

# THE NEAR NORMAL NEWS



*THE NEAR NORMAL NEWS* is published by the:

Near Normal Grotto #363,  
P.O. Box 813  
Normal, IL 61761.

Subscription price is \$10/year or free with the purchase of a grotto membership (also \$10/year). Issues are published in January, March, May, July, September, and November.

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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](mailto: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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<http://www.eiu.edu/~physics/nngrotto/nng.htm>

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:** "Behind the Curtains"  
Trenton Carley in Flowstone Cave (Cave  
River Valley) Photo by Troy J. Simpson

# Near Normal Grotto Business

## MEETING MINUTES JULY 8, 2005

Call to order at 7:14pm. Present: Marc Tiritilli, Ralph Sawyer, Troy J. Simpson, Don & Billie Kerouac, Larry Bird, John Schirle, Jason Kern, Jeffery Gosnell, Julie Angel, Beth Reinke, Adam Stanford, Doug Gregory, Leon & Lucas Hedding, Ambra Deering, Dave & Justin Carson.

Secretary Report—Troy read the May minutes. Approved. No minutes for the June meeting (no quorum).

Treasurer Report—Dave reported \$340.84 in treasury. Approved.

### Trip Reports

-Marc attended NCRC training in Alabama, working the instructor qualification group. They worked in Hugh's Cave, which Marc described as a Buckner's equivalent and Sycamore Cave with an impressive waterfall. He also dropped Vahalla Pit and Neversink during some recreational time.

-Dave and the Carson clan visited Missouri's Meramec S.P. They explored Fisher Cave, Lone Hill Onyx, Sheep Cave, and saw Mushroom Cave's gated entrance.

-Jeffery described a trip to Sullivan and Doghill-Donohue Caves.

- John described a trip to Illinois Caverns and shared a story about a few illegal cavers getting busted at IC.

-Don attended a CRF trip in Kentucky. They surveyed an "unknown" cave which was accessed by a series of extension ladders tied together. Don also "starred" in a cave safety video as a "walking wounded."

-Ralph attended the IKC work day at Robinson Ladder Cave.

-Larry explored the Lost Dutchman's mine area in Arizona. He mentioned a band of rattlesnakes he encountered.

### Old Business

- Marc introduced the discussion of having a grotto repository (maps, locations, contacts, etc...). The major concern Jeffery raised was who to give the information to. Ralph echoed this thought. Ambra felt information needs to be "handed down" through the generations of cavers. Discussion ensued about the whether to have a central location and who determines whom gets what. Don mentioned this issue can become thorny and bad-blood can occur. Membership felt one of the strengths of the NNG is its openness and the need for a central location of information was not necessary. The discussion was dropped.

- John addressed the website update. Lucas suggested a Yahoo Groups with a moderators as a way to getting information out. The Exec. Board will look at creating an e-mail that goes directly to the board as a point of contact. Currently Troy is the contact on the webpage. The committee will have a storyboard of potential updates to the website at the August meeting.

### New Business

-Vertical practice & meeting at Great Oaks Camp on Sunday, August 14. Motion, Ralph. Second Jason. Motion passed.

-Annual Grotto Picnic at the Clark Falls Farm on Saturday/Sunday, September 10, 11. Saturday is vertical work. Sunday will be the picnic. Motion Troy. Second Dave. Motion passed.

### Upcoming Trips

- Shaft/Buddha/CRV Trip; July 15-17

- Illinois Caverns July 22

- Annual NNG Picnic @ Clark Falls Farm, Sept. 10-11

- Next Meeting is Sunday August 14, noon -? Vertical Practice, Great Oaks Camp

Meeting Adjourned at 8:52 pm

Respectfully submitted by Troy J. Simpson  
Secretary, Near Normal Grotto

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## MEETING MINUTES AUGUST 14, 2005

Call to order at 3:08pm. Present: Marc Tiritilli, Ralph Sawyer, Troy J. Simpson, Roy Becker, Harvey Bluedorn, Laurie Bluedorn, Dewayne Fender & family, Beth Reinke, Nathaniel Bluedorn, Adam Stanford, Cory Wheeler, John Mayberry, John Ernst, Johannah Bluedorn, Hans Bluedorn, Ava Bluedorn, Jason Stanford, John Shirle, Ben Little, Ryan Brown, & Jeffery Gosnell.

