

GADSDEN GROTTO NEWSLETTER

VOL. 16No.5

SEPTEMBER 2003



It's Warmer Down Here !!!!

The National Speleological Society

2813 Cave Avenue
 Huntsville, Alabama 35810-4431
 Tel: (256) 852-1300
 Gadsden Grotto of NSS
 P.O. Box 2092
 E. Gadsden, Alabama 35903
 Chairman::
 Jim Loftin
 4616 Hickory Lane
 Anniston, Alabama 36206-1963
 (256) 237-3060
 1st Vice Chairman::
 David Teal
 106 Arcade Street
 Gadsden, Alabama 35903-2914
 (256) 546-4526
 2nd Vice Chairman::
 Mike Davis
 716 Timberway
 Weaver, Alabama 36277
 (256) 820-8212
 Editor:
 Kelly A. Keener
 P.O. Box 252
 Wellington, Alabama 36279
 (256) 892-1388



Membership Fees: Each Member receives a 12 month subscription of The Gadsden Grotto Newsletter.

\$10.00 per year to become a member

Gadsden Grotto Patches:

\$7.00 each – Member

\$10.00 each—Non member

Gadsden Grotto Meetings:

Rainbow City Recreation Center

4412 Rainbow Drive

Rainbow City, Alabama 35906

When:

Every 2nd Tuesday of each month

Time:

6:30p.m.



Front Cover: Stumble Well

Mark Medlen climbing out of our New Find. Mark, Kelly Keener, and Jim Loftin was going to drop a few nice pits in Jackson County when Mark happened to Stumble across the dig Well in December 2002. Photo was taken on January 18 2003.

Back Cover: Kelly Keener crawling out of V A Cave.

All unsigned material may be attributed to the Editor. Statements and opinions expressed in the GGN do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Gadsden Grotto or the National Speleological Society.

SEND YOUR ARTICLES AND OR
 PHOTOS TO...
 GADSDENGROTTO@YAHOO.COM
 OR SEND THEM TO...
 GADSDEN GROTTO
 P.O. Box 2092
 GADSDEN, AL. 35903

Trip Reports

Big Coon Valley

By: Jim Loftin

July 26 2003

Well, it seems we've been caving a lot on Sundays, some on Mondays, and not much on Saturdays. However, my constituents, Mark Medlen and Kelly Keener, and I decided on Friday to go Saturday to Jackson County, the most special county in the state, to some pits. There's only; well, a hell-of-a-lot of pits AND caves in this large county of extreme northeast Alabama. Actually, 42% of Alabama's 4000 known and listed caves are found in this one county! That's 1700 caves in Jackson County! Many of these are blessed as open air pits. So, we decided to go to 2 or 3 of these that Mark and Kelly had never been to and that I had not been to in a long time. And since I like to multi-task, we needed to check on the accessibility of the Big Coon area. This is a great area to do many different kinds of caving, from novice to wet multi-drop, but NOT during hunting season! Do not go close to there during hunting season if you value your property and you don't want to screw it up for the rest of us. It used to be that the road going in to Big Coon was iron gated by the hunting clubs. There were times when it would be locked. We would back track, turn down the dry (usually) streambed and follow that around the gate. Then the hunters piled large boulders in the way of the streambed. The conflict continued because the Skyline Wildlife Management Area dipped across the road back there and there is a cemetery back there as well. I think one cannot block access to cemeteries or WMA's, so there's been this conflict amongst the hunters and cavers and anyone else that was ticked off by not being able to reach this part of God's Country. I've heard it ended up in court and the court decided the hunting clubs, or no one, could block access to Big Coon. But this is all hearsay, anyway. It just gives us another purpose, another thing to do.

After logging in the coordinates of Mandy's Pit, Mark's GPS reported that we were 70.23 miles from there, straight line through. Well it took us much longer that a normal 70+ mile trip, stopping 3 times and navigating down Big Coon road through the huge trees that had been blown over. Somebody had cleared the way nicely. We got to the split in

