

THE NEAR NORMAL NEWS



THE NEAR NORMAL NEWS is published by the:

Near Normal Grotto #363,
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ARTICLE SUBMISSION INFO

We accept most cave-related submissions. Equipment reviews, scientific articles, trip reports, announcements, cartoons, artwork, and pictures are all welcome. Most submissions must be received by the last Friday of the month prior to publication. Scientific submissions need extra time for review.

Send submissions, using the guidelines below, to Jeffery Gosnell at gosnell@greatoakscamp.org. Submissions on disk may be mailed to 1384 County Road 900N, Lacon, IL 61540.

Photographic & graphic submissions should generally be in JPEG format. Query the editor if your submission uses a different program. Photographs should list the cave, general location (ex. Southern Illinois, or Washington Co, IN.), names of any persons included in the photo, and name of the photographer.

Written submissions may be sent as an attachment using Microsoft Works®, Microsoft Word®, or plain ASCII (DOS-text), or incorporated directly into an e-mailed text message. If you are uncomfortable with your writing ability, simply put together a basic account of the trip—ignoring spelling, grammar, and punctuation—and request the editor to help draft the finished product.

Scientific and Technical articles are expected to be of a high standard, citing evidence of statements and crediting references, where appropriate.

The Near Normal Grotto

The Near Normal Grotto meets the second Friday of each month at 7 P.M. in the Community Room of

National City Bank
202 E. Washington
Bloomington, IL.

Adverse weather, holidays, and our annual September picnic may affect meeting times.

2005 Executive Committee:

President: Marc Tiritilli

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The Near Normal Grotto is part of the **National Speleological Society (NSS)**. We encourage all persons interested in caving to join the NSS. Membership is \$35/year. Members receive the *NSS News* (monthly) and other caving publications.

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On The Cover: Naked Cavers in Sullivan Cave, IN Photo by: Troy Simpson

Near Normal Grotto Business

MEETING MINUTES MARCH 8, 2005

Call to order at 7:18pm. Present: Marc Tiritilli, Ralph Sawyer, Troy J. Simpson, Dave Carson, Don Kerouac, Bill Morrow, Cory Wheder, Jason Kern, John Schirle, & John Ernst.

Secretary's Report – Troy read Feb. minutes. Amended to include Angie, Mathew, & Justin in Dave's Illinois Caverns trip report. Dave motion to accept, Don seconded, membership approved.

Treasurer's Report – Dave reported \$325.14 in treasury. \$70 in dues collected. Expenditures of \$48.65 for NNN & \$75 for KCI membership. About 14 people need to pay dues. John motioned to accept report, Don seconded, membership accepted.

Trip Reports

-Ralph shared his experience in Sullivan Cave as the "most distressing, yet most satisfying" experience he has had. He discussed safety protocol and felt those on the surface acted appropriately. The surface group found poor cell signal at Sullivan. They noted excellent & punctual follow-up to their call.

- Troy, Don, John S., & Dave said the dry trip to Sullivan wasn't as expected. They encountered armpit-high water. They poked around the Spiral Room to find the exit passage, with no success.

- John S., Ralph, & Don went to Mammoth Restoration Camp. There were 103 workers. They saw one of Floyd Collins' coffins, worked in Snowball Room & began gating Cathedral Cave.

- John E. shared his adventures in Missouri and a quarry he has frequented, but has not ventured far until he learns safe caving.

- Marc & Roy Becker attended NCRC & hit Camps Gulf to find the large room. They did Cedar Ridge Cave with Anmar Mirza .

- Dave did a trip to Spring Mill S.P., Doghill-Donohue, & Marengo with Troy & Nathan after the Sullivan trip. They purchased retired helmets from the commercial caves.

Old Business

-Len Storm will continue managing the website. Troy motioned a committee come up with ideas for the site. Dave seconded. Membership accepted. The committee is Dave, Troy, & John S. They will contact Len and have recommendations in April .

-Trip to TAG in October. Mammoth Restoration is August. An Illinois Caverns/City Museum of St. Louis April 23 (tentative). NSS convention in Huntsville, AL this summer.

-June & August grotto meetings will be a vertical practice at the ISU Rappel Tower. Dates to be confirmed later.

New Business

- Video presentations are planned for the April & May meetings.

Upcoming Events

- Vertical Workshop, April 3; Orientation to Cave Rescue, June 4,5; NCRC Nationals, June 25- July 2; Next Meeting April 8.

Motion to Adjourn by John S., Seconded by Ralph. Meeting Adjourned at 8:31 pm.

Video Program given by Don Kerouac on Lechiguilla.

Respectfully submitted by, Troy J. Simpson, Secretary

MEETING MINUTES APRIL 8, 2005

Call to Order at 7:19pm. Present: Ralph Sawyer, Troy J. Simpson, Dave Carson, Don Kerouac, John Ernst, Jeffery Gosnell, Jason Kern, John Schirle, Andrew Rasmus, Kevin Rasmus, Cory Wholer, John Mayberry, Adam Stanford, and Bill Morrow.

Secretary's Report – Troy read March minutes. John S. motioned to accept, Jeffery seconded, membership accepted.