Introductions by the membership and guests. *Secr. Note: Jeffery Gosnell, in vertical practice tradition, attended the meeting on rope attempting to complete a changeover.*

Secretary Report—Troy read the July minutes. Approved.

Treasurer's Report—Troy reported treasury was status quo according to Dave Carson. Approved.

### Trip Reports

-Tabled (to be shared during the vertical practice).

### Old Business

-Marc will look into setting up a Near Normal Grotto "Yahoo Group" to assist in getting the word out about activities.

-The September meeting will be Sunday, September 11 at 2:00pm at Clark Falls Farm in Utica, IL. This will coincide with the Annual Near Normal Grotto Picnic at the same location.

- NNG picnic will be a two day affair with vertical practice occurring all day on Saturday, September 10. Primitive camping is available at The Falls. The picnic is around lunchtime on Sunday, with bring your own picnic lunch. There will be a variety of activities available on Sunday including vertical practice on 110' cliffs, hiking, and Utica Cement Mine trip.

### New Business

- No new business was discussed.

### Upcoming Events

- TAG this Fall!!

- Annual NNG Picnic @ Clark Falls Farm, Sept. 10-11

- Next Meeting is Sunday September 11, 2:00pm Clark Falls Farm, Utica, IL

Meeting Adjourned at 3:22 pm

Respectfully submitted by,

Troy J. Simpson

Secretary, Near Normal Grotto



# A CAVE RIVER VALLEY SAMPLING

by Troy J. Simpson

I have had the opportunity to explore the caves at Cave River Valley for nearly 8 years. Brett Bennett introduced me to Endless and Bear Den Caves on my first trip with grotto members. Since that time, I have made several trips to CRV, slowly, but surely checking off the list of caves located in this karst-rich area. My personal goal is to explore them all, and until this summer only one had eluded my piercing headlamp, Flowstone Cave.



In July, I joined several members of the grotto in a multiple cave trip to south-central Indiana. Ralph Sawyer and Jeffery Gosnell were spearheading a trip to Shaft Cave, while I was helping lead a group to Cave River Valley. My group consisted of Nathan Marcier, Dave Carson, Trenton Carley, John Schirle, and Bill Joe Averitt (one of Jeffery's interns). Our schedule was ambitious, as we wanted to visit Lamplighter's and River Cave.

We arrived at CRV, and headed to Lamplighter's first. It is amazing how difficult it can be to find a cave entrance when there is excessive foliage. "Where is the entrance?" I kept asking myself. Only a year ago, Nathan and I had reached the entrance in minutes (It was also December and the entrance stuck out like a sore thumb.).

We searched for a few minutes, and as we worked our way around the area we stumbled upon a cave entrance I had not seen before. It was a picturesque entrance with a bubbling stream emitting from the void. The only thought I had was, "This might just be Flowstone!"

We decided to head inside. The walking passage wound its way through the scalloping potholes in the floor. It did not take long for us to reach the namesake room of this cave. The passage opened up to a 30' high passage with elaborate

flowstone pouring out of the ceiling. I would compare it to formations that I had seen in Frozen Waterfall, just across the way, except this one was still active.

After a few quick photos, we made our way on. The cave continued on as we went through places such as "Fat Man's Curse," which had us diving between narrow draperies, and getting a little wet in the "Baptismal Pool." After a few more turns in the now-crawling passage, Trenton pushed ahead and encountered the tight squeeze of the "Jaws of Death." He decided it would be saved for another day. We still had other caves ahead of us and the day was still young.

