

Carbide Dump



June 2023
Vol 58, No 06

The *Carbide Dump* is published monthly by the Blue Ridge Grotto of the National Speleological Society in Roanoke, Virginia. Distribution date is approximately the second week of each month. An issue may be skipped if insufficient material is received. Contributions of articles and artwork are invited and will be gratefully acknowledged. Art work originals will be returned. Contributions should be sent to the editor. Regular and associate grotto membership (\$10) includes a *Carbide Dump* subscription. Subscriber rate is \$10.00. Exchanges with other grotto and caving organizations are invited. Direct exchange mail to Mary Sue Socky.

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The Blue Ridge Grotto holds its monthly meetings every third Friday of the month at 6:30p at Jersey Lily's Roadhouse, 1650 Braeburn Dr. Salem, VA 24153. See the Grotto meeting announcement in this issue.

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Contributors: David & Mary Sue Socky, Jeff Huffman, Meredith Weberg, Susan Burr, Rocky Parsons, Carol Tideman, and Jerry Fuller.

Cover: Joe Zokaites negotiating a traverse into virgin cave in McClung Cave, WV. Photo by Dave Socky

CAVERS CALENDAR

June 16: BRG meeting, 6:30p, Jersey Lily's-Salem, VA.

June 19 to 23: WVACS Convention Pre-Camp, at the WVACS Fieldstation north of Frankford in Greenbrier County, WV. For more information, contact Jessica Reep at j.reep@aol.com

June 26-30: NSS Convention, Elkins, West Virginia. Registration is open! For more information, see their website at <https://nss2023.caves.org>

July 14-16: Karst-O-Rama held at Great Saltpeter Cave Preserve, Mt. Vernon, KY. <https://karstorama.com>

July 21: BRG meeting, 6:30p, Jersey Lily's-Salem, VA.

Aug 4-6: Indiana Cave Capers. Click [here for the web site](#).

Aug. 18: BRG meeting, 6:30p, Jersey Lily's-Salem, VA.

Sept. 1-4: OTR, Dailey, WV.

Sept. 15: BRG meeting, 6:30p, Jersey Lily's-Salem, VA.

Oct. 5-8: TAG Fall Cave-In.

Summer 2024: NSS Convention, Sewanee, TN.

Treasurer's Report 6/8/2023

Cave Bucks	\$ 40.96
Conservation	\$ 2.00
Equipment	\$ 104.12
General	\$3,720.79
Total	\$3,867.87

Long Cave Lists

A legacy of Bob Gulden, now maintained by Paul Berger

<https://cave-exploring.com/index.php/long-and-deep-caves-of-the-world/>



BRG in Trout Cave at Spring 2023 VAR. Photo by Jeff Huffman

BRG Meeting & Trips Notice

The **June 16, 2023** meeting of the Blue Ridge Grotto will be held at **Jersey Lily's Roadhouse 1650 Braeburn Dr, Salem, VA 24153**. Dinner or appetizers with socializing starts at 6:30pm with the meeting starting soon after.

The program this month will be a slide show of recent cave trips by Dave Socky plus Nick Schmalenberger photos from the recent NCRC weeklong.

Grotto Trip

Greenbrier Poor Farm Cave, WV

Date & Time: Saturday, June 17, 2023. Meet at Hanging Rock Orange Market at **8:30 am**.

Leader: Doug Feller

Coordination: Susan Burr 540-580-9409
pondlady97@gmail.com

Requirements: Horizontal trip. If you wish to go, let Susan Burr know.

Description

Poor Farm Cave, Greenbrier Co. WV is fairly easy, mostly dry, and a good beginner cave.

Poor Farm Cave contains 3990 ft. of surveyed passage and has 93 ft. of relief. The cave contains large trunk passage, breakdown, low crawls, slippery mud, a small stream, areas of formations, and a 20-ft. pit. To avoid the exposure of getting around the top of the pit, one can go through a tight hole through breakdown on the right. Large people will not fit through the by-pass; they will have to go around the pit on the narrow ledges. A belay line around the pit is very helpful.

