

COOG

MARCH 1979

SQUEAKS

VOL 22 NO 3

MATCH

Jug Room

Denny Burns' Lost Passage

TARKILN CAVE
Elliott Co., Ky.

WATERFALL ENTRANCE

mapped by Central Ohio Grotto
1964, 1976

NORTH (MAG.)

Aqua Ave.

Topless Dome

Sea of Screams

Monster Dome

Shoosole Room

Loch Ness

SINK ENTRANCE

Moonshine Ave.

0 300'
survey total about 1 mile

Denny Burns' Lost Passage

Aqua Ave.

Sink Hall

Tarkiln Ave.

Phantom Junction

VALLEY PIT ENTRANCE

MAIN ENTRANCE

THE CENTRAL OHIO GROTTO OF THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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CONTENTS

Incident at Sites - Charles Short . . .22
 Tarkiln Cave - Lou Simpson25
 Complaints - Bill Walden26
 Cave Rescue Seminar26
 Cave Creek Afterthoughts - Paul Unger . .28
 Horror Hole (Fiction)- Larry Baldwin . .29

6th ← Note: 1 week early!

Our April meeting should be an important one. Horton Hobbs III will be present to explain what he is doing with the Ohio Cave Survey, Jake Elberfeld will be giving a short first-aid demonstration, and "Doc" Dougherty expects to be present to give us his ideas on forming an Ohio/Kentucky/Indiana region.

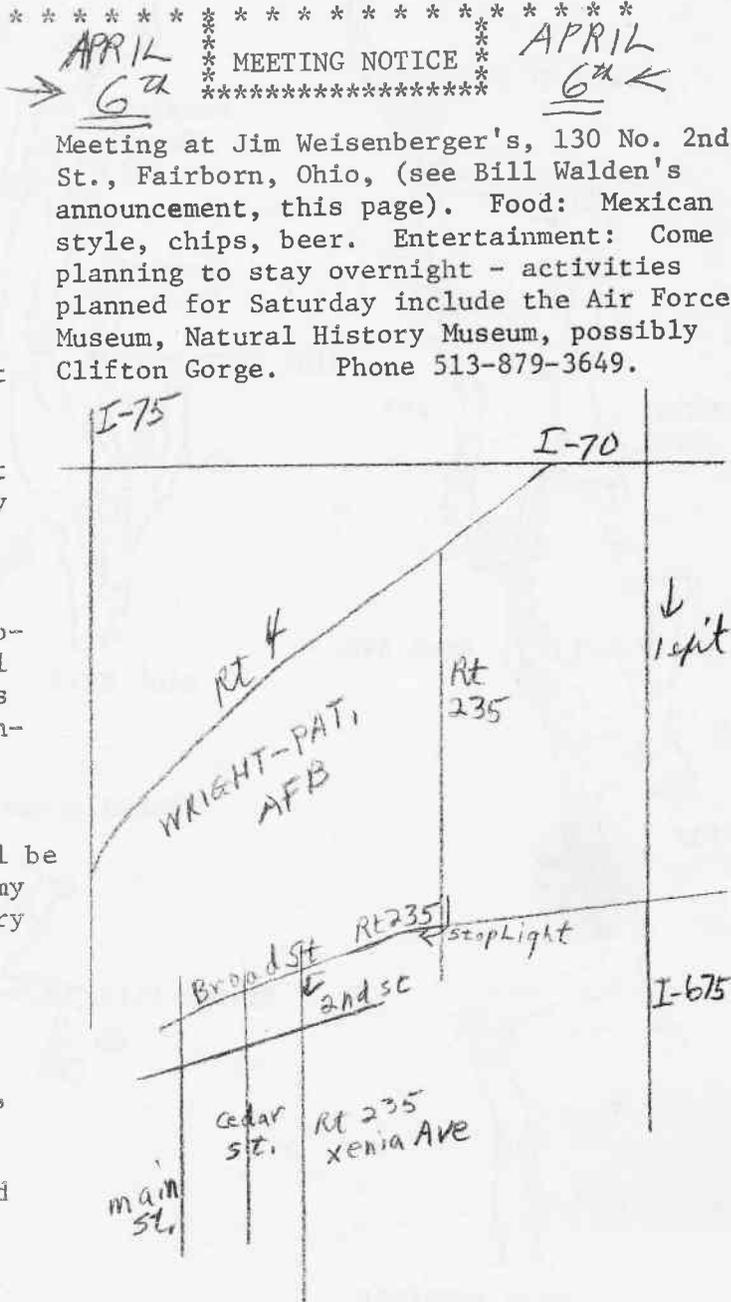
Because the issue of a region will probably be discussed and because we have a full schedule for the meeting, I hope all members of COG will attend this meeting. Jim Weisenberger, our host, assures me that he has plenty of space.

