

## Articles:

- Dues address.
- March Minutes
- Bill Roth's Sullivan Trip Report

A synopsis of what is going on in the world of the Near Normal...

## Contact Mailing and Dues Address

It's come to our attention that the contact address for correspondence on the newsletter and the website have not been available. This is rectified now. For mailing in dues (a bargain at a measly \$15), if you are unable to make the meeting, the

correct address is:  
Near Normal Grotto  
P.O. Box 813  
Normal, Illinois  
61761-0813

## March Minutes

Minutes of the meeting  
March 12, 2010

Present: Ralph Sawyer, Jason Kern, Kevin Rasmus, Gerry Woltering, Coree Woltering, Matthew Level, Todd McCartney, Laura Pierce, Andrea Tognetti, L J Tognetti, Chris Haydel, Bill Roth, Bill Morrow, Jill Bucher, George Mattson, Eric Mattson.

Todd McCartney called the meeting to order.

Moved, seconded, approved to forgo a treasurer's report.

Minutes of the January meeting were examined and approved. Due to a

lack of quorum, no official meeting was held in February.

Trip Reports  
Todd and Laura reported a Colorado through trip – the Eisenhower Tunnel (Highway 70).

Todd reported that he, Ralph and Laura searched for another entrance to Keller Cave near Waterloo IL. They climbed a dome into a narrow passage leading to another dome with large debris in the bottom, a small unattainable passage at the ceiling. Entry and exit from Keller was difficult due to ice.

Bill Morrow provided guidance to cavers in

Buckner's Cave near Bloomington Indiana. They shared the cave with a group of 28 cavers from the Purdue Outing Club. Lots of congestion in the Waterfall Passage.

Bill also reported on a trip into Donnehue Cave near Bedford. Bill Roth reported on a trip to the Rise of the Sullivan River in Sullivan Cave near Bedford Indiana. The trip lasted longer than it should have: 22.5 hours. Bill and Ralph appreciated water and assistance from Jeffery Gosnell and Marshall Kuyper near the end of their trek out. Jeffery and Marshall were part of a Near Normal group caving other parts of Sullivan the day before.

## March Minutes - continued

L J reported on a January trip to Tennessee-Alabama-Georgia (TAG). Byers Cave is technically a horizontal cave, but requires hand lines for slick slopes and traverses. In No Cave, cavers examined a mastodon tooth and a bat skeleton. South Pittsburgh Pit offered vertical work plus more cave at the bottom. L J explained aspects of horizontal and vertical caving to our guests. Todd added a description of a trip to Gourdneck Cave (plenty of water blasting through) and Cagle's

Chasm (vertical) during the same TAG trip.

Old Business  
May 15-22<sup>nd</sup> National Cave Rescue Commission training in Mentone Alabama  
Vertical practice in Ralph's barn any Sunday he is in town.  
Call 309-657-6130.  
Tentative June 13, August 15 Vertical practice at ISU's rappelling tower.

New Business  
Todd reported some divers in Missouri have agreed to test a sump to try to connect

Crevice Cave and another nearby cave. They need help carrying gear. 3 miles. This summer.

Bill Roth reported that Bill Baus of the Buckner's Cave Restoration project asks for help transporting a generator through passage to the Volcano Room.

We will try to have our speaker on wetsuits come to the April meeting.

Meeting adjourned.

## Trip to Sullivan's Rise – There and Back Again

**By Bill Roth**

I read logs from other cavers prior to our trip, to help me visualize what was ahead of us. Most of what I read got me psyched up for the physical and mental challenges that awaited us. Dear Laura, "Fifteen Hours of Torture" did not get me in a good frame of mind, but your "Return to Sullivan" did.

The trip was not fifteen hours of torture. I'd describe it

more as about 18 hours of adventure and challenge, followed by about a 5-hour grueling march. Matt Level, Chris Haydel, and Ralph Sawyer were all in good shape for the trip. I was in excellent mental shape, after conquering some of my previous anxiety over tight spaces and sumped or near-sumped crawls. A lot of positive mental conditioning prior to the trip and a

successful recent wetsuit trip prepared my head well for Sullivan. However my physical training was not up to that same quality. Combine that with the gallons I sweated out in my heavy gauge wetsuit, chillblocker socks, and chillblocker gloves. And take into consideration that I should have brought a couple more bottles of water... and you guessed it, I was the weakest link.

## Trip to Sullivan's Rise – There and Back Again - continued

We started our trip Saturday morning, February 13. We had a light breakfast at our hotel and got into the cave around 8:30 am. We navigated through all the familiar spots, beginning with the Backbreaker and ending with the Mountain Room, prior to entering the part of the cave that required those wetsuits. That first part went smoothly. Then we began our wetsuit route and our journey to the Emergence of the Sullivan River.

Ralph told me I'd neither find a tribe of Amazons nor a secret cache of gold at the Emergence. I still however imagined I'd find a gushing fountain or some other spectacular sight. The journey was not a particularly pretty one. There were highlights here and there: an interesting ceiling structure left behind after depositing its breakdown on the cave floor, occasional cave life such as a fish or a giant crayfish, and one room that the guys called the "bat room" because of the dozens of bats that were resting on the ceiling. Eventually, the water started looking quite beautiful, especially with our lights reflecting off its surface. And there were also formations of mud that could have competed with some of the more permanent rock

formations that I've seen.

