

THE NEAR NORMAL NEWS



THE NEAR NORMAL NEWS is published by the:

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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 gosnell@greatoakscamp.org. Submissions on disk may be mailed to 1384 County Road 900N, Lacon, IL 61540.

Photographic submissions should generally be in JPEG format. Query the editor if your submission uses a different program. Photographs should list the cave, general location, 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®, plain text, or incorporated directly into an e-mail message. If you are uncomfortable with your writing ability, put together a basic account of the trip—ignoring 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.

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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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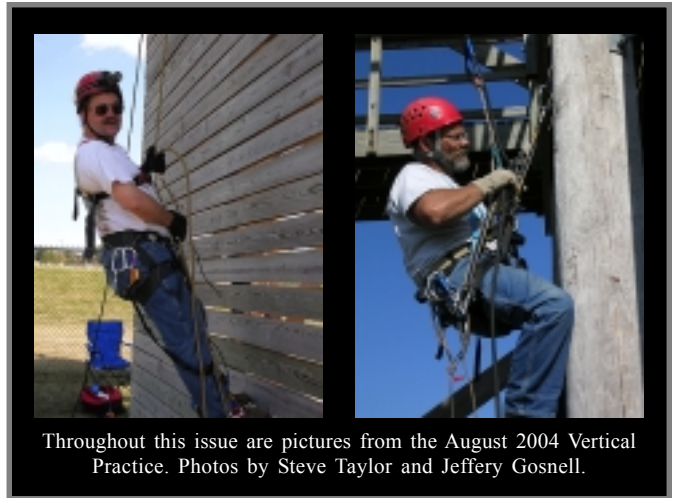
On The Cover: 1st Time Cavers check their map in Sullivan's Cave, IN. Photo by Ralph Sawyer.

This Page: A silhouetted caver explores Sullivan Cave. Photo by Ralph Sawyer.

Near Normal Grotto Business

July meeting minutes were not available at time of printing. No quorum was present in August.

No regular meeting in September. Instead, join us at our annual picnic (See back page for details.).



Throughout this issue are pictures from the August 2004 Vertical Practice. Photos by Steve Taylor and Jeffery Gosnell.

RAMBLINGS OF A TROGLODYTE

by Jeffery Gosnell



FOLLOW-UP ON COLD WATER CAVE

Who knew anyone actually read "Ramblings!" That being said, I must apologize for the controversy I started in my last article about Cold Water Cave, which seems to have spilled over into the pages the latest *NSS NEWS* (August '04, p. 237).

Several cavers contacted me to tell me that I unfairly portrayed the cave as inaccessible, without attempting to contact the landowners or others attached to the cave's management. To be fair to them, I should clarify that I did not actively pursue entrance to the cave beyond the NSS discussion board posts mentioned in my article. I had believed, based on that discussion, that further pursuit would be pointless. I would also clarify that the term "good ol' boy" was a term used by our caving host, and while I used the word "alleged" before each usage, I should have given more consideration to its offensive usage.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BAT WARNING

In July, I received a letter from the Illinois Department of Public Health sent to all Campground and Recreational Area Owners. The subject line read "*Re: Bat Exclusion—Rabies Prevention.*"

The letter begins with a short statement that bats are important because they eat bugs, but then goes into a long account of the danger of bats to humans. Several of the "facts" used in the letter are contestable. The letter mentions a rabies rate of 5-10% in tested Illinois bats. However, the department's own website lists only a 3.5% rate [<http://www.idph.state.il.us/pdf/rabies2002.pdf>].

Nowhere is it mentioned that many bats are protected, and I fear the letter may cause camp managers to exterminate bat colonies.

I have contacted Bat Conservation International with a copy of the letter. Hopefully, their knowledge and credentials will cause the IDPH to tone down its alarmist position. I have also



sent emails to all Illinois camp directors I have personal contact with, pointing them to websites and statistics that questions several of the IDPH's statements.

OUR REPUTATION PRECEDES US!

After reading the article "*Creatures of the Night*" (reprinted on page 8), I contacted the author for permission to reprint and ask where the survey took place. The author was hesitant to mention the location, and referred my request to the IDNR. Following is the response I received:

"I see no problem with letting the Near Normal Grotto know that the survey was performed in Blackball Mine in LaSalle County. The NNG has been instrumental in helping the DNR survey and manage this site and we greatly appreciate your/their assistance. Thank you.

Joseph A. Kath

*Terrestrial Endangered Species Project Manager
IDNR-Division of Wildlife Resources"*

I have received several similar emails from Larry Matiz concerning the grotto's past involvement with the Mammoth Cave camps. Such correspondence makes me proud to be a part of this grotto.