Arrival time for the April meeting will be the period of 8:00 to 8:30 p.m. I will do my best to start the meeting at 8:30; please try to arrive by then.

- Bill Walden, Chairman

MEA CULPA!! I IS COVERED WITH RUE !

- Phyllis (Absent-minded) Redshaw
As was announced at the last COG meeting, the long-sought Ohio Cave Survey material was discovered languishing in our basement, where it has been since Carolyn Herel passed it on to me more than 4 years ago. Use of it will be controlled by the Grotto.



INCIDENT AT SITES

OR

CHICKEN LITTLE WAS RIGHT, THE SKY IS FALLING

BY CHARLES H. SHORT,

Chairman, Mole Men Grottos

(Ed. Note: This was contributed by Dennis Scott)

On Sunday afternoon, May 28, 1978, six of us from the Mole Men Grotto of Ohio, and 3 boys from Pennsylvania were in the process of climbing the 298 ft. drop at Sites Cave near Thorn Springs Park, Franklin, W. Va. Five of us from the grotto, earlier that day had committed ourselves to the gueling mud crawl at the bottom of the southwest passage. This was our first trip to Sites and we had not been able to acquire much information about the cave beyond the drop area of the pit. The whole cave, as it turned out, is formed on about a 45° slant and runs both northeasterly and southwesterly for several hundred feet from the drop area. The only semilevel areas are the tops of the huge breakdown rocks. Everywhere else is extremely slanted and very muddy.

We had split up into groups of two and planned to meet back at the drop area in about an hour. Whichever party had the best story to tell about the area they saw, is where we would concentrate most of our effort. I, along with Herb Darfus, began photographing some of the outstanding formations that are abundant at the start of the southwest passage. I must, at this time, extend my highest compliments to those who have done Sites Cave. Not one of the formations have been vandalized or defaced in any way. This, without a doubt, is a true testimony that conscientious cavers do exist. There are parts of this cave where the formations are so numerous and delicate that you must be guided through them by your fellow caver in order not to touch them with some part of your body.

As it turned out, according to Sam Bellamy and Mike Dobbie, the most exciting adventure seemed to lay deep at the bottom of the mud-infested passage in the southwest direction. The descent to this passage was so steep and slippery that we decided to leave one man behind in case we ran into trouble getting back out. We don't normally leave anyone by themselves, however, most of the way would not be out of shouting range. We also set a check-in time of 30 minutes. We figured we would know by then if the passage went on and if so, someone

would return for the safety man. After seeing what the start of the passage looked like and knowing it got worse as it went, Edd Vanderpool volunteered to stay behind. As a matter of fact, he downright insisted he be the one.

Getting down the passage turned out to be even more difficult than anticipated. You would think that going down a passage at a 45° slant would be as easy as pie. That is only if the passage is not a mud-pie. With every step, about 93.7 pounds of mud would stick to each shoe. This would not have been too difficult if you could have stayed directly over them. As it was, the ceiling would rise and fall in relation to the floor. Half the time you were standing or crouching, the other half you were on your back or side trying to get your heavily laden feet to follow you. It was during one of these low floor to ceiling relationships that we suddenly discovered, much to our surprise, that a sometime distant caver had gratefully left a souvenir for all those foolish enough to try this passage. There on the ceiling just a few inches from the nose of Danny Briggs, (who happened to be in the lead at the moment) protruded a finely sculptured three dimensional figure of a face, which Danny quickly described to the rest of us in a somewhat higher voice than normal.

