerry dropped out of sight into the pit, he started complaining and moaning and making the most awful noises and saying something about a toilet flushing. While he was finishing his rappel I zipped up the wet suit top and tried to prepare myself for the water.

Slowly I lowered myself into the crevice and realized that the large flowstone formations beside the entrance had muffled the sound of all the water falling onto the ground below. It was a really pretty pit, with a good bit of decoration and even though it was definitely not a free fall, it was a nice ride down and you certainly didn't have to worry about over heating your rack (there was plenty of nice, clear, clean, cold water pounding on the body all the way to the bitter bottom).

There was no place to stand at the bottom to escape the relentless water flow and since Keith had gotten off the rope on the ledge above to explore, J.R. climbed aboard the nylon highway and climbed for all he was worth. Keith was still not back when Jerry signaled that he was off rope at the top, so I decided to climb up to the next ledge where Kebo was to get out of the water.

I knew this was going to be a fun climb when I had to fire up my Laser five times before I even got to the first ledge. Keith was waiting on me

when I disconnected my ascenders from the rope and I knew he was happy he was climbing out next (I had on neoprene and I would have been cold if it weren't for moving around and being out of the water).

Having to stop and rekindle a carbide light every few feet gives you a unique opportunity to observe some formations that you would normally miss if you were using a battery powered light source, but after the first few stops I decided to skip the fun and turn on the electric backup. There is a good bit to see in this cave, and I would highly recommend bouncing it at your earliest possible convenience. Just one word of advice, make sure it has been very dry prior to your visit because there are few things worse than climbing through a corkscrew tunnel where you are up against the wall eighty percent of the time, and there is water pouring on your head.

### BLUFF RIVER

It promised to be an interesting day at best where the weather was concerned. The clouds rolled in and out indiscriminately as the sky turned black, blue, then black again, and it was drizzling as I went into the Liberty to get breakfast.

Steve and I ate and as we finished, signed the register and left, David Teal and company arrived in grand fashion (I didn't know Ian was with them for another forty five minutes). As we made our way toward the skyline mountains we encountered the infamous Rob and Rob van with none other than J.R. and Rob waiting for us on the side of the road.

Some time later (after a few wrong turns) we made our way to the parking place on the side of a dirt road about halfway up a ridge in the Skyline system. It was a short downhill walk to the bluff where the cave entrance is and we slipped inside. It was my first time and I had been told it was a big cave with big passage but I had no idea it would be as huge as it was. The first room was large enough to drive a freight train through and as the passage turned the corner I thought it would probably taper down but I was incorrect. The water was about ankle deep but you could stay out of it by walking on the sand bars on either side. We came around the bend and to keep walking as the stream was flowing I had to bend over slightly to miss the over hanging rock but you could walk around this "obstacle" also.

The cave had few outstanding characteristics (besides its phenomenal size) but the walk is interesting, and by the time you get to the haystack, where the water makes an interesting cascade into the main stream flow, the cold liquid is almost comfortable. Your next few decisions could make or break the trip for you. I really don't mind being wet, so it wasn't so bad that I waded around the haystack and stepped off into the chest deep water of a sump that was so cold it took my breath. At this point I could tell you that if you waded through the water along the opposite wall the crater is only thigh deep, and I could tell you which side I went through but then you wouldn't have the satisfaction of knowing that you chose the correct way when you go through, so I won't.



The passage continues for a considerable distance to the back where there is a large breakdown room and the stream disappears under the rubble. I was told there is some wet crawl passage to be pushed beneath the rock but it is in a precarious position and care should be taken not to dislodge the support boulders in the stack. At the top of the breakdown pile off in the corner and through a diminutive crawl way there is a small but formidable crystal room that should be examined before making your way back to the entrance. This is a fine cave to carry novice cavers to and should be seen by anyone who likes being underground.

After walking back out of the cave it was suggested that we go looking for a small pit that was billed as "the prettiest dud hole in Alabama". It was a short walk from the bluff and it was back in the direction where we had parked so we trailed off through the woods. We found the cars first and since not everyone wanted to do a twenty foot drop and since part of our group was still blowing up flashbulbs in Bluff River, David and I began trying to find the elusive pit. It had turned out to be a relatively nice day and as we meandered through the woods I was thinking about the scent of the new grass and how warm it had turned out to be and how the sky was blue in between clouds and not about that snake that I almost stepped directly on. I had not even thought about snakes that day and since I was "following in the footsteps of 'the kid'" it came as quite a shock when my foot came inches from smashing that snakes head into the rock it was lying on.

We did find the pit not very far from where I had messed up my pants and it was a beautiful sight. Someone had carelessly rappelled into a very large stalagmite and toppled it but other than that it is a very well decorated room and worth the effort. As I walked back to the car I made up my mind that snakes are too dangerous and that walking around the woods during this time of year was ridiculous and that ridge walking season was definitely over for this year and that nothing could entice me to step into the green foliage of a snake infested hillside again. Well,... until next weekend.

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13th Annual  
T. A. G. Fall Cave-In  
Sequoyah Caverns, Valley Head, Al.  
Oct 5, 6, 7, 1990

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THE SHADOW

Look, there in the bluff!  
No, by the cedar tree.  
Is it just a shadow,  
or the one that's eluding me?

They've all been found you know,  
or at least that's what they say.  
They've all been found and closed,  
except for those you pay.

That's something I refuse to do  
to go and pay a fee.  
They're not here to make a profit,  
but are here to be enjoyed for free.

I realize there were those  
who lived in days gone by,  
that didn't understand or care  
They didn't even try.

Carelessly they trod,  
again, and again, and again.  
They wrote upon, they broke, they stole,  
the beauty from within.

There are those of us who loved and cared,  
and understood the time.  
The time it took to form these things,  
that are neither yours or mine.

To us, they are forever lost.  
Never more to see.  
These wondrous beauties of the dark  
are but now a memory.

It may be true they've all been found,  
and that is surely bad.  
For the ones we know are locked and bound,  
and that is very sad.

If those who ventured long ago  
had tried to understand,  
we wouldn't have the problem now,  
that caving's almost banned.

Now that I have reached the spot,  
the one up near the tree.  
I see it's just a shadow,  
it wasn't meant to be.

I will continue looking though,  
and after me, my child,  
So future generations can see,  
the one last cave that's wild.

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