IN THIS "SUPERSIZED" ISSUE:

- *Where's Marc?*
- *Beth Reinke takes us through Illinois Caverns.*
- *Ralph Sawyer tells of New Cavers Visiting Sullivan Cave,*
- *Larry Matiz reports on Mammoth's Restoration Camp.*
- *"Creatures of the Night" discusses Illinois' bats.*
- *Troy J. Simpson provides two underground reports.*
- *John Schirle reports on a trip to Missouri.*

WHERE'S MARC?

by Marc Tiritilli

Hi gang. It's been a busy summer for me and I suspect it has been for you as well. Busy for me unfortunately has not always meant caving. While fulfilling a lifelong dream of being on tour with a band, I missed the NCRC nationals. Being based out of Nashville, I planned to sample some of Tennessee's many underground thrills, but was outmaneuvered by a breakdown-prone tour bus. Oh well...

The little bit of caving I have done this summer involved rescue training in both Wisconsin and Minnesota. Our northern neighbors in the Central Region are quite

enthusiastic about their caving. The first event was an Orientation to Cave Rescue class that included a mock rescue in Pop's Cave. We even got a write-up in the local paper. The next trip was to the MSS Cornfeed in southeast Minnesota. Lots of great people up there with many gracious and experienced trip leaders. I was treated to a wetsuit tour of Coldwater Cave.

The best part of this summer for me has been the increased communication participation between area grottos. The recent training session at the tower brought in people from all over the state. I have always said that one of my favorite parts of caving is its social aspect so I am very much looking forward to this year's picnic.

There is still a lot of life left in this year. So it is time to start thinking about fall trips. I have got a new foot ascender to break in. So a TAG trip is definitely on for the late October/early November window. It is also about time some of us headed down to Missouri to make sure the caves have not gotten lost or something... Please e-mail me (and each other) with suggestions.

See you in Utica on the 19th.

--Marc

marc_tiritilli@hotmail.com



Illinois Caverns, Aug 21, 2004

by Beth Reinke

Champaign was well represented in Illinois Caverns on Saturday August 21. Julie, Jim and Michael Angel and I piled into the Angel's mini-van and headed south on I-57 shortly after 6am. After obligatory stops at the Columbus McDonald's and the Waterloo bakery (promised food stops were part of the trip draw for the Angel men), we arrived at Illinois Caverns around 10:30. A few other groups, including Scouts from Champaign, joined us in the cave, but we were well enough spaced that we did not adversely impact each other's enjoyment of the cave.

Our stroll underground got a bit of a

slow start when stepping off the last rung of the entrance ladder I exclaimed "I can't see my feet!" At first I thought it might be a ramification of my new-ish "progressive" lens glasses, but I soon realized that recent forays into my crawlspace to locate joists and move cable and phone wires had run the batteries down on my headlamp. After a quick battery swap we were on our way.

Julie and I both noticed that the water level was much lower than we are used to seeing in IL Caverns. I was breaking in some new (at least to caving) boots and stayed pretty dry until a ways past the bottom of the aluminum ladder. At the "T" room we took the brief side trip to the Lunchroom barrier, since Jim hadn't seen it before. Then we headed down the main passage in search of the Dragon. Because

of our leisurely start, casual pace and some "couldn't-pass-em-up" photo ops, we did not quite make it to our destination before it was time to retrace our steps. After our brief visit with the attendant, we figured we would not make any points by strolling out after the 2:30 deadline.

Once again comfortable in our travel clothes and dry socks, Julie drove us over near Foglepole cave and showed us a few other areas she has explored on her frequent research trips with the Illinois State Geological Survey. We stopped at a local Waterloo bar & grill (JV's) for dinner before heading back to Champaign and rolled into town around 8pm.

Not a real strenuous trip, but just what we all needed - a break from a seemingly endless floor remodeling project for me; a last-minute fling for Julie before returning to ISU for the fall semester; a first really wild cave trip for Jim; and some good eats for Michael!

NEW CAVERS VISIT SULLIVAN CAVE

by Ralph Sawyer

The worst of the thunderstorm had just passed as Jeffery Gosnell, six of his camp counselors and I pitched our tents a few yards from the Sullivan Cave entrance. Thunder continued to rumble as we climbed into our sleeping bags and set our alarms for six o'clock. A couple of Jeffery's staff had visited Buckner's Cave a few weeks earlier; for the other four this was their first time caving.