At the bottom of the mud passage was a pool of water. The ceiling now became the wall, except for a small space about shoulder width and six inches high. By moving into the water with your left leg extended to the bottom of the pool, your left hand pushed against the slanting wall and your right elbow slowly sinking out of sight into the slanted floor, you could shine your 6 volt light up the passage without seeing an end to it. It definitely went on. Voice soundings indicated that it opened into a larger room. Each of us was wondering how far we would have to go

Incident at Sites, (continued)

through the water to reach it, or if we even wanted to reach it. Even though the ceiling was only six inches from the water, the water was another 6 inches deep so we knew we had plenty of room to get through. Danny was the first to move into the passage. It involved laying completely into the pool of water, reaching out with your hands to guide you and pushing off with your feet against the mud bank. Almost immediately Danny let out a shriek and that was the last word we heard from him. No amount of calling would bring a reply. This we couldn't understand. We could hear splashing and when Sam lowered himself into the water, he said he could see Danny's light. The decision had already been made, someone else had to go through to see if Danny was o.k. Sam was already in the water so he removed his helmet and pushed through the hole. Sam likewise, let out with a loud, inarticulate sound that was somewhere between the joy of victory and the agony of defeat, only this time it was followed by fourteen and a half bushels of laughter. Both Danny and Sam were absolutely beyond themselves. We tried in vain to find out what was going on. Herb was next. A long moment of hesitation followed his first move into the pool of water. Finally words filtered through the laughter that we could safely make the passage, so Herb shoved off into the tiny hole and disappeared in a huge brown splash. It was suddenly as clear as mud what had transpired with only the passage of two people through this tiny opening. The once clear pool of water had quickly turned into a thick slurry of mud. With the moving through of each caver it became thicker and thicker. Now there were three people bellowing with laughter at the other end of this thing that now looked like a pig waller at the end of the monsoons. From my point of view, I just couldn't see what was so funny; however, it was my turn to find out.

I decided to leave my helmet on. It is somewhat narrower and allows you to get your head closer to the ceiling than with hats with the wider rims, plus it has the four point hitch and will not come off even with your head upside down. I unfastened my 6 volt light, turned it on and quickly plunged into the hole, absolutely unprepared for what transpired. Right off the bat I discovered to my surprise that the mudhole was much deeper than 6 inches. When I put my hand down

for support they could not find bottom. Deeper and deeper they sank. The mud quickly swallowed both arms, my chest and shoulders. I turned my face away from the rising wave of sludge and at the same instant my face started to sink and my carbide lamp snapped out, my outstretched hands touched something solid. I pulled my knees under me as quickly as possible, raised my body, which was now being shocked by the finely strained mud that had found its way through my coveralls, flannel shirt, and cotton T-shirt. With the grace of a well-tuned frog, I sprang outward, only to repeat the same process just a few inches further down the passage. I don't remember how many leaps it took to make it through; one was more than enough. With my carbide light out and my 6 volt light gone, all I had to aim at were the dimly lit lights of my fellow cavers, whom I could see were standing upright and clinging to each other for support. When I finally arose from the mire I could see plainly what prompted the tremendous outburst of laughter. Never in all my years of caving had I ever seen three more muddy, messier, uglier looking cavers. I too burst into laughter and we all stood around pointed at each other and laughing like fools. Looking back at it now, I guess we were kind of foolish, and I'm not so sure we weren't all laughing so hard just to keep from crying.

We quickly drew what composure we could and turned to see Dobbie repeat the same ritual. Now you see him, now you don't, as he bobbed up and down in that majestic spelunkers' beauty bath. Dobbie, that lucky fellow, got an extra thrill on his way through. On one of his bobs he came face to face with a strange half glowing eye. "Who in the H's light is this?" he hollered. "It darn near scared the crap out of me!" Someone quickly commented that no one would ever know it if it did, and the five of us roared with laughter until we were nearly exhausted.

The exhaustion was now at its worst as we glanced occasionally at the small circle of light nearly 300 feet above our heads. Only the thought of the warm evening air, a hot shower and a good meal kept our spirits alive as we waited our turn to ascend out of this cruel but marvelous pit. There were three ropes shooting sky-

SITES (continued)