Treasurer's Report – Dave reported \$360.14 in treasury. About 11 people need to pay dues. John S. motioned to accept Treasurer's Report, Jeffery seconded, membership accepted.

Trip Reports

- Ralph and Bill went to Equality Cave. Bill described the cave 's joint-controlled, maze-like entrance.

- Dave & Larry Bird took photos at an undisclosed place. Dave tried a new secondary light that enhanced many of his photos.

Old Business

- Website: Dave mentioned a web calendar to list events and automatically send e-mail reminders to members. He mentioned he will talk to ISU about feasibility to use their server as a possible host for this if the grotto chooses to go in this direction. The concern would be having people administrate or monitor the information on it. Troy mentioned additions to the webpage could include photo gallery, calendar, by-laws. & meeting minutes. Jeffery motioned the web page committee use their discretion in all matters without spending grotto finances. Bill seconded. Membership accepted.

New Business

- Jeffery raised distributing THE NEAR NORMAL NEWS at the monthly meetings. John S. motioned to poll the membership. There was no second to the motion. Discussion continued. Troy mentions that some grottoes distribute their newsletters at meetings. Dave motions Jeffery bring the NNN to meetings, when he can be at the meetings and distribute to those who are there. If someone cannot make it, Jeffery will mail the NNN to the member. Andrew seconded. Accepted by membership.

-Vertical practices. Troy mentioned grotto meetings are included in vertical practice. Business Meeting at 2:00pm. Jeffery noted Great Oaks Camp is a possible back-up site. Jeffery motioned June 5 be the meeting date, contingent on Marc reserving the tower. John S. seconded. Accepted by membership. Troy motioned August 14 as the second date, contingent on the tower. Jeffery seconded. Accepted by membership.

Upcoming Events

- IKC Clean-up, April 16; Sullivan Cave Trip, April 23; Mammoth Restoration, May 7-8; IKC Workday, Robinson Ladder Cave, May 14; SERA Cave Carniva,l May 11-15; CRF survey in Mammoth Cave, May 21; Speleofest, May 28-31
- Next Meeting is Friday May 13; Video Presentation

Motion to Adjourn by Don, Seconded Jeffery. Meeting Adjourned at 8:18 pm

Respectfully submitted by, Troy J. Simpson, Secretary

WHERE'S MARC?

By Marc Tiritilli

Marc has been pondering the features of LED lighting again and spending a good deal of time coordinating the curriculum for the National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC).

First the lighting. The last headlamp I built for Troy utilized an improved version of the Nichia LEDs. They were 50% brighter and cost half as much as their predecessors. When Troy ordered his lamp, I built a new 20-LED cluster for myself as well. I was very pleased with the result. However, Troy wanted to keep the Zoom reflector and mount the LEDs along its outer circumference. This turned out to be an excellent idea resulting in about twice the output of my light, without a reflector.

Enter Jeffery. He has been caving with a focusable, 1-watt, single LED headlamp that can throw a beam farther and brighter than a halogen Zoom. It's a pretty slick design and could reach down the Backbreaker in Sullivan about as far as my NiteLite. The 20-LED clusters I have been building throw off a lot of light and do so in a diffuse manner like a carbide lantern. Most people find this an enjoyable alternative to the sharply defined edges and mottled beams of incandescent lights. There are many instances, though, in big rooms or boreholes where a tight, penetrating spot is just what the doctor ordered. Traditional LED designs simply don't do that.

I have heard of 5-watt chips from Luxeon, but I haven't seen them in action. I see three areas of concern. First is the color of the light. Unlike standard white LEDs, the high-power chips are noticeably greenish in color—like a bad fluorescent light. This will no doubt improve as whiter phosphor compositions become available. Second is power consumption. A 1-watt LED is on par with the 20-LED cluster that last 8 to 10 hours on 4 AAs. A 5-watt will get 2 hours of burn time from the same source. This will necessitate larger battery packs. The Wal-Mart lights I use for student groups run for 2.5 hours, so perhaps people will accept the tradeoff in run time to save

weight. The third factor is cost. The 1-watt setup is roughly \$75. A 20-LED array can be built for about \$50. The great news is that all of these concerns will disappear over the next few years as technology in LEDs and batteries continues to improve.

As for the NCRC, we have been working hard this past year to incorporate the many suggestions, improvements, and research that has been offered over the last few years. This summer's national seminar will represent a major step forward in what is already a top-notch training program. Speaking of the summer, I'm looking forward to seeing everybody underground.

Caving is Good for the Soul

I'm borrowing a phrase from Laura Lexander to describe a point made more clear for me last weekend. I had been so busy I was considering not going on the trip to Sullivan Cave. I was burnt out by Friday night, and I admit I was rather blasé.

Once underground, I was feeling better, but keeping to myself. That didn't last long. John Ernst, his son Cory, and Cory's friend John had enthusiasm that was hard to resist.