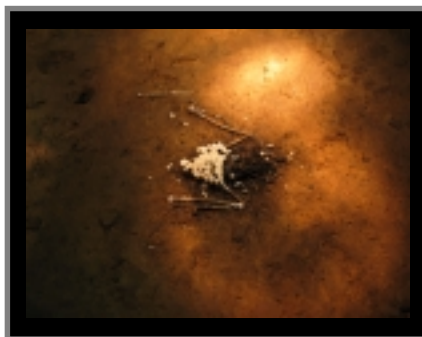


At eight o'clock the next morning, we dropped down through the gated entrance hole, descended a couple levels, crept through a low passage, then ascended into The Backbreaker. At this point we handed over the map reading duties to the new cavers. They proceeded through The Backbreaker, pausing at each notable feature to consult the map. "Could this little hole in the floor be Chip's Hole?" "This should be Second Dome, but is there a First Dome?" "Yes there is, but the map is fuzzy and we blew through it without noticing it." "This has to be The T – the passage branches right and left."

At The T we encouraged the new cavers to find The Mountain Room, warning them that the entry passage, a low crawlway, was difficult to spot. I told them that there was a chunk of concrete with a piece of iron rod protruding from it on the floor near the crawlway. They proceeded carefully, watching for clues. As it happened, the group stopped to check the map right next to crawlway. They studied the map very carefully. Just as they were ready to move on, one caver spotted the rebar, and then the crawlway.

"This is too small to go anywhere," one said. Another, who had visited Buckner's, described the tight entrance to the crawlway there. In we went.

Caving with experienced cavers is always a pleasure for me. It is reassuring; I probably will learn something; I am confident they feel the same way I do about caving; and it is likely I will make it to a part of the cave I have not seen before. Caving with newer cavers holds a different pleasure. On this trip to Sullivan Cave, I witnessed the new cavers' initial awe at the size of the Mountain Room. I enjoyed their discovery of Miller's Thumb, a small fish in the Sculpin family that inhabits the quiet pools in the stream below the Mountain Room, and of the crayfish that hang out in the potholes farther downstream. I shared their appreciation of the effort that must have been expended in digging Armstrong's Folly, and the obsession of the diggers. I was as excited as they were to examine the wire-thin bones of a bat on the cave floor, although in the back of my mind I hoped that the bat had not been dislodged by a caver during hibernation. And I definitely shared their trepidation as we hiked into waist-deep 58F water.



Remember what I said about the pleasure of caving with the experienced cavers – that I might see a part of the cave I had not seen before? The waist-deep water was as far as I had ever been in this section of Sullivan Cave. On previous trips I had assumed the water got even deeper here, and I had turned



around. The new cavers, with encouragement and guidance from Jeffery, pushed through, and the water became shallower. I was in a part of Sullivan Cave I had never seen before.

Now Jeffery and I were studying the map intently – is this rock the solitary piece of breakdown shown on the map? If so, the Spiral Room should be just around the corner! At this point one of our new cavers said she was reaching her halfway point. She was cold and tired and wondering how much energy it was going to take to get back. Jeffery asked for and got five more minutes, during which he found the Spiral Room, and I accidentally went sideways into the water, submerging everything but my right shoulder. So now I was ready to turn around too.



Despite my drenching, this was a very satisfying trip. With Sullivan there is always unfinished business. On our last trip through the flood route into the Beyond the Beyond, we came within less than a mile from the end of our map and the rise of the Sullivan River. This trip ended just short of the exit through Speed Hollow Spring. Plenty of incentive remains for return trips to Sullivan Cave.

MAMMOTH CAVE RESTORATION CAMP

AUGUST 2004

by Larry Matiz NSS #22563

Mammoth Cave Restoration Camp started off with our usual speech from Camp Director Roy Vanhoozer on Sunday evening. Roy lined us out on the jobs he we would be doing for camp that week, if the weather cooperated.

Monday morning, we were planning on attacking the bridge at the Echo River level on the Historic Entrance side of the cave. As we came across the ferry from Maple Springs Research Center, we noticed the water level in Green River had risen nearly 8' over night. Roy went down to Echo River and found it had also risen. We could not work on the bridge that day. We ended up removing sacks of wood from previous camps up the tower to the Historic Entrance. This took us all morning and most of the early afternoon. We then carpoled to Flint Ridge and the Floyd Collins House. We filled up a dump truck with 25 moldy mattresses and then took a walk down to the entrance of Crystal Cave. Some of our new people were really elated to see Floyd's house and also to see the entrance to Crystal Cave.



Tuesday, the water was down, but the bridge area was still too muddy. So we elected to walk 3 miles to the Carmichael Entrance—past the Snowball Dining Room—to Cascade Hall. The river was low enough to see the handrails where cavers made the 1972 connection between Flint and Mammoth Ridge. We returned to the Silliman/El Ghor Passage to remove remaining light fixtures, ballasts, and wire.



Years earlier we had removed the boats from the Echo River boat ride up this same passage. We called it the "El Ghor Death March" back then. We ate lunch at the Snowball Dining room. At the end of the day we hiked back to the Carmichael Entrance and up those many steps to the surface. Over all, I would say we walked between 10 and 12 miles.

