

Overholt History from Mike Thomsen

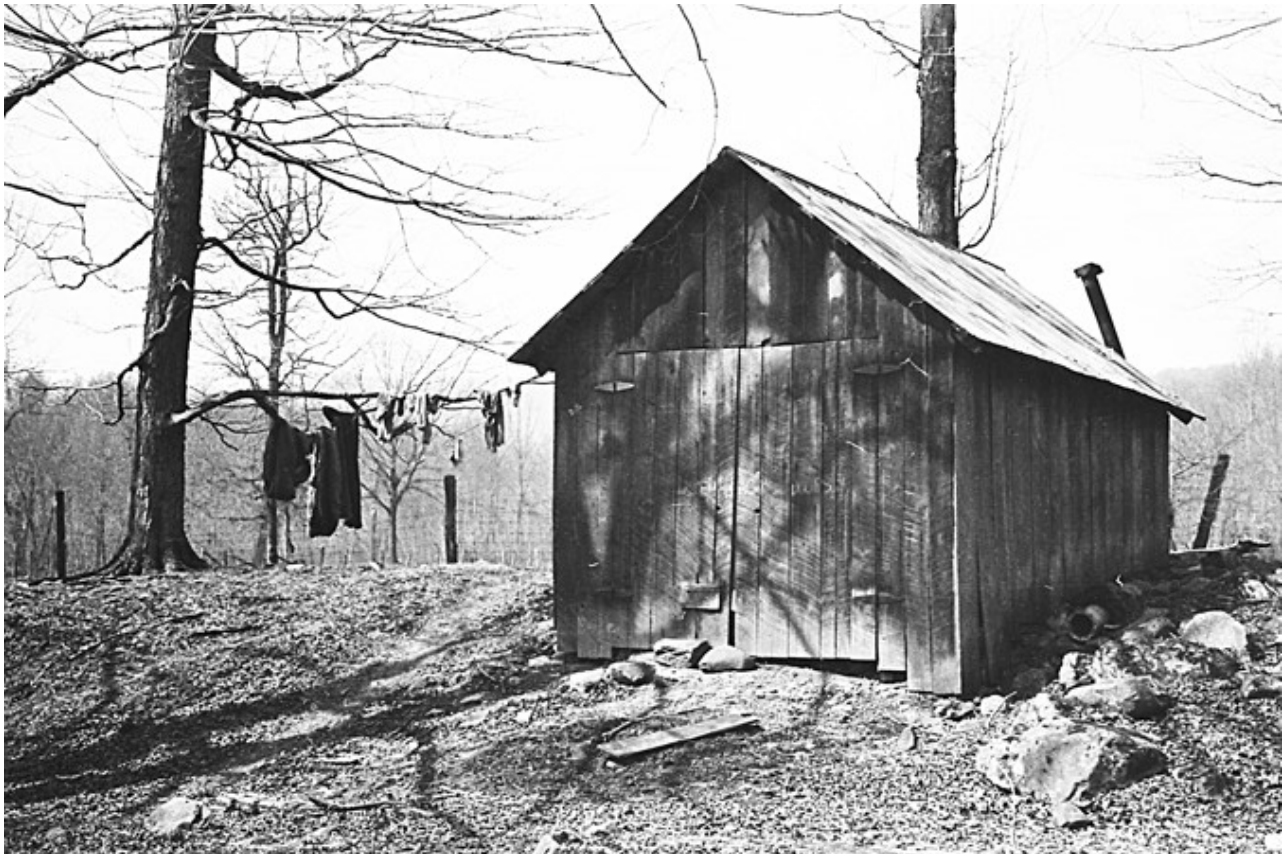
I am writing today regarding a web page that I turned up in the casual "Googling" that some of us engage in. Here's the link to the NSS Slide show on Overholt Blowing Cave.

https://caves.org/service/avlibrary/slide_programs/S706-SCRIPT%20Overholt%20Blowing.pdf

Before I go farther, I should introduce myself. I am Mike Thomsen (more formally, Dr. Michael A. Thomsen), NSS 5479 (lapsed), Nittany Grotto 1959-1963. These were the same years that were covered in the slide show, so I may or may not have known the people who took the photos. I did meet a few Pittsburghers -- perhaps Dick Hoffmaster and Allen McCrady. I hope you will forgive the tedious reminiscences this page has touched off.

On a whim, I "Googled" the phrase "Davies Didn't." Everything that came up was laughably off the mark. I added the word "Overholt" to the search, and found the most enjoyable slide-show transcript -- the ONLY relevant "hit" that came up. It spurred a multitude of reflections. Patience, please.

Between 1959 and 1963, my favorite "spring break" destination was Swago Creek, and my favorite place of lodging was Dallas McKeever's sugar shack.



Dallas McKeever's sugar shack

Lunch might have been Campbell's soup, straight from the can, with a piton for a spoon. Formal dinner would have been at Kelley's Hotel and Restaurant in Marlinton. Those may be my coveralls hanging on a limb in this photo, circa 1961.