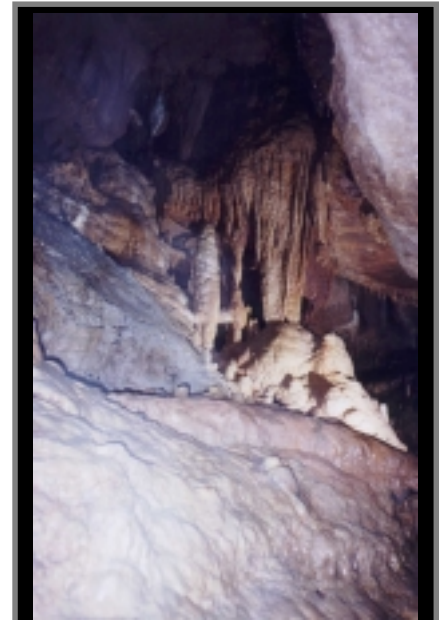
We quickly made our way to the Mountain Room where Ralph set up for his first pictures. I had brought a new light from Brinkman called the DuoMax. It has two Xenon lamps in a pistol-grip design that give 40 minutes of burn time on its rechargeable sealed lead-acid batteries. As you can tell, I get excited about gadgets, so a chance to try this out underground was a further boost to my mood. Turns out that the light worked quite well and was more than enough to light the room for some great pictures.

Though I had been to this cave three times before, I had never been on the route we took. We headed through waist-deep water to the Spiral Room in search of the Speed Hollow entrance. Just before the Spiral Room we paused to take more pictures. The Spiral Room proved to be the most photogenic and much time was spent trying different locations and lighting effects. Ralph has a great eye for



composition, and I discovered that I really enjoy the process of putting the shots together.

Back to Laura. She is the one who introduced me to the Windy City Grotto where I joined the NSS and began my involvement with NCRC. I hadn't seen her since 1997, so this was a wonderful reunion. We finished the trip with more ground to cover, as we couldn't make it to the second entrance. Throw in a great dinner, and we had an experience that transformed my spirit from the previous week. Laura was right—caving is good for the soul!



*Buddha-Christian Cave, IN
Phtoo by Troy J. Simpson*

IN THIS "SUPERSIZED" ISSUE:

- *Where's Marc?*
- Bill Morrow discovers "caves" in downtown St. Louis.
- Ralph Sawyer reports on a trip to Rumbling Falls Cave.
- John Schirle's pen is possessed by the ghost of Dr. Seuss.
- Troy J. Simpson creates his own caves in the "Great Corn Desert."
- Laura Lexander, Ralph Sawyer, and Jeffery Gosnell prove how crazy they are by going back to Sullivan Cave.

ST. LOUIS' CITY MUSEUM

by Bill Morrow

Looking for the perfect museum to complement a day at Illinois Caverns? The City Museum in St. Louis is the wildest museum I have ever been to, as close to getting your cave jollies without going into a bonafide cave.

The museum is downtown, west of the stadium. When walking towards it, the first thing one notices is a school bus hanging off the top of the museum, with suspended airplanes and a fire truck lower, but still many floors off the ground. Intertwining these vehicles is the evidence of a welder's wildest dreams. Wrought iron walkways, human-sized slinkies impossibly suspended, and slides going everywhere up to 5 stories above the ground. Leave your fear of heights in the car for this one.



As one enters, a giant collage made out of recycled materials comes to mind. Dinosaurs, whales, gargoyles, ponds, a

Swiss Family Robinson Treehouse structure, are all within sight. Your first impression is a general perplexed feeling.

But I'll get to the heart of why this is in a grotto journal. Caves. Caves. And more Caves. The 'original section' has caves, tunnels, and climbs going everywhere. It is all hands on – if you can get through, you were meant to go there. We immediately lost our son, after finding out he has no fear of tight crawls that Daddy could not get through.

A 'puking pig' is a giant water bucket that indiscriminately tips many gallons of water in a 'stream crawl/walkway passage' (the litigious can stay out of this museum, thank you). There is also the huge Enchanted Caves section, a multistory cave structure with passages ranging from walk ways to tight crawls with stalactites and stalagmites to watch out for. At the top is a multistory curving slide. The artists created a blend between realistic cave structures and dragonish features throughout the cave system. We never made it through the whole cave, as it was at the end of our visit, and our son was running on fumes.

While I knew it would be physical, I thought with a suffix of "museum," how bad could it be? Plenty physical. All of us were tuckered out, with enough crawling to rank up there with Wayne's.

There is so much more to this museum though. A glass blowing area, crafts tables, ball pits, trains, art exhibits, and more. There is Beatnik Bobs, a kitschy place to smoke (yes, smoke) and have a beer on the third floor, and on the main level, the Log Cabin Inn is another drinking establishment.



While we went in the day, this place is open till 1am, and is supposed to take on a whole 'nother flavor. The day had a ton of families. When we left, the older crowd was coming in to claim the night.

Come for the caves (yes, they're fake. Enjoy it anyway.). Stay for everything else. You will have a total Jane Fonda body workout at the end of the day. For more information check www.citymuseum.org.

Editor's Note: Metro East Search and Rescue uses the "cave" at City Museum for rescue practices.

RAMBLINGS OF A TROGLODYTE

by Jeffery Gosnell

Check it out! Two extra pages, and my column is still forced into the corner. How cool! This is your newsletter, and its content is up to you.

Sullivan Cave

"I love this cave!" Ralph Sawyer and I nearly blurted this out at the same time towards the end of our last trip in April. It was said with a touch of awe, a bit of respect, and an element of possessiveness for the cave.