Wednesday, we headed for Echo River. The river had dropped below the bridge, and we began to dig it out (We are to the point that the bridge is no longer over water, but in sand, which has to be shoveled to get to the wood.). After the wood was removed, we carried it about 1,300' to Vanderbilt Hall, cut it into smaller pieces, and placed it into bags and grass sacks, weighing around 25 lbs. each.



Thursday, we returned to the bridge. Later in the afternoon we went to the bottom of Bottomless Pit via a side

passage. We picked up debris from the bottom of the pit, a small diamond ring, pocket change and a few other things. We even had a tour group go over the top of us while we were down there. By Thursday evening we had removed all of our tools from the river area and passed up over 300 bags of wood to the top of the fire tower in Little Bat Ave. for removal.

Friday, we brought the remaining bags from the top of the fire tower to the steps at the Historic Entrance. From there, we passed all 639 bags of creosote coated wood up the steps to a dump truck (3 loads) and a dumpster to be taken to a land fill. We removed over 8 tons of wood (60' of bridge). Hopefully we will be able to remove the last 125' of bridge by the end of the next summer camp (It would be nice to see some of you old timers of Near Normal Grotto back for the removal of the last piece of bridge, what a celebration that will be.).



Saturday, we had some really nice educational trips offered from the Park. If you haven't attended one of our camps you are missing something, this is history in the making down at Mammoth Cave.

We had 38 volunteers during the week. We had great food all week, a program planned for us every night, and a little caving in the evening. We hit Adwell Cave and Dogwood Cave on the Flint Ridge side in Hamilton Valley. Thanks to Stan Sides and the CRF for allowing us to enter those caves.

Our next camp is November 6-7 2004. Next year the weekend camps are the first weekends in March, May and November. The week camp will be the first full week in August. If you are interested in restoration camp you can contact Roy Vanhoozer at RVanhoo@aol.com. We also have our website www.mcnprestation.com.

CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

Biologists work throughout the year to track bats.

By Kathy Andrews

Reprinted courtesy of *Outdoor Illinois* October 2003

The voices, enveloped in velvety blackness, rhythmically called out numbers. "Pip, 2 long-ear, pip, pip, 18, 4, 35, 1, 1, 20, big brown, pip, 8, long-ear, 18, 2 Indiana."

Moving through the dark, rubble-strewn corridor, the three-person team shone head lamps upward, scanning rock walls. Occasionally, a heavy-beamed light flashed on critters huddled in a tight mass.

It was the biennial winter bat inventory and the coded count was used to identify the five species of bats present. Biologists called out the numbers of northern long-eared, big brown, eastern pipistrelle and Indiana bats seen. Simply calling out a number signaled little brown bats, the most common species wintering in Illinois.

Headlights glowed from the next room as a second team made their way through the adjacent passage. Eavesdropping on their inventory, I heard "Pip, pip, pip—hurray!" A little subterranean humor.

"Come over here, you won't believe this," Joe Kath, endangered species program manager with the Department of Natural Resources, called out to his team. "Big brown bats don't normally form large clusters but there must be 75 bats packed into this ledge. This is so cool!"

It was cool in more ways than one. The bats were in the twilight zone of the cave, close enough to the entrance for some light to penetrate. Using a thermometer that resembled a radar gun, Kath quickly took readings of the air and rock temperatures. The big brown bats were nestled against rock that was 39 degrees Fahrenheit, only four degrees above the air temperature outside the cave.

Kath explained that the presence of different species of bats was almost predictable based on the temperatures of the surrounding air, rock and water.

"Big brown bats are able to withstand much cooler temperatures than the other bats, and are usually the species seen closest to the entrance," Kath said. "Indiana bats, a state- and federally-

endangered species (first discovered in Indiana in 1928), are much more temperature specific and are found deeper in the cave, where temperatures are more steady."

The biologists moved through the cave quickly, minimizing the effect their presence had on the bats.

"The bats are in deep hibernation," explained Kath. "Not only do our headlamps and voices disturb them, but the heat from our bodies will warm the cave. It can take bats up to 10 hours to awaken, so we'll be long gone when some of these bats stir. In doing that, they will burn several hours or even days worth of fat reserves, energy they need to get through a long winter."

FAST FORWARD TO A WARM, STAR-FILLED JUNE EVENING.

Kath had put up a mist net to capture bats as part of an educational program at Douglas Hart Nature Center in Mattoon. Curious children, their parents and grandparents sat quietly, anxious for the news the sampling was successful and they'd see a bat in the hand.

The fine-meshed net, when strung across typical bat flight areas such as wooded stream corridors and forest openings, is designed to be virtually undetectable by a bat's echolocation. Earlier in the evening, Kath had strung the net between two 20-foot-high poles and set up a pulley system to permit him to quickly raise and lower the net.