The road and the streambed bypass to find a new gate had been installed just before the split. It was just iron poles and a cable. Thank goodness it was down. However, the barrage of no trespassing signs was definitely formidable. If I hadn't had known better, I would have been very encouraged to leave. Well, I have been through this before here in the same area and the cable was down so we continued up the road that had the tougher iron gate ahead. It was open. It looked like it had been left open for quite a while. We continued on across the dry streambed. The road was in the best shape I had ever seen it. The mud holes were hard bottomed and the rocky parts seemed smoother. It was weird. All the large cobble stones that were lining the streambed were laying there like they were all stacked together laying down on a diagonal, facing the same direction. There must have been a lot of water and force bearing down on them during the recent storms. We made it to the parking spot, finally. We found some more interesting sights there besides all the neat little well polished stones heaped up around the water filled sinkhole. Claw marks, outside. But these were REALLY LARGE ONES! They were in the road, in the smooth hard packed clay, no grass. Looked like the animal was scratching at something on the ground. There was one scratch where all 5 claws made 6" long streaks with a width being 4"- 5" across. There were many 3 claw scratches 4" wide. There was a mold of a tip of a claw nicely formed in clay. Yep, it sure looked like a bear. Could have been a cougar, I guess. I had heard about 10 years ago that the Forest Service had released 15 black bears in the Skyline Wildlife Management Area; but, that was the first time I've seen any evidence of them.

By this time of day, it was getting real hot in the sun, cooler in the shade of all the trees, but still muggy. The hike 500' straight up the mountain wasn't too bad for me being out of shape like I am, even though we were drenched with sweat early in the trek. There was a beautiful section towards the bottom of the mountain where Christmas Ferns and running pine was everywhere. The mountain was a nice grade. We followed the ravine straight up to Mandy's Pit. It registered on my Casio altimeter watch at 1140' and on Mark's GPS at 1150'. I had it on my topo at 1250', but that had

Cont', from page 3.

To be wrong. We were at the contact. The entrance is a small sink with a large sandstone boulder blocking the 15' climb down to the 161' pit. After rigging the rope, I found someone's abandoned minimag light sitting on a rock. I tied the rope off on the best rigging tree, looped it around the other side of the boulder to keep it off the chert layers sticking out of the rock, and rigged to the newest bolt-hanger in the ceiling over the lip. I knew we were in for it when I first saw Mark's 220' rope covered in his last cave's dirt, nice and dry. Well, after rigging, I went down first to be showered, especially at the top end of the rope, with dry clay. Not only did I have to be careful not to get it in my eyes, but it was slowing down my decent, screwing up my rappel. Kelly came down next and cleaned the rope some more, then Mark. The lip empties you straight down into fairly smooth limestone against the wall most of the way but the magnitude of the pit is presented to you like a huge 180' tall stone carved theatre. It would make a good photo even though the flasher would be against the wall (easy to burn out the wall.) We'll come back. The 1' high passage at the bottom looked impassable. Probably has filled up some since the survey. The climb back up the nasty rope wasn't bad at all. The waterfalls were falling on the side of the pit and the drop was showered real nicely. It must've gotten the rope just damp enough to climb well. My left jumar didn't want to stick at all! The shower felt great on the way up, just enough and not too much!

We de-rigged and headed towards 67 Dollar Pit. It's supposed to be at 1150' also and 2 ravines over with the 2nd ravine being a series of ravines. I had the location at the far side of the series of ravines. We got distracted on the way over by a passable road just a little higher on the mountain. We followed it on over and cut down at the far side of the series of ravines to find a couple of sinks plugged and no pit. We continued forward on towards Holiday Hole. Mark wanted to hike on the road and look for caver markings and I stayed at the contact level. I called He and Kelly down when I found a hole that needed rigging but wasn't anything major. Or was it? It didn't look like anybody had been in it lately. It was a drop of 15' with a small round (body size) tube going straight down 30' - 40' with all the rope piled up on the bottom looking like passage. We saved that one for later. Walking on around at the same level, we ran right into Holiday Hole, right where it is supposed to be. It may not be deep at 105' but it is still a beautiful pit with a fair size sink entrance and a steep walled ravine pouring all it's water into the pit, when there is water. There wasn't any this day. I was intrigued sitting there envisioning during these past storms what it must look like when

there is a mega water being swallowed up by the pit. The bottom ended a couple hundred feet away from the pit with a 10' climb down and a crack with not much air space around not to mention water drainage. The pit must fill up with water when it's like that and slowly filter down into the mountain. But that must be the way, or one of the ways, most of the pits from around here, from the force of the water and rising and falling of the water level. The huge tree at the bottom that was there 20 years ago was still there and didn't look much rotten. No telling how old the tree was or how long it has been in the pit! It sure felt nice being underground as it was nice and cool and tranquil. Up at the top, it was hot, muggy, and buggy. The noseems were in full force with a helping of sweat bees. Nevertheless, we endured on back towards the vehicle and 67 Dollar Pit that we probably overshot. Sure enough, there it was, on the nearside of the series of ravines, not the far side. It could be easy to miss since there was a large tree growing over the crack of an entrance with it's roots appearing to hold the rocks together in the entrance ceiling and another large tree lying down right beside this tree and almost covering up the entrance. Whew, it was close! The sky was getting darker, so we headed on down the mountain from there and found some interesting digs at about 1050' and again at 980'. One had cold cave air blowing out of it. We'll be back!