After more than 40 hours in Sullivan, I've seen only a fraction of this cave. Yet each trip has left me both satisfied *and* frustrated, discouraged *and* determined. Every time I think I've got it figured out, Sullivan gives something new – a 20' bathtub with 6" of breathing space, a passage we can't find, an awe-inspiring dome, a torturous route that gets crueler the farther you go.

I have a map on my office wall highlighting each section of Sullivan when I

get to it. After 40 hours, there is still a lot left to highlight, and I'm fixated on seeing every square inch of passage. I have dreams about this cave (and after the February trip, I had a few weeks of nightmares about the "Side Crawl.").

So if you ever need a fourth for Sullivan, the answer is, "Yes, I'm ready to quit my job to make the trip."



A VISIT TO RUMBLING FALLS CAVE

by Ralph Sawyer

January 8, Marc Tiritilli, Kevin Rasmus, Andy Rasmus, and I visited Rumbling Falls Cave near Spencer, Tennessee. After a difficult twelve hour drive, we were rewarded with an easy search for the cave entrance, tucked into the side of a steep embankment below the highway.

We had come to see the Rumble Room, over five acres of chamber. Until a few years ago the Rumble Room had been a closely guarded secret, but the threat of a proposed sewage treatment plant had forced conservationists to divulge the existence, if not the exact whereabouts, of Rumbling Falls. The threat to the cave was featured in *Sports Illustrated*. An article in the *NSS News* described the political process of protecting Rumbling Falls.

<http://www.darklightimagery.net/RFC/thumbs.html> shows why we jumped at the chance to visit.

A short crawl at the entrance led to a 60' rappel to a small stream. Previous cavers had installed bolted anchors, ropes and safety lines, where we needed them. We tied in to existing bolts and down we went.

We headed upstream to the First Waterfall, following, with no difficulty, verbal directions from friends of Marc.

Right away we could hear the waterfall.

I am accustomed to finding wimpy little trickles that sound big as you approach them. Not here. The sound grows to a noisy rumbling. In the chamber of First Waterfall, a mild discussion resembles a heated argument; it is necessary to shout to be heard by the caver next to you. A breeze filled with spray pushed against my face, alarmingly cold. I assumed that it was evidence of our proximity to the Rumble Room (Later I concluded it was a floor-to-ceiling eddy of air current being continuously generated by the fall.).

A rope hung from the ceiling, ready for us to ascend, but since we had already doffed vertical gear, we free climbed the fall. I watched Kevin gingerly pick his way up the fall, getting pretty wet. He leaned forward just a bit, probably to look for a foothold, and a heavy cascade of water caught his helmet and forced his head down, pounding its way down the back



of his overalls. I made sure to go last, avoiding the mistakes exposed by my predecessors, but I was still completely wet when I reached the top.

At Second Waterfall free climbing was not possible. We redonned vertical gear and frogged, still catching a good deal of the water's cold force.

We continued upstream to our next landmark, the confluence of a second stream with the one we followed. Marc's directions were holding true and we headed to the right.

"In this section we explored several false leads." That is just one sentence in the middle of 1 1/2 pages of notes that I recorded during the trip home. But the four of us actually spent 3 hours (12 man-hours if you are keeping track) exploring false leads. At first we searched the most likely looking leads, always alert for any air movement. We became more methodical, backing up to the confluence of the two streams and squeezing into the more unlikely looking crawls, sometimes emerging back into our stream passage. Too often, we found ourselves having to back out of a tight crawl, moist clay making its way up the legs of our overalls. We wondered if we were supposed to bear left at the confluence instead of right, and explored accordingly. Knees and elbows were getting pretty beat up. All this summed up in one short



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sentence: “*In this section we explored several false leads*”.

Eventually we regrouped at the stream passage. Marc, Andy, and Kevin were dripping wet and cold. I had been doing some tight dry crawls. I was hot and probably looked like I had been rolled in seasoned flour. I was sure we had tried each and every passage to the end, but Marc reminded me of a narrow passage I had followed him into early on. With no hint of air movement, we had turned around when it forced us to the floor. Marc wanted to try this passage one more time.

You are a lunatic I thought, and then, like Sancho Panza to Don Quixote, I followed him. The tall passage narrowed up. We made our way sideways. I sucked in the gut. The height of the passage remained constant, but the narrowness descended. Sometimes I fed my neck through a constriction, my head and helmet in a sort of keyhole. Eventually we were both forced to the floor, propelling ourselves on our sides with one sore elbow. I am a slow caver and soon I was alone, inching along, unable to turn my head to see where I was going. And suddenly I could stand.

Here was that nasty feeling again, the feeling of having made a horrible mistake.

This was walking passage. To the left and to the right. My lunatic caving partner had deserted me at a junction of two passages. I yelled for Marc and awaited a response.

“nnnnnnmmUMBLE!”