After all, you can get pretty wet in Swago Creek,



Thomsen, with guitar, Jerry Underwood looking on

Naturally, I signed in on Dallas McKeever's back porch a number of times, and once had the honor of a guided tour of his beehives. I was saddened to learn of Dallas's death, and horrified at the circumstances.

I did much of my Overholt caving in the company of Nittany Grotto members such as Chuck Landis, Bill Glosser, Jerry Underwood and Jim Van Gundy.

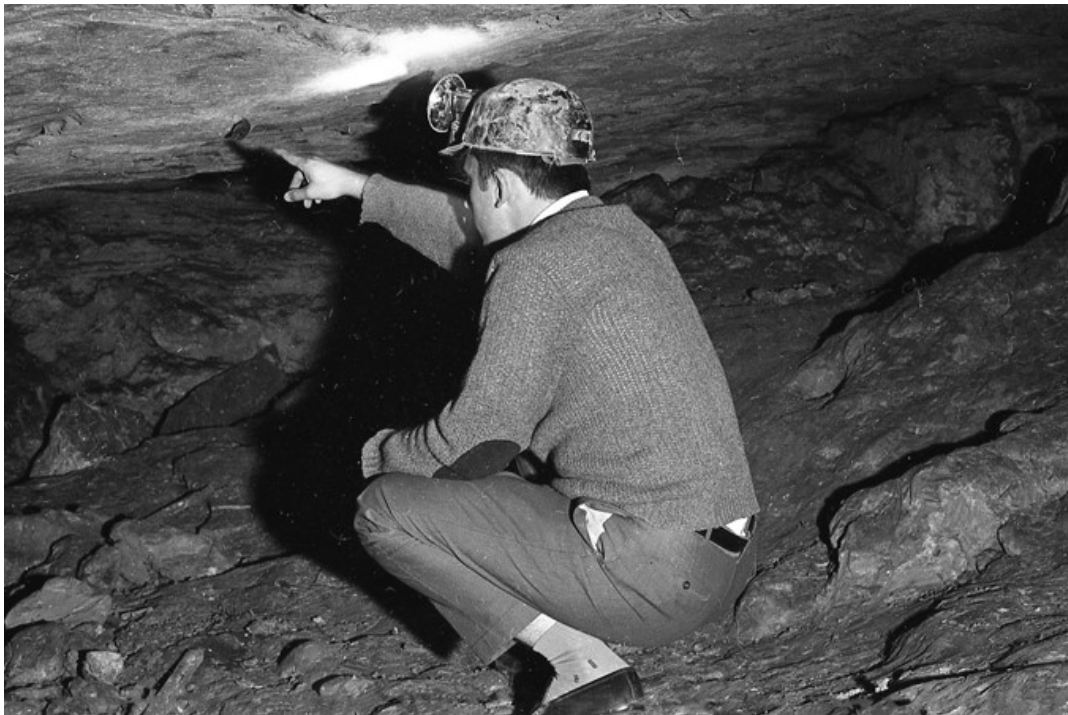
The page gives a most entertaining and informative description that includes major portions of the cave that I never saw, but omits any mention of the portion in which I spent considerable time and found most beautiful. At some point that I can no longer identify with precision, beyond Lake Rita and beyond the breakdown room, we left the main stream passage and took a different route. As I

Landis shown here searching for something inside Roy Willie's station wagon next to the sugar shack, while fiancée Carolyn Allison tickles his feet.





Glosser taking a break with his calabash pipe before the next foray through the Davies Didn't.



Underwood in street clothes contemplating a bat near the Overholt entrance



Van Gundy, in light "hoodie", with Will White, documenting some feature of the region's natural history

recall we reached areas that were previously unknown, including, first, a moderately large room that we named the "Good Friday Room" in recognition of the day we first reached it. From there, after traversing steep and muddy slopes above two somewhat intimidating dome pits, we reached a spot at which we were able to look through an opening to see marvels of colorful "bacon" and "soda straw" formations. [Bummer! Black and white film in the 1960's.]

The space appeared "virgin." The floor was covered with dry sand which appeared undisturbed by footprints or steam activity. I do not remember whether it would have been possible to enter that space, but we declined to mar its pristine beauty with the attempt.

Black and
White
soda
straws



The hand-drawn map that I created days after that visit has now vanished after almost sixty years and many moves, and I don't know whether trip reports or other documentation may exist in Nittany Grotto Archives. I hope Nittany Grotto has been able to prosper following its expulsion (or, perhaps simply "disaffiliation") by Penn State University. I complained to the University, but my complaints -- even without space travel -- are "weightless!"

Most of the folks I have mentioned are still my friends, although Stellmack and Landis did get summonses from Gabriel's horn to grab their Brunton compasses and do some mapping beyond the Pearly Gates -- I suppose I'll get my call before too much longer.

Regards to you all!