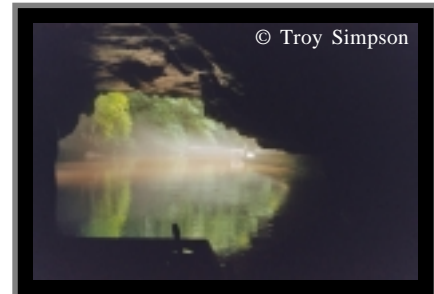
Our next stop was Lamplighter's. We searched up and down the stream bed, hunting for the elusive entrance. I kept close watch of the clock, and 15 minutes later I heard the excited voices that the entrance had been found.

We made our way into the climb-down entrance and the opening crawlway. Once in the cave, we made the decision to head to the Randall Entrance. It was easy going until we reached the "Loop Passage." We started off by crawling to the left and negotiating a series of dragon's teeth filled crawl passage. The passage wound and emerged above a rather impressive crevice one really does not want to venture into.

After passing the crevice, there was a tight crawlway to the left and out the Randall Entrance. The passage was not just any crawlway, though. Not only was it a belly crawl, but there was a slight slope trending right that we had to keep from wedging ourselves into. This was my biggest challenge, as members of my group (I will not mention Dave's name!) encouraged me to push on. I wiggled and squirmed my way about 50', and decided



I had enough. Unfortunately, there was no turning around, and I had to back my way out. After several minutes of reversing my course and preventing myself from sliding into the wedge, I made it out. I was beat. We took a little break and made our way back towards the entrance. We took a quick gander at the "Big Room" and then headed back to the cars for a refreshing meal.



After some eats, we made our way up to the entrance of River Cave, with two inflated rafts. To give a little background on this cave, it has a rather decent flowing stream exiting the entrance and cascading over a retaining wall that once helped provide water to the valley. The approximately 8' wide stream entrance requires a raft to negotiate the deep stream passage (at times 20' deep). Once in, there are two portages required during the 400' paddle, until finally reaching a point where you can explore the cave on foot. With six people in our group, it would be necessary to ferry two or three people in to the first portage, go back to the entrance, get the remaining people, and do a ferrying system until the 400' stream passage was completed.

Nathan and I embarked, with John and Bill Joe in the next raft. As we got in, I heard some gurgling coming from the other raft, a leak. I made an executive decision and felt we should abort this trip and call it a day.

We cleaned up and my little Lamplighter's escapade started to take its toll on me, more than I had originally realized. In fact, it would prevent me from visiting Buddha the next day. Not exactly how I wanted this little trip to end, but at least I did get to finally notch Flowstone Cave off my CRV list.



# WHERE'S MARC

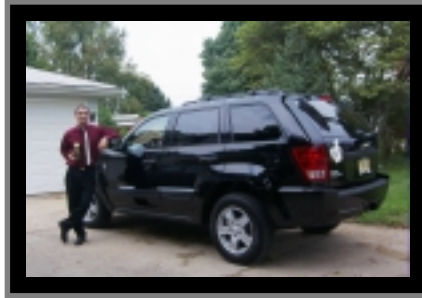
by Marc Tiritilli, President



Marc has been getting ready for the new school year. Tremont High School, where I teach, starts early, so I have spent the better part of August preparing for the new semester. While putting my room together, I noticed that my cave pictures haven't changed much over the last couple of years. I moved Jeffery's *Immersion Emersion* to the front of the room (it's still my favorite), but the remaining four-by-sixes and NSS covers are looking a bit tired. Bottom line, I need to get some new and/or more exciting cave shots for my room!

There are a few reasons why this need exists. First, I have been shooting more video lately. I am constantly striving to convey to my students and others the feeling of being in a cave. Since I lack the talent that others have for composing pictures, I rely on tape to capture a series of events in the hopes that at least something useful will appear. I guess the difference is similar to a marksman who needs only the one shot to accomplish his goal versus the 'spray and pray' method of an inexperienced machine-gunner. Second, When I am taking

pictures, there is an inherent problem—I am taking the picture! My students comment regularly that they do not see me in the presentation. I guess they are more interested if there is a familiar point of reference. Thirdly, I just bought a digital camera, so I am no longer



generating hard copies. This works well for slide shows, but not so well for bulletin boards (no, I don't have a photo printer). Finally, even when I bring the camera along and remember to get into the picture, I still have issues with illumination. The Brinkmann Dual Xenon floodlight has been helping in recent months (\$24 at Lowes, 45/80 minutes of rechargeable burn time on one or two

floodlights), but I still need more practice. Ralph has been great in helping me collect some of the data.