Shortly after the crowd settled around the campfire for marshmallows and stories, Kath called out from his position. He had a bat.

Flying with their wings extended, bats quickly fold their wings when hitting the net, becoming entangled in the mesh. Scientists like Kath must respond quickly, but gently, to remove these fragile-winged mammals.

"I have to wear gloves when handling

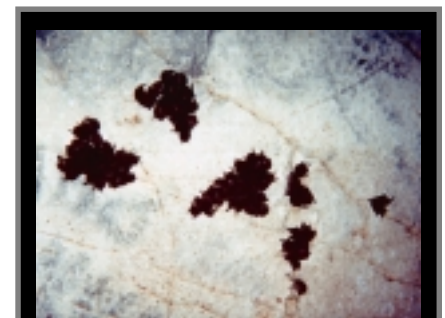
the bats as they are much easier to work with if they bite down on something," Kath remarked as he unwrapped the bat from the web-like snare. "Better a glove than my finger!"

Kath circled the campfire, allowing participants to softly run a finger down the bat's back, while he regaled them with stories about this species, the red bat.

Understanding bat population levels and habitats takes a lot of work—from full days spent in an ice-cold cave to sticky summer nights battling mosquitoes on the bank of a stream. So why do biologists work so hard and risk disturbing these creatures?

"The information we are gathering about bats helps us understand their role in the ecosystem," Kath said. "We now know that without some level of intervention, the Indiana bat may become extinct—not endangered, extinct—within the next decade.

"So many people are misinformed about the importance of bats," Kath continued. "Bats control insects, pollinate plants and disperse seeds. They have been used in the development of vaccines and navigational aids for the blind, and have contributed to studies on aging and space biology. They certainly don't deserve the negative rap foisted on them."



Nyeman Cave Photo by Jeffery Gosnell



Endless Cave Photo by Jeffery Gosnell

400 FEET BELOW THE SURFACE *by Troy J. Simpson*

This past June I managed to convince my wife to attend a conference with me. This was not any normal school related conference though. This one would take us into the coal country of Southern Illinois and places where few have the opportunity to venture.

It all started at an information booth at the annual state science convention. I got to talking with the presenter, and, before I knew it, I was signing up for a three day conference about coal production. June finally came, and Amy and I made our way to the Rend Lake Conference Center. We joined about 70 other participants in a series of lecture discussions the first day. Presentations ranged from the geology of coal to coal mining to mine reclamation. This was all just the preliminaries for the real reason for us to attend the conference. Day two meant visits to active coal mines!

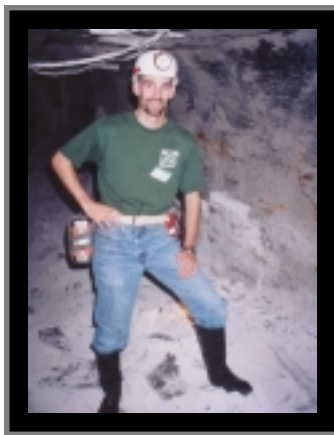
6:30 A.M. rolled around, and we were divided up into three groups. Our day consisted of visits to a coal burning power plant, active surface mine, and active subsurface mine. Amy and I were placed in different groups, which meant we saw different mines. My trip took me to Liberty Mine outside of Harrisburg.

We pulled up to the main office with the conveyor shaft looming tall overhead. The shift manager guided us into the conference room and explained the history of the mine and how much of the local area had mines underneath. I guess one cannot really fathom that two-thirds of Southern Illinois has mine shafts and tunnels criss-crossing underneath the surface. After the history lesson, we went



through a mandatory safety class. We were introduced to the equipment needed underground and what to do in case of an emergency. We received little state-issued certificates that said we had been safety trained and headed to the equipment room to gear up.

Now, I am used to gearing up for caving trips, so I was thinking, "*Helmet, headlamp, 3-sources of light, etc...*" Well there were some similarities. I was issued a miner's helmet and a fully charged "wheat" headlamp. We were not issued additional sources of light, but being the conscience caver that I am, I had brought



my mini-mag light, just in case. The next item we were issued was one thing I am not used to carrying into a cave. Each of us had a 5-pound box that contained our emergency respiration unit. This was the main reason for our safety training. Yes, we went over emergency escape routes, but the thought that there was even a chance we might need this piece of apparatus sent chills down several participants' spines.

We marched towards the incline shaft. This particular mine had an inclined rail car sent down by cable towards the working face of the mine. We hopped into the car and rode down the 15 degree angled slope towards the bottom. The height of the passage was 8', but it seemed a lot shorter. We click-clacked our way for a quarter mile and finally stopped 400' below the surface. We climbed out



of the car and watched it being pulled back up to the surface.