This is a very straight forward cave; you cannot get lost. There are large rooms and big passages on either side of the cave from the entrance room.



Doug Feller backlighting bacon on the January 14, 2012 BRG trip to Poor Farm Cave, WV. Photo by Dave Socky

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BRG Meeting Minutes – can be read on the BRG webpage at: <https://blueridgegrotto.org> under the 'BRG Organization' button.

NSS Membership: Would you like to join or renew with the NSS? See this [link](#) for details.



Memorial Services

Cliff Lindsay (NSS # 11224RL, FE) will be held **Sat. June 10, 2023**, 1pm-4pm at the Alumni Hall, Osteopath College in **Lewisburg, WV**. Contact Bill Balfour, billbalfour48@gmail.com for more info.

Jim Werker (NSS #31653, CM, CO, FE) Celebration of Life, June 11, 2023, 10am in Hillsboro, NM. Jim was an outstanding caver who helped write the book on Cave Conservation. After an intense year of in-patient treatment and out-patient rehab for a stroke and seizures, Jim Werker contracted COVID and died on April 13, 2023. Join us in celebrating a life and spirit measured in miracles. Click on this [link for obituary & details](#).

Bat Cave Closures -

We are now in Summer **Bat Cave Closures**. Hibernacula may be open, but other caves will be closed due to bat maternity colonies. VA and WV have differing schedules.

- Summer closure for bat caves in **Virginia is April 15—Oct 15.**
- Summer closure for bat caves in **West Virginia is May 15—Sept. 1.**

See [wv-list-2012-03\(3\).pdf](#) for more WV closed cave information.

This closure affects some, but not all caves. If the cave you want to visit is closed, go elsewhere! There are thousands of caves in the Virginias.

Please respect all cave closures.

VAR CLOSED CAVE LIST: lots of information needs to be updated. Please send changes, additions to Brad Blase blase@viriniacaves.org The Closed Cave List can be viewed at [this link](#).

2023 NSS CONVENTION

JUNE 26–30, 2023 | ELKINS, WEST VIRGINIA



See <https://nss2023.caves.org/> for info on lodging, restaurants, and above ground activities. Registration is now open! Early registration ends May 1.



McClung Cave Survey Project

Pushing the limits of Outer Mongolia

By *Dave Socky*

It took two fourteen-hour trips to push the limits of Outer Mongolia in McClung Cave, but the survey in this section of the cave is now complete. Except for the “small person” leads that are still left. The first trip was on May 13, 2013 and included Joe Zokaites, Bill Koerschner, Paul Walko, and I. The second and final trip was on June 3 and included Bob Alderson, Joe Zokaites, and I.

The May 13 trip was to the southern end of Outer Mongolia to finish up the lower leads and thus finish off this area of the cave. We entered the McClung Historic entrance at 10:15am and made our way to the first lead without incident, getting there in about 2.7 hours.

We checked two leads before the end on the left that we had done PUD shots into when we originally surveyed this section. One we left as a PUD shot, it got too tight about where we showed it ending. The other was marked as a good hammer lead. Paul and Bill pushed it without a hammer, and it was determined it needed to be surveyed. We got 118 feet out of it, but it eventually got too tight.

We then went to the last room at the end of the southern section and started looking for the low leads. Not much luck. Joe and I surveyed one short lower passage which ended after 40 feet while Bill and Paul moved breakdown. Without any luck with the low leads, we sent Paul up the climb to the high lead we had done a PUD shot into before, back



Paul Walko after checking a lead.
Photo by Dave Socky

in April of 2021. There was a big room up there, so Joe climbed up. He found a nice phreatic canyon that continued. I went to climb up after them, but the hand holds I was going to use to pull myself up with were loose. So, I pulled them down, clearing the climb of loose stuff. The only trouble was, a large rock above me on the left shifted and started slipping toward me. It was 6 feet long, 4 feet wide, and a foot and half thick. It was big! I jumped out of the way, and luckily the big rock stopped. At this point, the route up was on a stable pinnacle with the big shifting rock on the left and a large slab of shale on the right which was being held up by a few pebbles. Joe said “Just don’t touch either of those rocks when you climb up”. I said “no way, I don’t want to get

crushed”! But then Joe said he checked his lead for 50 to 60 feet and it kept going. Damn, I was going to have to try the climb anyway. After carefully planting my feet on the foot holds and grabbing stable hand holds, I was actually able to ease myself up using arm strength and avoided touching either rock. Yeah, I made it up without getting crushed.