Sounded like he was yelling “Get ready to rumble.” I could not tell which passage Marc’s voice came from. I headed into the left passage and yelled. No response. Dead silence, no dripping water, nothing. I backtracked into the right hand passage. And felt... something different. The slightest drop in temperature. Or maybe air movement. Yes, barely detectable; I had to stand very still to feel it on my face. But air movement. Marc appeared around a bend and I could see from his face he had found it. He encouraged me to walk ahead of him so I could feel the air movement. We emerged from the passage—no, it was more like the passage simply *ended* at a wall of darkness. It would have been easy to simply walk off the edge. Previous



explorers had rigged a safety rope along a wall. We hooked our elbows into the rope and stood uncomfortably close to the edge. But we never rappelled in. We were too close to the halfway point in our endurance.

That’s right, dear reader, you waded through all this blather to find out that we only made it to the edge of the Rumble Room. How do you think we felt? Bitterly disappointed? Defeated? No. Elated. Marc’s quiet, controlled lunacy had paid off.

We were standing on a ledge 200’ above the floor of the Rumble Room, over five acres of open space below us. You could fit the Houston Astrodome in here. We held our breaths and listened to silence. We shone our headlamps into the darkness that ate the tightly focused beams, absorbing them before they could illuminate anything. We yelled like tourists to hear our garbled echoes. We shook hands.

Does anyone ever write about the trip back down the mountain, the return trip through the cave? I’ll give the short version. We headed downstream, rappelled the two waterfalls. We discussed the verbal route descriptions we had, and agreed they made perfect sense, as so often happens with caving in hindsight. I took photos of froggers ascending toward the entrance. We emerged and slowly slogged up the steep hill to the car. We celebrated the fact that on our next trip we should get to the Rumble Room in about an hour. Ever since I have been quietly plotting and scheming for a return trip to Rumbling Falls Cave.

Photos by Kevin Rasmus.



Cavers With Gear

by John Schirle

(with apologies to Dr. Seuss)

Now the Tried and True Cavers had helmets with lamps
While the plain ol' spelunkers had nothing but caps
Those helmets weren't much, all muddy and battered
You might think such a thing wouldn't really have mattered.

But because they had Gear, all the Tried and True Cavers
Would brag, "We're the speleo-pros — none are braver!"
With their helmets and kneepads attached so securely
They'd sniff "We've the right to be underground, surely!"

When the Cavers had ridgewalkings, surveys and trips
They kept out the spelunkers; they gave them the slip.
They only invited the Cavers with Gear;
"Spelunkers might ruin things!" that was their fear.

"What if they fall? They might break an arm!
Or take a stalactite — or do bats some harm!"
Let them see show caves — those aren't so rough."
And the Tried and True Cavers thought that was enough.

Then one day, it seems, while the spelunkers so weary
Were standing in line for show cave so dreary
Wishing for caves a bit wilder to see
A stranger zipped up in a Hummer bright green!

"My friends" he announced, in a voice clear and keen
"My name is Fred the Outdoorsman Extreme!
I've heard of your troubles, I've heard you've no Gear!
But I can fix that — the solution's right here!"

And quickly Fred the Outdoorsman Extreme
Unloaded the top of his Hummer so green.
He set up some tables, and put up a sign
He spread out his wares, in a pleasing design

"What you need," said Fred, with a wave of his hand
"Is Gear, so like Cavers, you can go underland."

"I've cave maps," he said, "with locations to boot
And helmets and headlamps and backpacks for loot
There are boots you can wear, and coveralls, too
With this Gear you'll look just like a Caver so True."

And the Spelunkers, with MasterCards waving about
Descended on Fred, and bought him right out.
They snatched up his stuff with obvious glee
And went to find caves to explore now for free.

"Oh no!" groaned the Cavers, with obvious pain.
"Those spelunkers have Gear now — our efforts are vain!
They'll mess up our caves and spoil all our fun!
They'll think they're like us now — oh what can be done?"

Then up came old Fred with a very sly wink
And said "Things are not really so bad as you think.

The spelunkers have gear now, that much is true.
But come with me, friends, do you know what I'll do?
I'll make you AGAIN the TRUE Cavers you are.
The answer is here, in the back of my car."

And then wily Fred the Outdoorsman Extreme
Opened the back of his Hummer so green.

"See here is NEW gear that is better than theirs
The hottest, the latest, the best you can wear.
It's all quite high-tech, and of stylish design.
All you need is some plastic — Visa is fine."

So Fred opened boxes and bags and a bin
And set out such Gear as made their heads spin

There were Petzls and Swaygos, Princeton-Tec, MREs,
Harnesses, wetsuits, 5-watt LEDS
Ascenders and 'biners, rappel racks and cables
Bat bumper stickers and more on his tables

The Cavers, of course, could not be denied
And they bought up his stuff in the blink of an eye

The Spelunkers, of course, now became quite irate
The Gear that they had was now quite out of date
And of course, old Fred with a welcoming grin
Invited them back to his shop once again

Well, from then on, as you've probably guessed
Things really got into a horrible mess
All the rest of that day in those karst-lands so weary
The Spelunkers and Cavers kept getting more Gear-y

They kept spending money; they kept buying stuff
Whatever they had now just wasn't enough

Then when all of their cards were maxed out at last
Good old Fred drove away, and he laughed as he passed.
"These speleo-nuts, they never will learn!
As long as they're fighting, they've money to burn!"