The main passage looked like the basement of an old house, the incandescent light giving an antique glow. Our guide led us away from the incline car passage towards the workings of the mine. The overhead lights ended and our headlamps became our primary sources of light. The passages took on a ghostly appearance from the lime dust that coated the walls. Passages splintered off in all directions. Our guide informed us the mine extends over 5 miles from the entrance to its furthest reaches. This is not even one of the largest mines. Some in Illinois extend over 15 miles.

We walked by the ever-moving conveyor belt that sends coal to the surface. It was hard to imagine how much material is mined and sent on its way each day. I paused for a minute to get a few photos and then explored some of the inactive passages. Despite the lime coating, I could still see the 4' coal seam bounded by shale layers.

I looked up at the ceiling, almost hoping to see soda straws delicately hanging. Instead, I see between the bolts that anchor the roof one of the largest calamites plant fossils I have ever seen. Oh, how I wish I had my geology hammer! Here I was in the middle of what was once an ancient swamp. I have been on the surface and seen such fossils, but this was different. It was hard to put into words how I felt. I have never really thought about physically being in the middle of this geologic record. Shortly, the guide came up to me and asked me what I had spotted, and I naturally pointed out my find. I was taken aback when he began asking questions about these plants that once ruled the carboniferous time period. I figured he would know all

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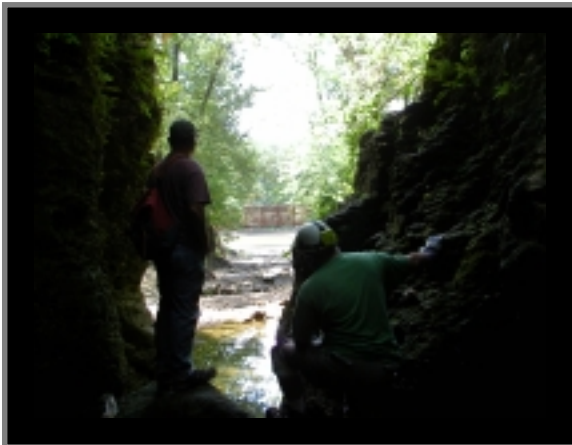
A RETURN TO THE PAST

by Troy J. Simpson

I recently had the opportunity to visit my old stomping grounds at the University of Illinois. One thing I always look forward to is my stop at the Natural History Building and the Department of Geology. Here is where the geology library is located, and, even though my wife and others might think it strange, I enjoy perusing the vast inventory of geologic references. I decided to see what they had for cave related items, and I stumbled across a bound book that had newsletters from the defunct Mid-Illinois Grotto. What caught my attention was an issue from 1968 that featured 4 caves known as the Bourbonnais Caves. As I began reading, it hit me square in the face. I know these caves and the best part is, they are practically in my backyard!

When I got home, I began to plan a trip back to the Bourbonnais Caves. Of course, I was more familiar with their modern name, *Indian Caves*. I had been there several times before, but, to be honest, was unimpressed by the lengths of the caves. The passages ranged from a few feet to twenty-five feet. This time I had other things in mind. I wanted to see about resurveying the caves and be a bit more detailed with the maps.

The beginning of July rolled around, and Nathan Marcier and I were getting antsy about getting underground. It did not take much convincing to get him to agree to go on a little trip to Bourbonnais.



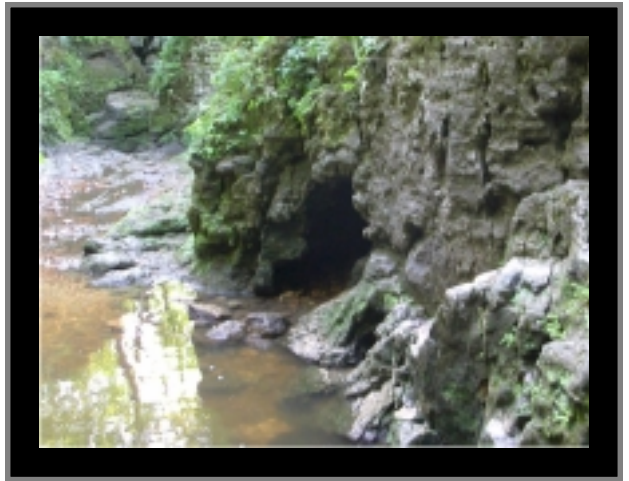
We arrived at Perry Farm and grabbed our helmets and lights. The caves are located along the Kankakee River, and in order to reach them, we had a one mile hike along the paved bike path. Before long we were looking into the mouth of a limestone canyon with a stream carving its way through it. Immediately to the south of the canyon was the entrance to Cave #1. We were about to go caving!