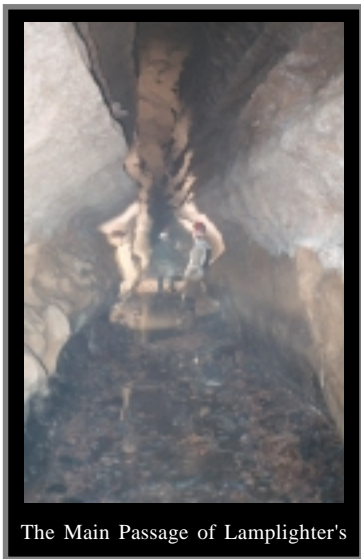
The bottom line—I need to do more caving! I had a very active June with NCRC, but the trips had packed agendas and/or tight schedules and were not very conducive to photography. I am looking forward to the fall with upcoming trips back to Indiana and TAG. Dates and destinations are still flexible, so get your suggestions in soon.

In a related note, now that school is back in session, my students have graciously nominated me to receive the Golden Apple award for area teachers from WEEK-25. One of the perks is that I get to drive a brand new Jeep Cherokee Laredo for an entire month! If we get these trips planned for September, we can get there in style! So please, for the sake of my students, let's go caving. There's plenty of cargo room for the extra cameras and I promise to smile if you take my picture...

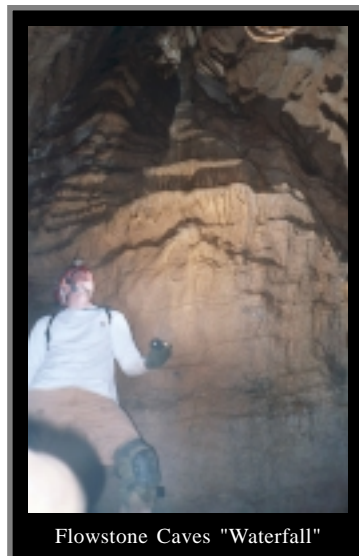
—Marc



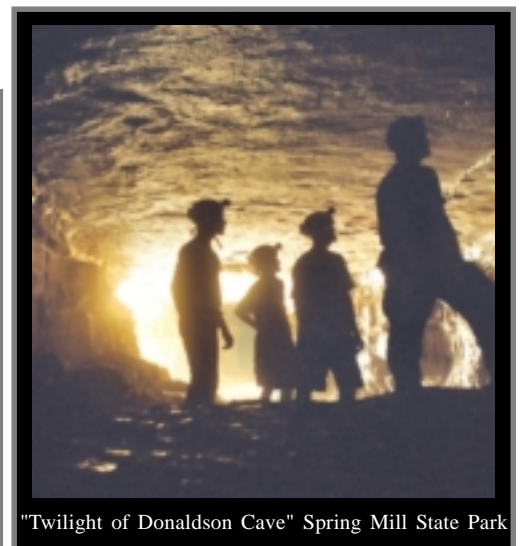
PHOTOS BY TROY SIMPSON



The Main Passage of Lamplighter's



Flowstone Caves "Waterfall"



"Twilight of Donaldson Cave" Spring Mill State Park

# 2005 CAVE CAPERS

by Laura Lexander

My first Cave Capers was great! I drove down with Jack Wood and Greg Schmit on Friday, and we set up camp by Bill English and Patty Ruback. She brought several people down for their first Cave Capers as well. Besides some fun caving, I was also privileged to meet many wonderful people during this event. A few were Sam Frushour (one of the Sullivan Cave "gods"), Mike Taylor (who wrote *Cave Passages and Dark Life*), and Keith Dunlap and Bob Vandeventer from IKC. I also met back up with Bill Baus who I had met at the Memorial Day CRF Expedition.