But there was also what seemed like endless breakdown, coated in endless amounts of slippery mud. That increased the difficulty level and exertion needed for moving ahead, at least for me. Lots of water too, which I did not mind at all, except when it meant we'd need to slog through distances of pudding-like goo at the bottom of that water that pulled down on your boots and caused your footing to slide from side to side.

Chris and Ralph were pretty wary of that water from the start. It didn't necessarily bother them, but I could tell they were thinking ahead to possibilities of hypothermia induced by soaking ourselves too long in that water. Matt and I embraced the water and looked forward to it to a greater degree than those other guys. For me, it felt like a leveler of caving strength. If I could float or swim along on the surface, buoyed up by my pack, I could offset my less than ideal physical condition. We were careful to check each other for hypothermia regularly over the last several hours of the trip, by seeing whether we could make an OK with thumb and pinky. We passed that test every time.

If you look at a map of the Emergence, you see that the two routes leading up to it roughly form a triangle. Take a right turn, and you journey along two legs of that triangle, passing through the magic of The Catacombs prior to reaching the Emergence. Take a left turn, and you head straight to the Emergence. We took a right turn, heading counterclockwise, and we caved the remaining leg of the triangle on the way back.

Despite Ralph doing his best to prepare me for the simple beauty of the pool of water that lies at the location of the Emergence, I was still disappointed that there was no waterfall or fountain you could point to as the source of the river. It felt good to get there though. It was a real accomplishment, a personal Mt. Everest for me.

Yes, we took food and drink breaks throughout the trip, a few of which were longer to allow for eating more than just a snack. And you know our friend Ralph took a few opportunities for photography, usually coupled with a break that we were having anyway, and not adding excessively to the total length of our trip. If the pictures turn out, we hope to have some good Rise pictures, among others.

## Trip to Sullivan's Rise – There and Back Again - continued

As the trip progressed, I became increasingly exhausted, more than the others. They were patient with me as I needed to take more breaks, and that eventually slowed the trip down quite a bit. We began talking about the best strategy for exit. We wanted to get word to our emergency call person (Becky) on the outside that we were ok, just slow and tired. We also did not want to split up. As a result of that, we stayed together right up until about the last minute, to the point when waiting longer might mean others on the surface would be imagining the worst about our watery demise. We were all ok, no hypothermia, no injuries, just one extremely worn out caver in the group.

After getting through the last of the tight water spots in the wetsuit part of the cave, our relatively younger friends, Matt and Chris, went

ahead. They got all the way to the backbreaker together, and then Chris ran ahead from there. He got to a phone in time to assure others we were fine. Then Matt joined him. Both of those guys are in great shape. With Chris in training for the Boston Marathon, he was the most in shape of the crew. In fact, the night before we went into Sullivan, he pondered whether he'd try to get in a run before we caved. I'm glad he saved that energy for the cave, assuming he ever runs out of energy.

Don't forget about Ralph and me. We had a little food left, but I soon ran out of the energy drinks that I had brought with me. I haven't been able to look at an energy drink since then. At the end, all I wanted was cool, clear water. Since Ralph is part camel, and since he had planned better than I, he had a bottle of water that he was

able to give me as we worked our way out of the wetsuit route and into the main part of the cave. I was soooo extremely happy when we got out of the wetsuit route, but I forgot that the remaining trip would still take a few hours.

As we forged on, we started to sense that our friends on the surface were thinking about us and praying for us. And we became more certain that we would soon see one of our caving friends pop up out of nowhere ahead of us to give us a hand, and some cool, clear water. We had come to Bedford in two separate groups, one planning to take lighter routes with kids and our more aggressive wetsuit team. Ralph and I started throwing out names of which of the adult members of the other team might suddenly emerge out of the darkness.

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## Trip to Sullivan's Rise – There and Back Again -

### Near Normal Grotto

P.O. Box 813  
Normal, IL 61761-0813

Meeting at Bromenn  
Medical Center, Normal,  
Illinois. Second Friday of  
the month.

E-MAIL:  
nngwebmaster@yahoo.com



We're on the Web!

See us at:

<http://www.caves.org/grotto/nng/>

Just short of the Mountain room, we began hearing voices. I hoped they were real. Jeffery Gosnell and a new friend of ours, Marshall Kuypers walked up to greet us. Man, that felt good to see them. Yes, we could have made it out. But it sure was a lot easier being able to ask for an occasional hand over an obstacle. And although I initially declined Marshall's offer to take my pack, when we got to the Backbreaker, I gladly gave it to him. Jeffery had a number of water bottles with him in various pockets.

That was some of the best water I've ever had.

Ralph, Jeffery, Marshall, and I got to the end of our trip around 7:30 am on Sunday, March 14. We changed in the cave and headed out to our vehicles where others were waiting. One thing still makes me chuckle about that trip. At the beginning of the trip, Chris and Matt had discussed how cool it would be to do an overnighter in a cave, to spend a full 24 hours, with camping in the middle of the trip. Well, we

didn't spend a full 24 hours in that cave, only 23. And we didn't sleep in the middle of that trip either. But I hope that was close enough for those guys.

I am thankful that I belong to a grotto that supports me, that is safety conscious, and that is fun.

Thank you NNG friends!

### *About Our Organization...*

The Near Normal Grotto is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study, exploration and conservation of caves and cave life. Our members come from all walks of life – landscapers, camp

counselors, carpenters, geologists, mechanics, teachers, and students, to name a few. In other words, people like you. Our interests may vary from exploration to conservation to photography, but we all

share a passion for caving. If this interests you and you would like to know more, feel free to attend one of our monthly meetings!