Nathan took lead and entered Cave #1. The entrance was walkable, with crawl passages shooting off it. We noticed several spiders, and washed in debris was evident from the last bout of rain. We took our standard pictures and eagerly headed up the canyon to find the other 3 caves.

Cave #2 is located just inside the canyon on the south cliff face. The cave is joint controlled, and has three entrances. We could negotiate two of the entrances. The third seemed a bit of a squeeze.

Up the creek canyon, we spotted Cave #3. This cave is located about 15 feet above stream level and is high and dry. We scrambled up to the entrance, which is a short crawlway. The crawlway then reaches a "T" junction, with short passages on either side. The cave was quite roomy for



Central Illinois standards. Nathan and I could both fit inside and even stand in it. We did not notice any formations, but, unfortunately, we did take notice of the pile of beer bottles in the corner. My mind immediately thought ahead to a clean-up project. We did what we could about gathering up a few things and then headed on up in search of Cave #4.

The canyon opened up a bit, and I remembered a cave entrance up on the cliff. Nathan had noticed an entrance at stream level around the bend. With Nathan at stream level and me above, we discovered that the two entrances connect! Cave #4 was actually a "through" cave! We were not really prepared to get wet and muddy. We had other things on our mind, like finding other caves. So we passed on squeezing through the tight connecting passage.

I had noticed a dark hole up on the cliff opposite of Cave #4. It was about 10' up from stream level and bit tricky to get to. I managed to reach the entrance and realized it was a small crawlway that I could just get enough of me into to count it as a cave. I guess we can count five caves on the day. Of course, Mid-Illinois Grotto only listed four. So that means we can survey and add one to the list!

For those who think the story has ended, think again. At the July meeting I talked with Don Kerouac who lives in the Kankakee area about our trip. I also showed him a copy of the MIG newsletter. I agreed to get a copy as soon as possible, and we would meet up sometime and go caving there. Shortly after, there was Don's voice on my answering machine.

Continued On Page 11

MY ROCK 'N ROLL TRIP TO MISSOURI

by John Schirle

I just got back from what I have decided to label my “rock ‘n’ roll trip” to central Missouri—so called for a couple of reasons.

First, as I usually do when traveling by myself, I found a “classic” (read: old, antique, ancient) rock ‘n’ roll station, rolled down the windows, and turned it up loud. Second, I rolled through a lot of miles in three days, and my goal was to see a lot of rocks.

I started with the oldest rocks on the planet, the igneous. First stop was Elephant Rocks State Park. WOW! There I found awesome, huge, massive granite outcroppings and boulders—very cool to scramble over, around, and through. Next stop was Johnson’s Shut-Ins State Park. Again, the featured rocks were volcanic in origin, this time rhyolite. Here the Black River carves its way through the almost unerodable rock, forming miniature channels, canyons, pools and falls. It’s beautiful, and *great fun* to play in.

But this is a grotto newsletter, and you’re probably wondering when I’m going to get to sedimentary rocks and particularly a cave (And yes, you geology people, I *know* caves are also found in igneous and metamorphic rocks.). So my last stop was Onondaga Cave State Park.

Wait ... Onondaga ... isn’t that a (gasp!) SHOW CAVE?! Yes, I must confess, I’m a caver who *still* loves to hit show caves whenever I can. My fascination with caves began with the show caves we visited on family vacations, and I still get excited when I see one of those signs along the

highway—“*Greatest Cave in the World! Always Cool Underground!*” And there are times I want to see a cave without having to don full body armor, crawl through mud, and immerse myself in 56° water. I don’t mind shelling out a few dollars for the privilege of visiting a cave that I would not otherwise get to see and helping those who own the cave manage it. And there are some caves that are such treasures that they deserve to be made accessible to the general public in a safe, conscientious and environmentally-responsible way. To me, Onondaga is such a cave.

I almost had a personal tour. Being the middle of the week and late summer, there was only one other person waiting for a tour. So he, I, and the guide set off.

I was very impressed with how the guide tailored her tour to our interests. My fellow tourist was not a caver, but he had obviously been to a lot of show caves and was very knowledgeable. Our guide was a caver herself, well-trained and passionate about caves and conservation. Once she saw that we did not need the standard explanations, she focused her presentation on the history of the cave, and on the efforts of the Missouri DNR to conserve the cave while still making it accessible to the public.

Onondaga was for many years a privately-owned show cave, and suffered many of the depredations common to such – broken formations, altered water-flow patterns (to make it “prettier”), coins tossed into rimstone pools, even the introduction of white koi that were

presented as “blind cave catfish”.

In the 1970s, however, the cave was given to the state by the owner upon his death. Since then the MoDNR has been doing what seems to be a great job restoring and managing it. They have removed unnatural additions, installed a moisture-retaining door at the entrance, bat-gated another large, natural entrance, limited lighting to the essential, limited tour routes and the tour season for the sake of the fauna, and on and on. Since Onondaga was already developed for public access, the MoDNR seems committed to not only using it for displaying a sample of Missouri’s underground wonders, but also educating the public about cave conservation.