We left Big Coon as 3 happy cavers and headed for the restaurant in Scottsboro. Kelly had been really looking forward to the Triple R, as always, but it was close to 9 pm and we were afraid it would be closed. So we opted for the Old Mexico. They had a live band playing rhythm and blues in a separate staged area and sounding pretty good, but loud. The food was absolutely outstanding. The discounted margaritas were awful, but I didn't have any trouble downing my frozen one. The place looked really metropolis, maybe a good hang out for locals, or ones looking for locals, or not-so-locals looking for any ole locals or not-so-locals. They sure seen friendly up there in Scottsboro. Or maybe it's because we feel so close to Jackson County. We're biased.

Jim Loftin
NSS#23097
Scci #271

Mark & Kelly's Pit

By: Kelly Keener NSS #48045/Sccl.#1023

July, 27, 2003

Mark & I got up Sunday a.m., Brandy was sitting outside on the front porch waiting for us wake up. She sat outside for about 30 minutes patiently for us to open the door and let her inside. We were getting our things ready and piling the back of our vehicle with our gear box. Mike pulled up at 9:00 and we went to drop the cave that Mark and I dug open this past winter. We slid down about body length into a hole on safety, to a rock that we have to straddle to rig in. We repelled into a 41' ft. pit.

It bells out into a good size room. On the bottom, pure untouched red mud with many formations such as drapes and popcorn on the walls and ceilings. We ascended back to the top, gathered our packs, and then we hiked at an angle up the mountain back to the Jeep. We arrived at the truck, and then left to go back home. I can't wait to find and dig open more caves.

Cave safely

Caving and Yard Sales

By: Kelly Keener

Saturday, August 2, 2003

On Saturday 8/2/03 Mark and I took Nick to drop Exhalation Pit, It was his first "real" repel, On the way there we noticed that it was Yard Sale Week-end, which starts on Noccoalula Falls Rd. in Gadsden, and continues to Ohio. We went on to Collinsville to drop the pit, On our way back, we hit the yard sales. I bought two camera flashes, both a dollar each, and some flashbulbs that were the right size for the flashes. I am hoping that I will have better lighting for my camera on my next caving trip, and maybe my photos will turn out better and brighter.

Happy Caving!!!



W a n t e d C a v e V a n d a l s

\$250-\$1,000 R e w a r d

The National Speleological Society will pay a reward of at least \$250 and up to \$1000 to anyone for information that leads to the conviction of a person or persons for:

Cave Vandalism,

Violation of the cave protection laws of any state in the United States,

Violation of the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act,

Harming animals in and about caves that are protected by federal or state laws,

Destroying or damaging cave gates or other barriers designed to protect caves.

Cave Laws

Federal law protects all federally owned caves and many cave-adapted animals.

Caves are protected by law in most states; therefore it is illegal to:

Write or mark on cave walls.

Litter or dump spent carbide.

Break or remove mineral formations.

Tamper with or damage cave gates.

Disturb bats or other living organisms.

Remove or disturb historic or prehistoric artifacts or bones.

HOW TO COLLECT A REWARD

The reward applicant is required to provide information that the conviction occurred and to provide such other supporting information as is reasonably available. The reward request must be made within three months of the conviction. To collect your reward or for more information, write to the National Speleological Society, Cave Vandalism Deterrence Reward Commission, Cave Avenue, Huntsville, Alabama 35810

PLEASE HELP

Help enforce the law by reporting any suspected violations to the cave owner and the appropriate law enforcement authority. Caves are a unique nonrenewable natural asset. They are protected for our use and benefit, and the use and benefit of future generations

Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints, and kill nothing but time.





Gadsden Grotto

Recent Trips



Gadsden Grotto
 P.O. Box 2092
 E. Gadsden, Alabama
 35903



Inside This Months Issue

Grotto Information	Page 2
<u>Trip Reports</u>	<u>Pages 3-5</u>
Big Coon	Page 3
Cont' Big Coon	Page 4
Mark & Kelly's Pit	Page 5
Caving and Yard Sales	Page 5
WANTED CAVE VANDALS	Page 6
Gadsden Grotto Recent Trips	Page 7