After talking with Bill the night we drove in, I signed up for a trip to Limekiln Hollow Cave. There were ten others on the trip as well. Only Bill had been to the cave before so we hoped we would not have too much trouble finding it, and we did not. Of course, having ten people spread out over the ridge did not hurt either! About 25' from the entrance there was a 9' pit where two cavers rigged a hand line. At the bottom there were two passages to take. One led to the entrance and the other further into the cave.

After some map deliberation, we figured out we needed to squeeze down a tiny hole that had been enlarged by the cave surveyors about 15' into the next passage. It was a little unnerving because

you are blind to any footholds until you are well into the crack. On this next level we looked around for Paradise Passage, a 2-3' crawl with a sandy floor. We found it leading off to the north, where it ended with nice flowstone, but we had difficulty finding it going the other direction.

Bill Baus and I went down a gnarly crawlway thinking that it might connect to Paradise Crawl. None of the others followed. We crawled and slithered up and down and around rocks for what ended up being two hours. We finally decided to turn around after studying the map more. When we got back to the room where the others were, most of them had left for another cave.

Before Bill and I headed out, he took another quick look around and, amazingly, spotted the other lead to Paradise Crawl! It was right between the gnarly crawlway and the way to the exit. We scrambled down it for a short time. I also dropped into a small crevice where I had to take off my helmet because it would not fit. That was cool to see how small a space I could squeeze through – too bad we didn't get any photos of it. The passage dropped into a small room with a few feet of water. There was a small lead off it, but it did not seem to go. So I did not push it, especially with folks waiting for us.

Three people waited for us, including Jesse Bahr and Linda Mark from the Near Normal Grotto. They helped us up the pit and out into the hot, humid daylight. Jerry Bailey was outside the cave waiting. We were in the cave for only about 5 hours.

That evening was a lot of fun. After the banquet, we listened to Mark Minton about deep caving in Oaxaca, Mexico and the search for the world's deepest cave. Then Terminal Syphons played for several hours. In lieu of dancing, which I adamantly refuse to do, I played with several chairs and objects to see what I could squeeze through. That was fun and Bob Vandeventer even got a few photos of me doing it.

The next day Jack Wood, Greg Schmit, Dave Everton, and I surveyed a small cave west of Paoli called Midland Trail Cave. Ty Spatta joined us later in the afternoon. We only surveyed for a few hours, but they think the whole cave probably will not end up being more than 300'. Dave and I saw one blindfish in a small pool of water. At first Jack did not believe us, but Dave successfully photographed it so we had proof! After cleaning up in a creek near the cave that was probably dirtier than the cave itself, we took off for the long drive home.

## CAVE CAPER PHOTOS



Laura's Helmet in Limekiln Hollow  
Photo by Laura Lexander

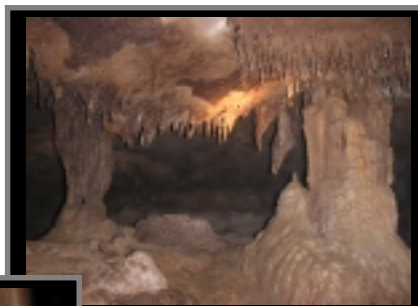


Photo by Linda Mark



Laura's fascination with chair squeezes.  
Photo by Bob Vandeventer

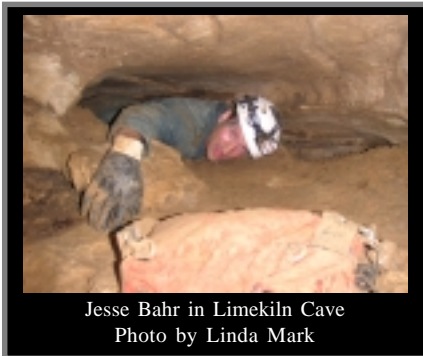


Jesse Bahr in private cave.  
Photo by Linda Mark

# CAVE CAPERS 2005

by Jesse Bahr

On August 5-7 Linda Mark and Jesse Bahr went to Cave Capers in Marengo Indiana. This year the Crawford County Fairground was used as the home site. We arrived Friday night, registered and quickly looked at the available led-trip caves. There were a few of each type (horizontal, vertical). Maybe we were spoiled in last years by more available caves, but then we recognized that many caves were on public land in the Harrison Crawford State Forest (and the locations were provided). The event was well organized, vendor participation was low. The camping was great, lots of real estate.