I joined Paul and Joe and we started surveying while Bill carefully climbed up. The room above did end, but the phreatic canyon went and went. We breezed past a left lead at NFA19, continuing straight in a larger passage. At NFA30 and NFA31 a large dome pit had developed to the right of canyon. Paul found a way to climb down into the 15-foot-deep pit. A waterfall was on the eastern side of the pit with a difficult

(Continued on page 52)



Bob and Joe setting up for the belay. Photo by Dave Socky



Bill Koerschner coming out of a crawl.
Photo by Dave Socky

(Continued from page 51)

climb up of about 10 to 12 feet. Paul did not attempt to do this, but we did put a PUD shot up the passage for 32 feet. This is an excellent lead.

There were also some low leads below our canyon between NFA31 and NFA35. The canyon continued, but the characteristics changed at NFA43. The floor went up toward the ceiling and we ended up in a crawl, belly and army crawl, until it got too tight at NFA49. There were nuts, debris, bones, and other indications of a possible entrance.

It was 9pm when we finally headed out. It was a long slog out, with everyone but Paul getting leg cramps. We exited at midnight, but it was long enough to say the trip was 14 hours long. We surveyed 978 feet.

It only took a day or so to recover enough to start thinking about the good leads that we had left. So we returned on June 3. We lost Bill due to not feeling well and Paul couldn't make it because he was playing in Iceland with a bunch of other cavers. But we did pick up Bob Alderson. That was good because, just in case it was needed, he brought his drill, nails, and other stuff to do the waterfall climb. We not only looked forward to surveying a bunch of virgin cave, but according to Nick, we needed only 550 feet of new survey in order to push the Great Savannah Cave System to 53 miles. We were ready!



Bob squeezing himself out of the tight canyon. Photo by Dave Socky

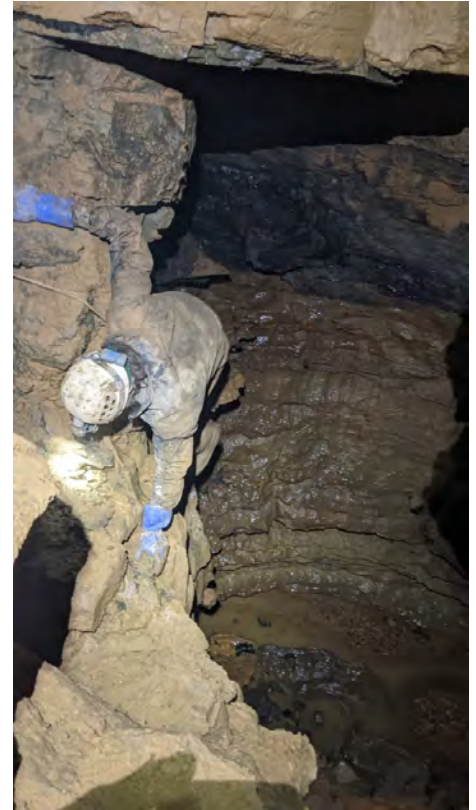
We entered the cave at 10:30am on a cool and sunny Saturday. In order to keep from over heating too much, we moved slowly toward our goal, taking 3 hours to get to the start of our survey.

Bob took one look at the dome pit with the waterfall lead and determined that the lead could be accessed easily by doing a traverse from our previous survey. We wouldn't even need to go down into the pit. While Bob and Joe worked on setting up a belay, I checked the low level leads and crawled down through the breakdown into the pit. In doing so I had to shift some loose rocks to make the climb down safer, but unfortunately I didn't move my fingers out of the way quickly enough and a large rock smushed by right hand index finger tip. Ouch! My finger ached and pulsed for the whole trip with the finger nail turning dark. So much for that finger nail :(.