ward from the narrow confines at the bottom of Sites pit. One was our main climbing rope. The second was our safety belay rope, and the third belonged to the three gentlemen from Penn. who had dropped into Sites sometime after we had left the drop area. Our telephone line glanced occasionally against the sheer wet walls of the deep hole but had been deliberately pulled out of the line of ascent. Herb, Sam, and one of the Penn boys had already made it to the top. Mide Dobbie was about 180 feet up and was shouting a message to our safety belay man, Dennis Scott, who was anchored to a tree topside. Another Penn caver was about a third of the way up. Danny Briggs, Edd Vanderpool, the third Penn boy and myself were at the bottom, pressed as closely to the sides of the pit as possible. Danny was hooking his Gibbs' to the rope and would start the climb as soon as Dobbie was off and the belay rope was lowered. I was on the phone talking to Robin Vanderpool who handled all the phone equipment from topside. I had just looked back from a quick glance at Dobbie and was relaying his position to Robin when suddenly there was an ear-shattering explosion. I felt myself bounce off the near wall, then suddenly I was scrambling for balance part-way down the steep slope just below the drop point. I tried to open my eyes, but could only see a tiny slit of light. I shut my eyes again and they felt like someone had poured fire into them. The next thing I knew, Edd had hold of my arm and was firing questions at me faster than I could think of the answers. For a minute or so I was about three answers behind, which didn't help any in the confusion. From somewhere, bless his soul, Edd had found a clean hanky or rag and was wiping the mud and grit from my eyes. As I came more to my senses, I realized that I had been struck by a rock. The size of it no one will ever know; however, the force of it was a different matter. It had fallen from somewhere above Dobbie, who at the time it whizzed by him was somewhere between 180 and 190 feet from the bottom. It glanced off the sleeve of the Penn cave who was about 140 ft. up, and slammed full force square in the top center of my hard hat. Or to put it like the rest of the grotto does, right at Charlie's hairline. The force of the rock first pushed the sweatband down over my eyebrows and curled my ears 180°. The foam rubber around the band was full of mud and sweat. This sprayed into my eyes and was what temporarily blinded me.

I had started to move back against the wall just before it struck, so that movement along with the extra boost from the rock was what slammed me into the wall. The area where we were standing was wet and slippery so I must have lost my footing and/or equilibrium and tumbled partway down the steep incline from the drop area. Edd had caught up with me just a few feet down the slope and grabbed my shoulder to stop my slide. When he saw the mess my face and eyes were in, he took the very last and only clean thing left in his utility bag and wiped my eyes with it. It turned out to be the rag bag he carried his spare carbide lamp parts in. The next thing I realized, Edd was trying to get my helmet off. I must have been fighting him or something, because he suddenly blurted, "Stand still, you darn fool, I want to see if you're bleeding." There were no obvious injuries. No cut or scratch or lump or depression. I had started making sense again with my conversation, so I put my hat back on and together with Edd, moved back up to the drop point. However, by the time I reached the ropes I had started to shake uncontrollably. I think it was partly from the fear of what had happened and partly from hypothermia. Anyway, the boy from Penn was the first to notice and suggested to Edd and Danny that they get me on the rope as quickly as possible, or they might end up pulling me up. Poor Danny, he had just finished hooking his last Gibbs to the rope, but didn't hesitate to unhook when he saw how bad I looked.

I must give credit to each of the team members for handling the whole situation they way they did. With their quick thinking and actions they, without a doubt, turned the tide on what was quickly developing into a very serious situation. The biggest credit, however, must be given to my hard hat. It is a regular fiberglass helmet fitted with a four-point hitch and a CH lamp bracket. I bought it from Mr. Ellis at the Speleo Shoppe in Louisville, Ky. I will be ordering a new one before I do my next pit. The one I have now has two one-inch cracks parallel with each other, one inch apart, top dead center of the middle ridge.

TARKILN CAVE

BY LOU SIMPSON

Tarkiln Cave, Elliott Co., Kentucky's longest cave, was mapped by Central Ohio Grotto members during the spring and summer of 1965. The resulting map, drawn by Fred Dickey, was published in sections during that year. Unfortunately, the sections were not quite drawn to the same scale due to photo-reduction or something, and the section with the Waterfall Entrance was possibly never published or surveyed. A party of COG cavers surveyed this missing section in 1976, but the composite map of the cave system has been unpublished until now.

The earliest reference to Tarkiln Cave in the COG Squeaks was in 1960 in an article by Joe Voight.¹ The group entered the Waterfall Entrance and explored upstream and downstream from there, not connecting to any other entrances. Of interest is Joe's description of the passage upstream, since this passage is still unmapped and I haven't explored it: "To the left (upstream) side it leads to a water wall to wall situation where the water appears fairly deep. The space above the water looked like a foot or so for the 20 or 30 feet we could see before it bent to the right and out of sight.