We signed up for Limekiln Hollow cave for Saturday. The only other members we knew were Bill Bausman and Laura Alexander. The cave is located in the Harrison Crawford State Forest. Our car/truck caravan stopped first at the Forestry office to fill out the caving permit. Then across the road and onto the fire road. A handy map from the office aided in navigation. We stashed the vehicles and then off to trail walking/bushwhacking to find the cave. Hiking in heat with cave clothes...bring on the sweat. It took a while as the trip leader did not know the location of the cave, and we were trying to find it by the split up and search method.

The entrance was a hole amongst rocks in a ravine. There was supposed to be a pit nearby, but we could not find it. So the consensus was this was a cave and thus it would be explored. The entrance hallway was short and the passage was an angled-down sloping canyon. At the bottom was a ledge and a 10-15 foot drop. A webbing hand-line was rigged, but down-climbing (and up-climbing) was certainly possible. The

bottom of the drop was a nice standing room and had a low side passage leading to another climbable dome. This dome had a few formations. The other passage leading out was a belly crawl with enough of a canyon below to allow a drop knee and thus easier navigating. The crawl ended with space to swing your feet and slide down another down sloping canyon. There was only really one place one's body would fit, but plenty of ledges on the way down made it sort of a fun challenge. Several in the group either chose not to descend or could not fit (trip leader). One could say that moving the small number of people in our group thru these obstacles was not a representative example of efficiency. Once down in the main part of the cave it broke up into a long hands and knees crawl and then a winding sub-canyon passage. Although the canyon had height, it was rare that one could walk for very long—not too many formations, but fun moving your body. After the group explored the shorter lead, several (Laura and Bill) headed down the next section.

The group was spread out and several of them wanted a more interesting cave. It was explained that since the trip leader was "out" it became a self-led trip, and we were all on our own. Most of the group decided to exit and head to Mauck's Cave. Linda and I searched a few of the passages but mainly stayed by the underlying canyon. It was interesting to hear Bill and Laura's voices and how it sounded as if they were close, then far, then close, etc. We were finally able to make contact, and they indicated they were on their way out. We reversed our route and exited again to the land of sunshine and summer heat. On the way out we stopped at Leavenworth to catch some sights of the 'old' town as well as some elevated views of the Ohio River.

That night the banquet was good, as was the presentation. This one involved the exploration of deep caves in Mexico. The presentation elaborated on several long term expeditions supported by National Geographic to locate and survey the World's deepest cave. It was fascinating. The passage was not stream

passage, but rather waterfall. The rigging required made our gear stash seem ridiculously small. We didn't hang around for the music talents of the Terminal Siphons, but as we drifted asleep we could faintly hear them.

One of the nice things about cave conventions is the ability to network with fellow cavers. We met a few friends Saturday morning, and they described a cave outside of Paoli. It was on private property and permission was needed. We got the description and headed out on the quest. We caught the owner just as he was leaving the house. We had to assure him that it was only us going in the cave and our intentions were pictures. He agreed and was very willing to show the cave, describe the history, and offered us facilities on the property. We were overjoyed to get access to the cave. We did have back-up plans as far as cave exploration for Sunday, but this cave was ranked high our list.

The cave is stream passage, at times we were up to our waist, but you could see the cave floods and debris was high on the walls. Soda straws were everywhere and as long as 1.5 feet. The bacon was serrated and the flowstone very alive. The formations were some of the best we have ever seen, but the treat was dozens of white crayfish and blind fish. We even found a sculpin. We had to watch where we stepped and always had to be aware of the head room. We brought a 1.5 million candle power lamp, and it really lit things well for pictures. The cave had several entrances, so we chose a length that allowed a through trip with a short walk back to the car. The stream passage washed our clothes and gear, nice clean caving.