Anyway, back up at the traverse, Bob successfully climbed across to the lead with a Joe belaying. The floor was only 12 feet down, but enough to hurt oneself. So the belay was a good thing. The lead went, so Bob and Joe tied both ends off tight so we had a good traverse line. Joe went across and using the webbing, we passed packs around the traverse. Then I joined the crew at the start of our lead. The traverse was actually pretty easy as there were really good footholds and the rope was used for balance allowing one to step right around the 12 foot traverse.

As it turned out, the lead wasn't as big as I had thought. It turned into a tall narrow canyon right away, about 15 feet high by 2 to 3 feet wide with a trickle stream coming out. The survey was a bunch of pretty short shots because of the bends in the canyon. We had to go up, then down, and squirm through in a couple of places because of pinch points. After about 65 feet, the canyon clamped down to a point where only Bob could fit through. He checked it out for an estimated 70 feet until it got too tight even for him. It will take a 'small person' team to survey the rest of this canyon.

We derigged the traverse, recovering both the rope and the web-



Bob coming back across the traverse on belay. Photo by Dave Socky

bing and after a snack, started the survey down into the low level leads. Again, the leads had looked really good, but when we got down to it, they devolved again into tight, gnarly canyons. One route led back to the bottom of the dome pit, but the other continued in a northerly direction, parallel to the southern Outer Mongolia main passage. After only 40 feet the passage split into two, but both leads were way too tight to fit into.

(Continued on page 53)



There were some formations - just past the dome-pit. Photo by Dave Socky

(Continued from page 52)

While I worked on the sketch, Joe climbed up into a high lead at ATZ18 and found a tight crawl lead over the top of the climb up. It went, especially after some sharp corners were removed with the masons hammer.

More tight, gnarly, high canyons, with tight spots and crawls interspersed here and there. It was a real challenge for Joe, who was doing instruments, as he had to turn around at every station in order to the back shots. Not any easy task in such narrow quarters. After 80 feet or so, it got too tight even for Bob. We turned around and cleaned up one side lead which doubled back and came close to ATZ11.