In an August 1964 article Fred Dickey and others explored Tarkiln and Denny Burns² found his Lost Passage by getting lost in it. The group looked briefly at the Insurgence Entrance, and speculated that it might connect by a long wet crawlway to Tarkiln. In the same issue, another trip to Tarkiln written by Denny Burns describes another push upstream from the Waterfall Entrance: "We continued upstream past the Waterfall Pit Entrance to a point where the stream covered the passage floor. Joe Davidson and Denny waded upstream about 75 yards to a sandbank." This party also looked at the Insurgence Entrance and aborted due to thunder.³

The survey of Tarkiln began in July 1964 when Fred Dickey, Bill Brundidge, and Casey Cronk mapped 500' at the Main Entrance.⁴ They also mapped 380' in Sinkhole Cave, which I suspect is the Sink Entrance of the same system. In August 1964 John Bridge, Fred Dickey, Casey Cronk, Jack Droescher, and Deane Kihara mapped 3000', the bulk of the cave system.

If you look at the bit of topographic map showing the cave's location, you will see that it is very near an airport. In August 1964, John Bridge piloted a plane to this airport, carrying as passengers Kihara, Dickey, and Joe Davidson. After a long, difficult trek over rugged terrain, the party mapped Aqua Avenue, but no footage was given in the article.⁵ Another survey trip in May 1965 resulted in an additional 400' of survey around Topless Dome.⁶

In the October 1966 COG Squeaks, Joe Davidson described a push upstream: "With high water in the waterfall, we went upstream in the main passage and it soon turned into a water crouch. This went for about 500' to an apparent siphon and a small side passage. The side passage led to a small pit with no productive leads. I crawled to the apparent siphon. This turned out to be a hands and knees crawl in about 2 1/2 feet of water with a descending ceiling."⁷ Joe crapped out at this point, but implies that it might be worth looking at on a drier day.

In the mid '70's, John Fisk, Rick Shellhammer, and others explored Tarkiln and the associated caves. They pushed the Insurgence Entrance for a considerable distance, encountered deep water. They discovered a small entrance by digging out a blowhole ("F" on the map). This entrance is near a spring, to the right and higher up. There are no written records of this group's activities.

A brief mention was made in the Squeaks of a trip to the abovementioned small cave in the March 1976 issue.⁸ Dave Socky and I explored this wet cave for 100' or so and it appeared to sump. We also looked for entrances down the hollow from Tarkiln. There are some, but they didn't seem to amount to very much. On this trip the missing north section was mapped by Socky, Simpson, Barb Simpson, Carolyn Herel, Dan

1 COG Squeaks, Vol. 3, No. 3, Mar. 1960.

2 Op. Cit., Vol. 7, No. 8, Aug. 1964.

3 Ibid.

4 Op. Cit., Vol. 7, No. 9, Sept. 1964.

5 Ibid.

6 Op. Cit., Vol. 8, No. 6, June 1965.

7 Op. Cit., Vol. 9, No. 10, Oct. 1966.

8 Op. Cit., Vol 19, No. 3, Mar. 1976.

TARKILN CAVE (continued)

Hickman, and Bob Hamilton, amounting to about 500 feet.

Prospects for Extending the Cave

The most obvious prospect is to push the unknown section between the Waterfall Entrance and the Insurgence Entrance. No one has succeeded in making it from entrance to entrance. Possibly a sump exists somewhere. Wetsuits and safe weather are a must. Another loose end is to map the missing sections of water passage (Aqua Avenue). According to Joe Davidson, a party made it through from Waterfall Entrance to Main Entrance, following the water all the way. "The lowest place was 15" high with 9" of water. With our heads turned, one ear was in the water while the other scraped the ceiling!"

Tarkiln Hollow affords a very scenic place to camp. It is not advisable to drive down into the hollow without four-wheel drive, although people have tried.⁹ Cavers with pilot's licenses might consider repeating that adventure. To my knowledge, no one has done extensive cave-hunting in Elliott County.

(See Map on Page 27)

⁹ COG Squeaks, Vol. 13, No. 4, Apr. 1970.

COMPLAINTS

By Bill Walden

It has been brought to my attention that two COG members were responsible for removing a large gypsum crystal from the Treasure Chamber in Wolf River Cave. I would like to remind everyone that it is the policy of COG and the NSS to protect and preserve caves. This includes protecting formations, including crystalline formations, from damage or removal from their natural environment. One crystal might not seem like much, but if several persons remove but one crystal each, the beauty of the cave is permanently damaged for all.