# CAVE CAPERS '05

by John Schirle

*Cave (n)* A hole in the ground

*Caper (n)* 1. A usually spiny Mediterranean shrub having white to pale lilac flowers and dehiscent fruits with red-dish pulp. 2. A pickled flower bud of this plant, used as a pungent condiment in sauces, relishes, and various other dishes. 3. A playful leap or hop. 4. A ludicrous or grotesque act done for fun and amusement, or frivolous escapade or prank. 5. A crime (especially a robbery)

Friday afternoon, August 5 found me driving into the Crawford County 4-H Fairgrounds, just south of Marengo, Indiana, for the 52<sup>nd</sup> annual Cave Capers. This venue for Capers seemed to be much more spacious, though not quite as scenic, as Delaney Park near Salem, where I had been several years ago. Scenic didn't matter; space was important, because it meant people who actually wanted to sleep at night (like me) could camp relatively far from those who apparently feel caving is more fun with a hangover and no sleep.



Formations in Marengo  
Photo by John Schirle

The Central Indiana Grotto did a tremendous job of organizing the event, including vendors, food, cave trips, entertainment, and an excellent guide book with cave descriptions and maps. When I arrived, I quickly registered and received a wrist band and parking tag. They also had free copies of past CIG newsletters, which I latched onto.

In the registration tent they had posted about 12-15 cave trips for the next day with various levels of difficulty. Most had a limit on the number who could sign up. Sign ups sheets were to be posted at 8

p.m., to allow for most people to get there and have equal opportunity to sign up.

Additionally, the guide book contained descriptions and maps of numerous area caves where people could just go on their own. Some required IKC permits, others INDR permits, both of which were available to fill out.

The book understandably did not contain specific directions to the caves. Instead, posted in the registration tent were large topo maps of the area, with the various cave locations marked. That was not too helpful to me, since I do not read topo maps well. I don't know if there would be an easier and yet still secure way to provide cave directions to Capers participants.

Also at Capers were various vendors of stuff, including Howie of Howie's Harnesses. Having caved for the past 8 years or so with an old Illinois Power hard hat, I finally decided to look respectable and get a Petzl Ecrin Roc helmet from Howie. And since there was a 10% discount if you bought a helmet & light together, well, how could I not add a helmet-mountable Petzel Duo?

I decided to forgo the evening entertainment, and instead spent my time reading my free copies of the CIG newsletter and attaching my new headlamp to my new helmet, with nothing more than my trusty Swiss Army knife. (I considered rubbing mud on my new helmet so I would not be embarrassed the next day.)

On Saturday I chose to go on one of the led trips. This was to the "New Discovery" section of Marengo Cave, a section where they do not do tours or currently even take "wild" caving tours. The leader was Gordon Smith, the owner of Marengo Cave and co-manager of the IDNR's Wyandotte Caverns concession.

The nine of us went first through the Crystal Palace tour section of Marengo, to the "Blowing Bat Crawl." This entrance to the rest of the cave was just discovered in 1992. The crawl was not real long, but one of those twisty ones where you have to take your time. From there we emerged into stream passage, some walking, some duck-walking, a little crawling. Within no

time, though, we were in huge borehole passage, punctuated with periodic massive mountains of breakdown that we had to clamber over.

We eventually reached the point where Gordon said the breakdown got worse, as the cave intersected a sinkhole that had collapsed on the surface and ultimately blocked any further progress. The trip out was mostly backtracking, though we exited through a different (and very muddy) crawlway to a different entrance they have dug into this section of the cave. (Thanks to the mud, my new helmet ended up looking appropriately broken-in.)



Marengo Crew  
Photo by John Schirle

Saturday evening the CIG put on a great BBQ for everyone. I hung out with Laura Alexander and other Windy City folk. (Illinois cavers were decidedly the minority.) Afterward they gave away door prizes (I didn't win any), and had a fascinating program. The speaker was Mark Minton, part of a team of US cavers pushing for the world deep cave record in Mexico. The pictures alone of the kinds of rigging required to safely navigate a cave like this were enough to make me shiver.

Sunday I took advantage of more freebies. Marengo and Wyandotte Caves were offering all their regular tours free to Capers participants, so I did one of each, and headed for home.