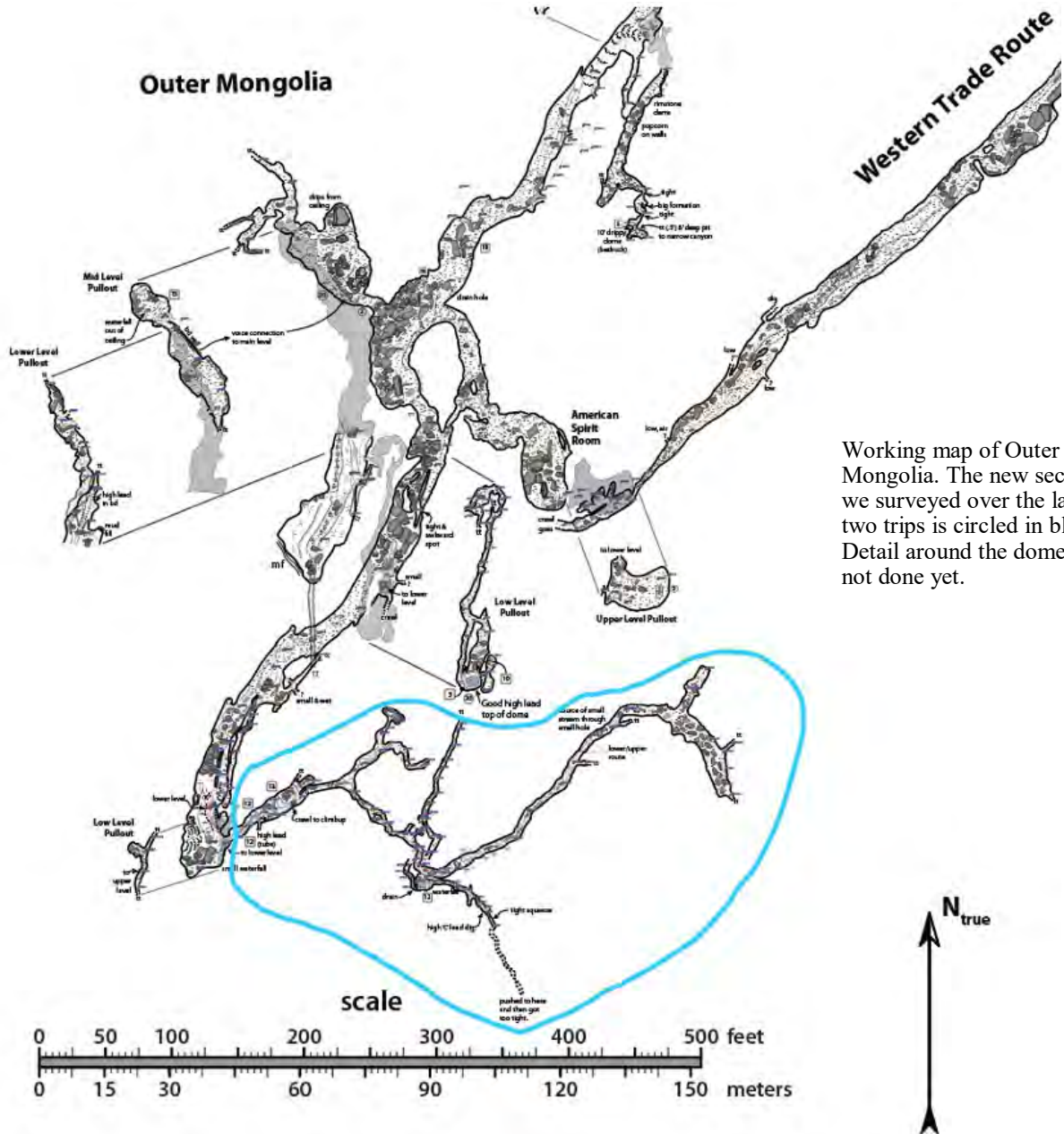
By this time, it was 8pm or so and we were getting tired. But there was still one lead left to do at NFA19. I insisted we survey that lead as I didn't want to have to come back again just for one lead. With some grumbling, Joe and Bob agreed to do it.

This time the passage dimensions were a little larger. We still had to climb and stem to progress down the passage, but you could turn around with ease for backsights. After 40 feet, the passage split into two ways. Left devolved into a crawl after 20 feet and then opened up into a small breakdown room with no exit. One lead down. Straight ahead the passage turned to the east and opened up into a small room with a climb up to a

crawl and then a dig. It didn't take much to get through, but the passage ended after only another 15 feet.

We were done! Yeah. As far as we were concerned, Out Mongolia is completed! No need to make that long three hour trip any more. We took off our polypro, had a snack, and headed out. Another 3 hour slog, we exited at 12:17 am Sunday morning, making for long 14 hour trip.

We didn't get the Great Savannah Cave System to 53 miles, but we came real close. Our total survey for the day was 477 feet, but removing exclusions, we added maybe 457 feet to the cave. It was some really hard fought footage, but this time it was all virgin. In the end, it's worth it!



Working map of Outer Mongolia. The new section we surveyed over the last two trips is circled in blue. Detail around the dome is not done yet.

Grotto Trip Log

5/13: McClungs Cave, WV. Participants included David Socky, Joe Zokaites, Bill Koerschner, Paul Walko. This was a trip to the southern end of Outer Mongolia to finish up the lower leads and thus finish off this area of the cave. It was a great 14-hour trip where we surveyed 978 feet. See the article on page 51.