Onondaga is a beautiful cave. It lies a relatively short distance beneath the surface, and the ground above must be very porous. Almost everywhere it is *filled* with formations, most of them growing. The flowstone King’s Canopy and Queen’s Canopy are both breathtaking and enormous. And neither could really be appreciated with just a caver’s headlamp. It takes the full show cave lighting to see how stunning they are.

So I had a great trip. Kudos to the MoDNR for doing a tremendous job, and to my guide (whose name I’ve forgotten – sorry, I wasn’t taking notes) for a great tour. When I asked if she got bored, doing the same thing over and over, she replied no, that the cave was always a fascinating place to be. She loved leading tours, and loved the chance to teach people about something she found important.

If you’re ever passing through Missouri on I-44, with family members who cannot quite understand your obsession with crawling through holes in the ground, take them to Onondaga. They may just decide you’re not so crazy after all.





400 Feet Below continued

about them, because he was exposed to them day in and day out. He just never had the opportunity to take the time to look.

The guide took me and couple others over to another passage that had some of the wall exposed. I looked at him and half-jokingly said, "I guess cave laws

don't apply here. Can I take piece back with me?" He looked at me puzzled and said, "Be my guest. Take what you want." I walked over to the wall and broke off a fist-sized chunk of coal. Our guide smiled and said, "Looks like you're a miner now!"

We spent another half-hour

underground and watched the incline car approach from the surface to take us back. We piled into the car and made our way back up. I was still reflecting and absorbing what I had just experienced as I clutched my mined piece of #6 Coal from 400' below the surface.

Return to the Past continued

Don Coons had also been thinking about those little caves in Bourbonnais and was itching to do a visit. Don Kerouac began to coordinate an impromptu trip.

On Saturday, August 14 the three of us met at Perry Farms. We looked over the maps from the MIG newsletter, and I informed the two Don's I believed there to be five caves on the premises. Excitedly, we headed off to the caves in the canyon. The main purpose was to see about the significance of caves in question. We were also looking at possibly doing some work in the canyon. I showed the two of them the four caves on the map and lobbied for Cave #5 to be counted as a cave. Don Coons agreed to counting it, considering the unique geologic area we were in.

Going around the bend in the canyon, I showed the two Don's the stream level entrance to Cave #4. I mentioned I had wanted to push the through trip a few weeks prior with Nathan, but decided against. This time I was determined to go from the upper entrance to the stream entrance. I squeezed my way down and

went feet first through the tight passage connecting the two entrances. After a few twists and turns, I made it. I had officially made Cave #4 a "through trip!" I have to admit, I was pretty excited. I could not tell if anyone else had attempted the trip, but I'll go on written record to say I did it. Don Coons said this one would be the crown jewel of the bunch.

After recovering from that brief high, I pushed ahead upstream. Just over the last waterfall, I noticed a little overhang to the right close to stream level. I ducked down and noticed a lot of debris. By this time, the three of us, were joined by Rick, who is from Kankakee and knew Don Coons. He came over to where I was and scoped it out with me. We determined that it was pretty decent size and could have some potential. I called out to Don Coons and we declared this Cave #6.

The day was beginning to get away from us and it was time to go. Don Coons, Don Kerouac, and I began to brainstorm some ideas that we were bouncing around. We were able to see some unique things and experience a unique

opportunity. At this time we can't really go into some of the things that we tossed around, but it will be exciting. We are making connections and putting the pieces into place to help make the Indian Caves among the significant caves of Illinois.



ANNUAL GROTTO PICNIC
AT CLARK FALLS FARM
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2004

All Welcome!

12:00-Bring Your Own Lunch
1:00-Business Meeting
-Vertical Practice & Play
-Visit of Utica Mine
(Bring Helmet & Light)
Also: Vertical Practice at Clark Falls Farm
on Saturday, September 18. Contact Troy J.
Simpson for details.
Overnight PRIMITIVE camping available.

Directions To Clark Falls Farm:
I-39 to IL 71 EAST
-NORTH at IL 178 into Utica
-Continue into town & where IL 178 takes a
left, GO STRAIGHT!!
-Continue straight onto Mill Road and follow
it up the hill & onto the flats.
-At the sharp curve to the right curve, you
will see a gate and a driveway on the
LEFT SIDE. THIS IS THE PLACE!!
-Take the driveway back around the right
side driving on the grassy path that sepa-
rates the woods and the field.
-You will see vehicles and find a place to
park. We will have signs up!!

THE NEAR NORMAL GROTTO
P.O. Box 813
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