But old Fred was quite wrong, I'm quite happy to say
All the cavers got really quite smart on that day

That day they decided that Cavers are Cavers
And no kind of Caver is Best or the Braver
It's not about Gear, or how much you spend
But caring for caves and each another in the end
As each helps the other as best as he might
They all work together to do what is right

That day they decided there was room all around
For all to explore and conserve underground.



TRINITY CAVERNS III-KARDBOARD KARST

by Troy J. Simpson

Over the past several years I have been involved with my church's ministry to children from 1st to 5th grades. Every few years I am asked to pull together a special evening where cave exploration is the main activity. I would love to take the kids on a wild cave trip, but this isn't an option. So I have come up with the next best thing. Bring a cave to them!

Our story actually begins in high school. My youth group devised a haunted house for Halloween. We gathered cardboard boxes and constructed a tunnel system. We created trapdoors, hidden passages, and dead-ends. It was a hit!

Ten years later, I was collaborating on an alternative to traditional Halloween celebrations. Almost immediately, I thought back to the tunnel. This time we would use the idea of it being a cave.

That original cave took shape. It totaled 65 feet of passage and had unique squeeze passages, formation rooms, and dead-ends. It took four days to complete, and it was determined this undertaking would not be done every year!

Fast-forward to October 2004, it was time to bring back the cave. I had constructed one in 2001 with nearly 80 people going through 103 feet of passage. I felt it was going to be a tough one to top. Learning from the past, I had fine-tuned the process and could make a run at pushing the limits of cardboard karst.

The construction of "Trinity Caverns III" started with gathering cardboard two weeks before the opening. The boxes came in all sizes from computer paper boxes to those the size of refrigerators.

With the boxes set, we had two other obstacles to overcome, space and time. We managed to commandeer the a Sunday School room. It was only 20' x 40', but with a little creativity it could work.

The window of construction now was the looming thought. We would be able to get in only after the Sunday evening youth ministries. That gave us just three evenings to put this all together.

Sunday evening construction began. I was able to get Nathan Marcier to lend be a hand, along with a couple of high school students. We started with a

formation room in one of the corners. This was shrouded with black tarps and filled with stalagmites and flowstones I created using plaster of paris and spray paint.

From this point we had crawl passages winding through out the room. The main passages ranged from 2'-3' in height with a 12 inch squeeze built in one section. Construction of these passages was simple enough. We opened the boxes and used packing tape to secure them together. One person would tape the outside of the boxes, while someone else would be in the passage taping the flaps together, creating an overlapping effect. I found this to be a very solid construction technique that would prove itself later on.

The goal was to use the maximum amount of the space as possible, so we made the passages wind back and forth. I was amazed at how much passage could squeeze into one space. We did not have a set layout, we just eyeballed where passage could go and made it work.

By Tuesday, we had the cave put together. It was time to put in aesthetics. We created "soda straw" passages by placing nearly 200 straws in the ceilings. We used bendy straws cut at various lengths, poked them through the cardboard, and taped the bent ends to the outside roofs. We also replaced lights so that there would be just the minimal amount of light shown in the cave.

We were able to keep people from seeing the cave from the outside by extending one of the passages into another room. The cave would only be the one they seen from inside. Another challenge was a unique exit. We constructed a stair-step exit that simulated crawling out of a sinkhole. This required creative uses of furniture and cardboard.

I spent Tuesday night surveying the cave. I took compass and tape, mapping every inch of the cave. The advantage was most passages were uniform, and straight shots were easier to do from station to station. All told, there were 136 feet passage, with a vertical extent of 4 feet. While drawing up the map, various passages were named by the builders.

We used 121 boxes, 4 rolls of tape, 2 bags of straws, and 4 boxes of plaster.

Wednesday evening started with Nathan and I walking into the darkened sanctuary, headlamps on, fully geared up for caving. After brief introductions, we showed a PowerPoint presentation about safe caving and some photos of our caving trips.

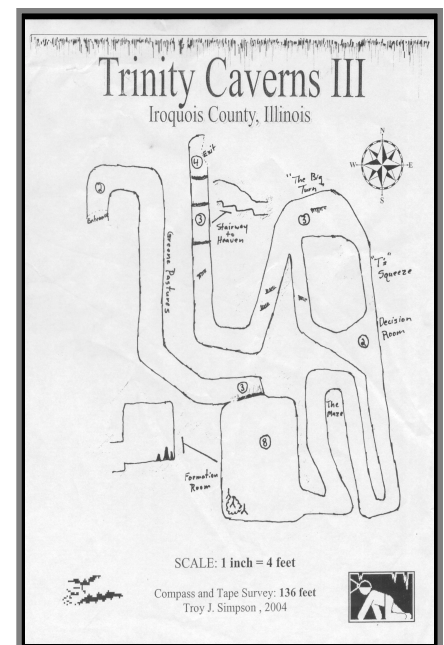
The initial stop for each group was the "Visitors' Center." Here Nathan or I talked about the cave and the gear we used. Each group was sent with two of our junior high student "guides" into the cave.

The tours lasted about 10 minutes for each group, and we continued to rotate throughout the evening. I had also printed out "I Made It Through" cards and maps for each kid when they exited.

By the time the evening was done, we had over 125 children and adults explore Trinity Caverns III. I went through the cave last to check out what damage had been done. Believe it or not, the cave was still very much intact, and all the kids heeded our directions to "crawl softly."