5/20: Trout Cave, WV. Participants included David Socky, Mary Hicks, Sally Chappel, Sally's daughter & son-in-law, Trish Geiger, Lauren Appel, Jeff Huffman, and one other. This trip was during the Spring VAR at Thorn Springs Park. The trip started out with just Lauren and ended up with a total of 9, including myself. We only saw the first half of the cave since the access to the back end had a sign asking cavers to stay out because of the bats. There were lots of bats in the cave. Trout is a very dry cave, with mostly linear passage, pretty easy. The map we used really was pretty useless as there was no detail and didn't even show half of the little loops and come arounds. We spent a couple hours touring the cave.

5/20: New Trout Cave, WV. Participants included David Socky, Lauren Appel, Jeff Huffman, Mary Hicks, and one other girl. This trip was during the Spring VAR at Thorn Springs Park. After the Trout Cave trip we hiked further up the hill expecting New Trout, but found Hamilton instead. We only looked at the entrance, deciding we didn't want to crawl around in a dusty maze. Plus we wanted to make sure we didn't lose Sally and family. New Trout is actually the lower cave. Turn right at the kiosk and it's right there. Long straight linear passage for first part, then it's a maze of break down passages where the map doesn't do it justice at all. We didn't find the end, instead got turned around and ended up back in the big room. Fun little trip.

5/20: McCoy Mill Cave & McCoy Mill Shelter Cave, WV. Participants included David Socky and Amos Mincin. This was a small little cave within walking distance of Thorn Spring Park campground. It's in a cliff on left side of road. Crawly cave with two entrances. Probably a couple of hundred feet of passage. Real close to McCoy Mill Cave is McCoy Mill Shelter Cave. "Mountain Dave" (Dave Knox) and friends were digging at the crawl at the end of this 50-foot-long cave. It was blowing air, but the lead was pretty small. They did 4 or 5 sessions of technical digging and progressed four or five feet, but there is still lots to do and not an active project. For them, it was just something to do at VAR.

5/27: Roppel Cave - Khan Entrance, KY. Participants included David Socky, Bill Koerschner, Bob Alderson, and Philip Balister. A second team included Jim Bordon, Laine Roberts, Marissa Schorr, and Emily Michael. We went into the Khan Entrance of Roppel Cave and involved a one-mile hike through fields and woods. The entrance was a vertical culvert going down about 20 to 25 feet. Bill had a key, but we insisted Jim bring his key along just in case. Good thing he did because Bill's key was old and didn't work. Jim finally got the lock off and we went caving. Our goal was to familiarize ourselves with the area, and check leads. Plus, survey any stuff that needed surveying. We went into the Outward Bound passage, the end of which was a gnarly crawl with tight spots and obstacles. But at least it was dry. Near the end, we got to a tight spot that Philip and I couldn't fit through. Bob pushed a wet crawlway and got into the bottom of a high dome with a big passage above. This was a known dome, so we surveyed out. We were looking for a tie-in to the F survey. Philip headed back toward F34 looking for the way up into Bunnell Ave, but Bob found the 'hidden' slot up at a point where it shouldn't have been. A tight awkward squeeze up led to a large trunk passage - Bunnell Ave. Luckily Philip

came back before we left him. We explored Bunnell Ave to the left until it got down to a low crawl way. A left-hand lead led to a dig, which we worked at for a couple of hours, but we finally gave up after reaching a corner and seeing that it continued really low for a long way. This would be a long term dig with little air. We then headed back to where we had split with Jim's team. We headed up a stream canyon looking to get into the Son of Khan trunk. There was a section where stemming was required over a narrow canyon. The stemming soon ended, but the passage turned into a hands and knees crawl in sand and then a belly crawl. Bob had had enough, but Bill went on for a little. I finally followed Bill and found I could get through the belly crawl. A very small lead on the left supposedly went to the Son of Kahn. Since I couldn't fit, we headed on out. On the way out, Bill said he had found another lead which we might have fit through, but we headed out anyway. Jim and his group had caught up with us. We were out by 9:30pm. It was a fun trip, but not very productive with only 71 feet surveyed. But it did add to the length of the cave!