Read more about the Central  
Indiana Grotto's Cave Capers  
on-line at  
[www.cavecapers.com](http://www.cavecapers.com)



# DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL

by Jason Kern

**"Are you really taking me caving tomorrow?! Are we going to leave before anybody gets up? Are we going to drive all day and go camping too?"**

"Whoa! That's enough questions little girl. We are not leaving early, not driving all day, and not camping. We are going to have fun." I hope.

First destination: Maquoketa Caves State Park! We drove into the park at 11:00, and it was crowded. I parked in the second to the last spot over the Upper Dancehall Cave with a car right behind me taking the last spot and more vehicles on their way.

We geared up ready to go and Katelyn could hardly contain herself.

**"Where are they? Do we have to walk very far?"**

"Nope, we are over one right now but we do have to walk to some. There are caves all over this park! Are you ready?"

**"YES! YES! YES!"**

The excitement of a child. So far, it's fun.

Our first cave is Dancehall Cave, and she thought it was all right. **"It's big"** was all she said, at first. Then she asked **"Is that a cave...in...a cave?"**

**There's a lot of people wanting to go in there. Can we go to another one?"**

"We have to get out of this big one first but we can go find other caves." So, on we go.

After exiting Dancehall Cave we went on to see the natural bridge. She hardly looked up.

On the other side she thought she saw a cave so we did some climbing. I was impressed at this 7-year-old's agility! Maybe she is older than I think. Maybe she is not dad's little girl anymore. Katelyn and I climbed to her destination (she has the Kern climbing gene!), found it was a very little cave, but still enjoyed the climb.

After climbing down, a family of four

came up to do the same thing, but the closer they came the more doubtful they became, except for "dad." The rest of the family were begging him to come down before he even made it up six feet. I was just smiling to myself and thinking "You sissies." Those two children had at least 3 years on my girl. My next thought was, *"I hope today isn't learning about pride coming before the fall."* On we go.

Outside Dancehall is a small cave, a belly-crawl, climb-up, climb-down, get-wet kind of cave, and Katelyn loved it! Even the part when both our lights ran out of batteries! And what'dya know, we both had back-ups. Methinks I have a caver with me. We went all



the way in, doubled back a little, and went down a vertical! My daughter did a vertical shaft!! I might have been a little proud but I was much more excited than proud. Out we go without incident.

Since our batteries were no good we went back to the truck for lunch and a new set of batteries. Man, this place is packed! I even see a Jeep Wrangler with Illinois plates and the word CAVERGRL. Awesome.

**"Two or three more caves and we have to go."**

**"Maybe 4."** Says she.....

**"Hooked!"** thinks me.

We find Rainy Day Cave and Ice Cave are nice, but it is obvious that she is looking for more. Another caver

said Wye Cave is worth checking out **"Last cave, Kate."**

Down we go! Yes, this is a cave! Breakdown, belly crawling, dry mud (thank you), and tight squeezes, and my girl is having a blast! So am I but...there...is...a...really...tight...crawl. Do I dare even try to get my firstborn down there? Oh, the temptation! But I just can't. At least not this time! O.K. This cave defeated us so back we go.

Going up the breakdown we both notice an opening on the opposite side of the entrance. We crawl to a spot that we can't get our helmet through but if we take off our helmet we can make it and we do. It keeps getting a little tighter and tighter. I think we can keep going but Katelyn finally gives in. I'm ready to throw in the towel myself. The cave beat us twice.

We come out of the cave and on the trail back she says, **"Can we go to two more?"**

I just laugh and say, **"One more and that's it."** We play around and call it a day.

Second destination. It is after 5:00. Must be something about caving or

central Illinois because Kate picks out Taco John's for supper. Mexican Food! Who would'a thunk?

Third destination: We are in the driveway just after 9:00. Before going to sleep Katelyn asks, **"Can we go next week?"**

A few weeks later I ask her what she liked about the caving trip. This is what the 7 year old enjoyed: dark, climbing, crawling, mud, water, and watching people go by and they not noticing us. Me too!

She's my little girl.



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