It was a bittersweet moment when we took the caverns down. We had put over thirty-five man-hours into construction and watched it demolished in thirty minutes.

I'm not sure when Trinity Caverns IV will be discovered, but I'm sure it will be a bit more exciting!



RETURN TO SULLIVAN

by Laura Lexander

After seeing a hearse driving to work Friday morning with the license plate "Deep 6" and chipping one of my teeth at a Chinese Buffet, I had to wonder what this second foray in Sullivan Cave would present us. Our group was Ralph Sawyer, Jeffery Gosnell, Marc Tiritilli, Bill Morrow, John Ernst, his son Cory, Cory's friend John Mayberry, and me.

Entering Sullivan for the second time was the first time I had been in the same cave more than once. After the initial drop in, we spotted several salamanders. Ralph also pointed out to me some lovely big spiders.

I had been in Sullivan, yet never down the Backbreaker. Want to get a good thigh and butt workout? Try walking slumped over for about 1300 feet. It was not that difficult of a trek for me, granted I am only 5'5." So my taller companions had a bit more fun. We let the two boys study the map at intervals to see if they could lead us down the right path, to teach them how to read the map.

From the Backbreaker we went through a little bit of crawling and entered the Mountain Room. Who knew there were large rooms in Sullivan? (*I am being facetious. Those familiar with my previous report know we never entered anything large the last time.*) We poked around for a bit in the Mountain Room, with Marc and Ralph taking photographs. A few of us slithered into a small tunnel at the highest part of the room, nosing our way around a bit. There were lots of

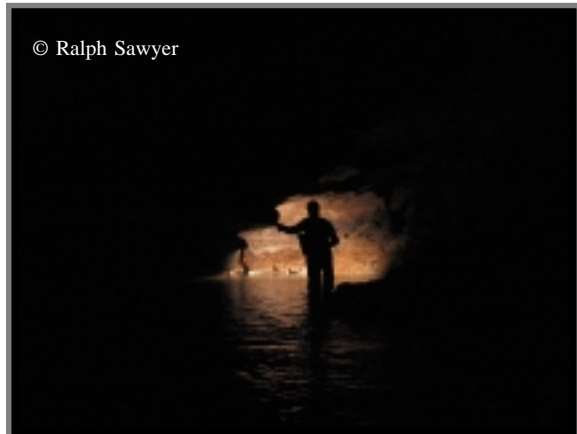
formations, though many were damaged by human hands. The crawl way looked like it might have gone on, but we regrouped, dropped down to the stream passage on the western part of the Mountain Room and proceeded into the 52 degree water of the Sullivan River.

The first time the cold seeped into my boots it made me cringe. It was painful until I became accustomed to it. We sloshed through the steam several hundred feet trying to spot crayfish and cave fish. The crayfish seemed more plentiful.

The water level did not reach much higher than three feet, occasionally wading through deeper parts. It was always possible to keep to the shallower edges of the passage, a quite beautiful and expansive tunnel.

When we reached the Spiral Room, Ralph and Marc took more shots. The room is one-of-a-kind, with a flat ceiling and breakdown sinking into a circular bowl.

We scoured the room to no avail for the Speed Hollow exit. We pushed crawl ways and scrutinized the map. A couple of times we thought we had it. Along the way, Jeffery nicknamed himself the "monkey." A post-surgery Bill would spot hard leads and direct Jeffery into them. "Sure, give the monkey a peanut,



© Ralph Sawyer

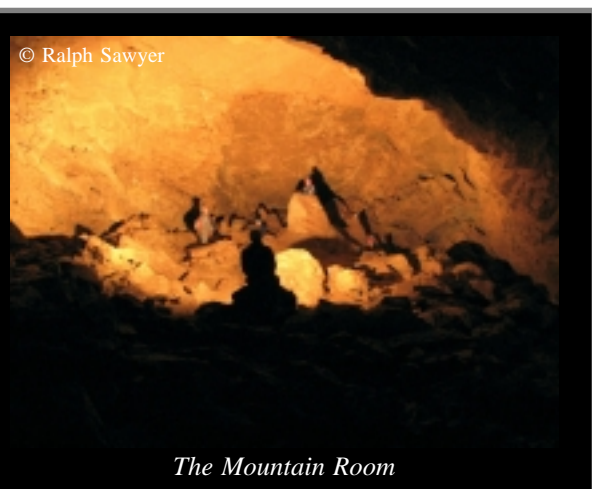
and send him in the hole," he would joke.