5/28: Mammoth Cave Crystal Cave section, KY. Participants included David Socky, Tom Brucker, and Brian Hockaday. The second team included Maggie Brosky, Michael Ketzner, and Lee Gray Boze. This was a fun trip and to an area of Mammoth I had never been to - the far reaches of Crystal Cave, all the way back to Floyds Lost Passage. See the article on page 55.

5/3: McClung Cave, WV. Participants included David Socky, Bob Alderson, and Joe Zokaites. We went back to the leads in Southern Outer Mongolia. Got 477 feet of virgin cave. See the article on page 51.



CRF Memorial Day Project Weekend

Making the Worlds Longest Cave a Little Longer

By *Dave Socky*

Participants included David Socky, Tom Brucker, and Brian Hockaday. The second team included Maggie Brosky, Michael Ketzner, and Lee Gray Boze. This was a fun trip and to an area of Mammoth I had never been to. We parked and changed clothes at the Old Crystal Cave ticket office and the supposed Floyd Collins house. There was a group from Speleofest in the cave. We went through the hall where Floyd Collins was in his casket for a number of years, then headed further down the tourist trail, through the Grand Canyon and the Devil's Kitchen. A little bit past the end of the tourist trail is the Scottsman Trap, a little downclimb tube that leads to the Crawlway. Lot of hands and knees through dry dirt floor with breakdown rooms in between. Then it gets smaller – mainly narrow canyons which you barely fit through, skootching sideways to make progress. Then there is the 'S' bend, which is somewhat awkward, but really not bad. A little past that obstacle is the Keyhole. It's a horizontal slot up off the floor which is about 10 inches high. I know because I had to exhale a bit to get my chest through. But it's short, about 4 feet, so not too claustrophobic.

After this, the passage was larger, but soon turned into the "Straddle Canyon", a section where stemming and straddling is required to stay up out of the narrow canyon below. Exposure was 10 to 20 feet. We went past a spot that Tom calls the Shark Rock because a rock projec-

tion looks like a shark head. Other features we went by included the Little Dining Room and Ebb & Flow Falls, which is a spot you can get clean water from.

Soon after this is the Bottomless Pit and the first spot to do some survey. Tom wanted to tie in the top of the Bottomless pit at Z79 to the bottom of the Pit (it was 58 feet deep!). They shot to a spot we should be able to find at the bottom and then we continued over the scary traverse to the other side of the pit. It was a fairly exposed traverse and step across, but the footholds were good and there was a cable and rope which one could hold on to for comfort.

Past the traverse was some more stemming and crossing of deep exposed canyon, in some cases probably scarier than going across the top of the Bottomless Pit. But, again, good footholds and handholds. Soon the floor came back and eventually we reached the "Formerly Impossible", an exposed traverse/crawl that gives access to the Turnpike.

From the Turnpike we headed to the left and down the Boat Ride Passage and showed Maggie where their team was going to survey. Then we climbed down into a stream channel and into the Flat Room and then Floyds Lost Passage. We went past Mud Avenue and the junction for the B Trail and finally to McClures Slop



Stuff left over from the good old days (1950's) in Floyds Lost Passage. Photo by Dave Socky

Shop where we had lunch. This is where the C3 expedition camp was set up. We didn't go to the C3 Waterfall Trail, but we were close to it.

After lunch and many stories from Tom, we headed back to where Maggie's group was to survey. Then Tom, Brian and I took a side passage which, after some funky climbs, led down to the bottom of the Bottomless Pit. And surprise – we couldn't find the point where they had shot to from above. As it turned out, it was 20 feet off the floor and invisible from below. Since we could see Z49 on the ceiling 60 feet up, I suggested we set a station down below, do a back sight, and then when we headed out, we could do the front sight from above. We did that.