After one crack proved fruitless I followed Jeffery back to another possibility. I decided to be the monkey for this one, to see if I could do it. We were crawling along large breakdown at the southern end of the room. The hole I pushed was probably the smallest I have done yet. It took me a bit of time to gather up the courage to slither down. I could easily slide my legs in, but my hips were a different story. Rock was kissing hip bone, and I was not sure I could fit. A few things raced through my mind at this point. I did not want to be the cause of a cave rescue, nor did I want to give up needlessly. I was also not optimistic it would go anywhere. After a few more minutes of deliberation and Jeffery telling me not to push myself too hard, I made my decision. 1-2-3, and I let my body slide down. I had to manoeuvre, but once I was committed it was not that hard. It is



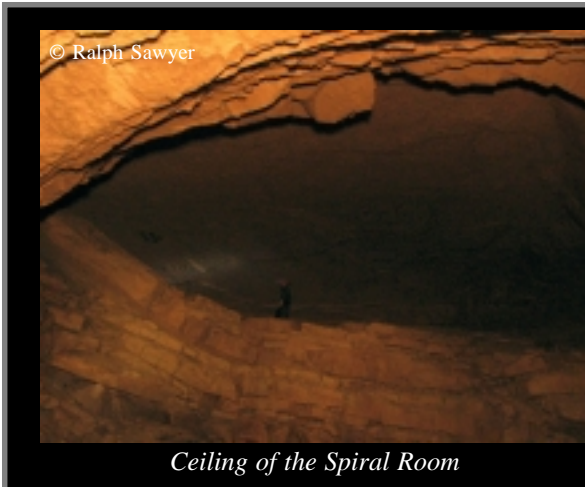
© Bill Morrow

Laura in Deep

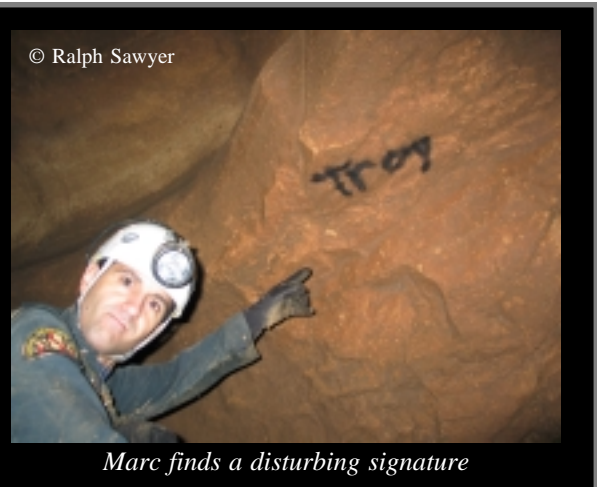


© Ralph Sawyer

The Mountain Room



Ceiling of the Spiral Room



Marc finds a disturbing signature

amazing what one can fit through when you simply try. I was giddy with delight and crawled on. It did not matter that this lead also proved itself a dead one, I was happy with myself.

Marc dropped down into the same passage further east than me and we crawled back out the way I had come in, letting Jeffery know it was another no-go. At this point Bill called us all back to the water's edge because it was time to go.

When we got back to the hole leading up into the Mountain Room we encountered Bambi and Keith Dunlap, the property managers of Sullivan Cave, along with Joe and Julie Myer. We chatted several minutes, which included learning about another route into the Mountain Room. We decided to give it a go.

After climbing back into the Mountain Room, Jeffery and I talked about the climbs we were willing to do in caves that we would adamantly refuse in the full light of the sun. Caving lends to a sort of immediacy that other parts of life cannot. In a cave you are forced to take things one step at a time because the whole picture is blanketed in darkness. Perhaps that helps play a role in being able to let go of everyday concerns and live in the moment while caving.

Instead of heading west into the Backbreaker we headed north and completed the Bone Crawl and Baker's Nitch. As we turned southward we entered the Helictite Passage. Per Bambi's directions we found a slot in the floor and poked our way through.

From here it took a bit of exploring. Bill, John, and the boys continued

northeast to the "Grand Canyon" before realizing that could not be the correct way. Bill found the right little crevice, though not without persistent searching from Marc and Ralph. Bill, John, and the boys headed into the tunnel first.

Meanwhile, I spotted another group of folks in the passage above us. I followed their light beams over to the slot we had dropped in, and called up. This time the encounter was with Northern Indiana Grotto member Bob Silverman. I tried to explain we were looking for a route into the Mountain Room and he, concerned that we were lost, made sure we knew the regular way. Ralph assured him we were good.

Into the tunnel we went, this one being quite a tight squeeze, but not overly hindering. We popped out in the northeastern corner of the Mountain Room.

Bill, John, and the boys looped back around to retrieve their packs and we converged in the passage leading to the Backbreaker.

As I waited for Ralph and Marc at the final traverse to the waterfall room, I took several moments to gaze longingly down the curving passage of the Endless Crevice, Sullivan pulling at my heart stronger than ever before.

This trip was completely different than the last one, yet knowing those other pathways were there left me feeling almost stunned. It's hard to describe how passionate I feel about

Sullivan now. It is a fierce loyalty that might seem odd to some people, especially non-cavers. It's akin to how a sea captain feels for his ship or how the military feels towards our country.

And that is not to mention the friends you are with at the time. It had been about eight and a half years since I last saw Marc and it was wonderful to meet back up with him. I know we will not let such time pass again. I believe my friendship with Ralph and Jeffery grew stronger on this trip as well and meeting Bill was also a plus! It was also great to be there with new people, showing them Sullivan for the first time.

We are definitely planning a Sullivan Rise trip and on that one we will most likely try to connect the Flood Route with the Mud Room via the Connection Spring. For now, I must find contentment with the world above ground. Caving is good for the soul so I think I'll be able to handle it until the next journey.





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