At this point, our goal was to redo the Y survey, which needed to be replaced because of poor quality numbers from way back when. We started our survey at 4pm and surveyed until about 9pm. We picked up side leads as we went. One was a low crawl through loose sand/gypsum and went up through a ceiling height change. It popped up into known passage, of course. This was our 'new' cave. We continued in the Y survey to the northwest until we saw another side passage on the right. We surveyed that for about 50 feet to where it intersected with a larger passage going both left and right. But this didn't need surveying, so we went back to where our dig had come out and surveyed back

(Continued on page 56)



Historic graffiti from 1948 with Brian Hockaday and Tom Brucker in the foreground. Photo by Dave Socky

(Continued from page 55)

to our YY3 station, completing a loop. By this time, it was 9pm, the time we were supposed to meet the other team. It didn't take us long to find them. They were waiting for us in the Turnpike. On the way out, we stopped at the top of the Bottomless Pit and completed the survey.

The trip out was pretty quick. Tom and I brought up the rear, letting the others lead the way out. I was surprised when we got back to the Scottsman Trap – it was quicker than I thought it would be. Then it was just a stroll out the huge commercial section, with nice trails the whole way. When we got to cars, Michael realized his tablet was missing. He

figured he had accidentally left it at the Scottsman Trap where we had taken a break. He and Maggie went back in to try and find it. We left for the field station, expecting Michael and Maggie to get back about 1:30am. They found the tablet and made it back before anyone was worried. It was a good trip 12 hour trip where we surveyed 375 feet.



Tom Brucker pushing through the tight spot in new cave. Photo by Dave Socky

Membership

No May BRG meeting. The weather was nice, and several BRG cavers attended Spring VAR in Franklin, WV. 200+ cavers attended Spring VAR!

BRG currently has 56 members and 5 subscribers for 2023.

Updated BRG Membership lists will be available at the June 16 BRG meeting .

Know of a potential caver? Bring them to a BRG meeting, sponsor them on a BRG activity, do lots of fun things with the best cavers around ~

Carl Cornett
1718 Grandin Rd Apt. 13
Roanoke, VA 24015

Cave Softly

“Explore Virginia Caves” license plate

Hi VAR Cavers, specifically VIRGINIA Cavers,

Here is a great opportunity to help the Virginia Cave Board and get a cool caver license plate for your car!

Before this becomes a reality, we need 450 of us to preorder them. And it probably won't be until sometime next year, but it'll be worth the wait, I think. The cost is \$25 for a non-personalized plate and \$35 for a personalized plate.

This license plate was designed by a Show Cave owner (Luray Caverns).

Please send DMV Preorder Request paper work and checks payable to **Treasurer of Virginia** with “Explore Virginia Caves” license plate in the memo.

Send paperwork & check to: Virginia Cave Board, Attn: Michael Fletcher (FOIA Officer) 600 E. Main Street, 24th Floor Richmond, VA 23219. His contact information is (804) 786-8445 / michael.fletcher@dcr.virginia.gov.

Click on the links below for the forms that need to be filled out to preorder:

[License Plate Development Preorder request.](#)

[DMV Special License Plate Dev Process](#)



Greenville Saltpeter Cave Has a New Owner

By Rocky Parsons
(Originally published in the June 2023 WV Caver)

Greenville Saltpeter Cave in Monroe County, WV, is a very special cave. Included on the West Virginia Significant Cave List, the cave was once an important bat hibernaculum and was mined for saltpeter prior to the American Civil War and by the Confederates during that war. The cave contains an immense number of old saltpeter vats and is listed as a National Natural Landmark.

In the early 1990s, property containing the cave's Water, Hilltop, and Skylight Entrances was purchased by the Institute for Earth Education. This organization designs and disseminates carefully crafted educational programs to help people of all ages develop a more harmonious relationship with the Earth's natural systems and communities. Through negotiations with an adjoining landowner, the Institute established an easement for access to the historical Saltpeter and Mill Pond Entrances.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has gated all of the cave's entrances in order to protect the hibernaculum.

A few years ago, that adjoining property was purchased by the Conservation Fund of DC. Their main interest was to protect the bat hibernaculum. Recently, both properties have been purchased by the West Virginia Land Trust, an organization that sets land aside and protects it from future development.

The cave is currently closed, but within the next year, the Land Trust plans to develop a management plan for the property so that access to the cave can someday be carefully and responsibly managed.