Remember our motto: "TAKE NOTHING BUT PICTURES, LEAVE NOTHING BUT FOOTPRINTS". Expanding on this motto I question even the leaving of footprints! In passing through newly found or well protected decorated passages I often stick to the existing trails or in-

sist that members of the party step in each others' footprints. I remember all too well the pristine whiteness of the White Grotto in Sloan's when Lou Simpson found it and what the "White Grotto" looks like today. The whiteness has given way to the red-brown footprints which not~~w~~totally cover the once-white floor!

Protect our caves! They form a delicate world of beauty and intrigue. Once damaged, the damage is permanent. Once lost or taken, crystals and formations, for all practical purposes, are gone forever!

CAVE RESCUE SEMINAR

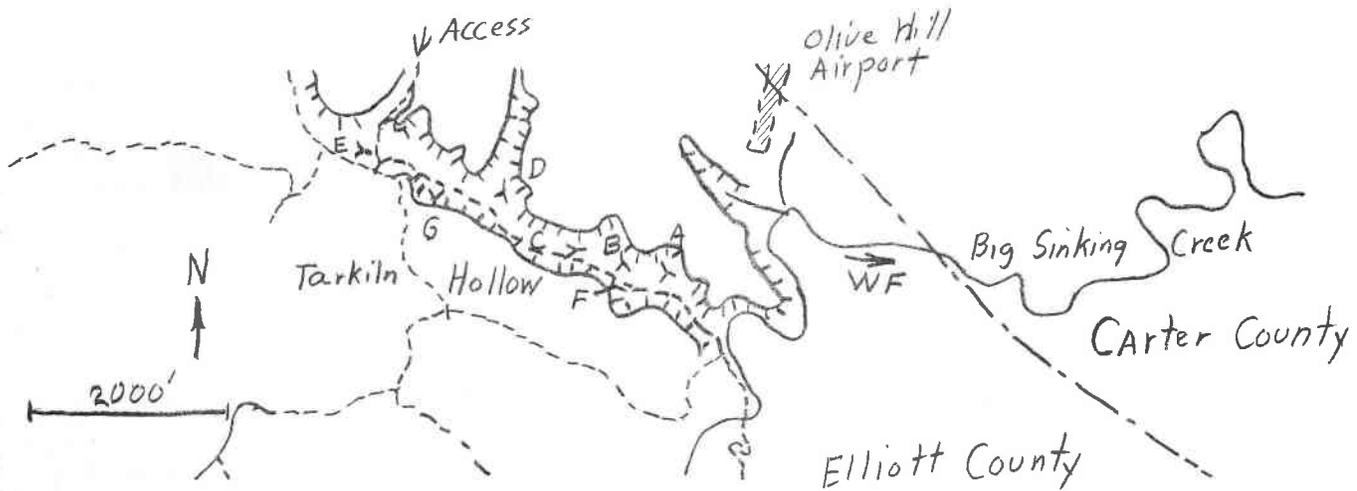
We have been discussing the problems of cave rescue in our latest grotto meetings, and have begun a series of presentations by various knowledgeable people in our midst concerning what the average caver should be prepared to do in an emergency.

We have recently received an announcement of a Cave Rescue Seminar which will be held in Albany, New York, just prior to the NSS Convention in Pittfield, Mass. The dates are July 29-August 4. It will include class and field work in all phases of cave and underground rescue. The class size will be limited to 66 students to provide maximum learning opportunity, so if anyone is interested, registration should be made early. Cost for the course (prior to June 1, 1979,) for NSS members, is \$120, for non-NSS members, \$150. After June 1, \$150 for NSS members, and \$190 for non-NSS members. This course bears 30 units of continuing education from the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians.

Further information can be obtained from National Cave Rescue Seminar, 834 Louise, Petaluma, CA 94952. (Phone (707) 763-4884.

The Fort Knox Recreational Club is having their Cave-In on April 28-29. See last month's Squeaks for the announcement and registration form. (I forgot to bring it to the office with me, sorry.) It sounds like fun, and a good opportunity to get acquainted with some other cavers in the Kentucky area.

PAID YOUR DUES YET ???



KEY

Dotted lines = Jeep trails

Ref: NE Corner Ault Quad.

- A Main Tarkiln Entrance
- B Pulley Pit
- C Sink Entrance
- D Waterfall Entrance
- E Insurgence Entrance
- F Cave investigated 1975 by John Fisk
1976 by Simpson & Socky
- G Small cave in sinkhole

See Also Page 27A for Tarkiln Cave Map.

Don't Forget Meeting

April 6

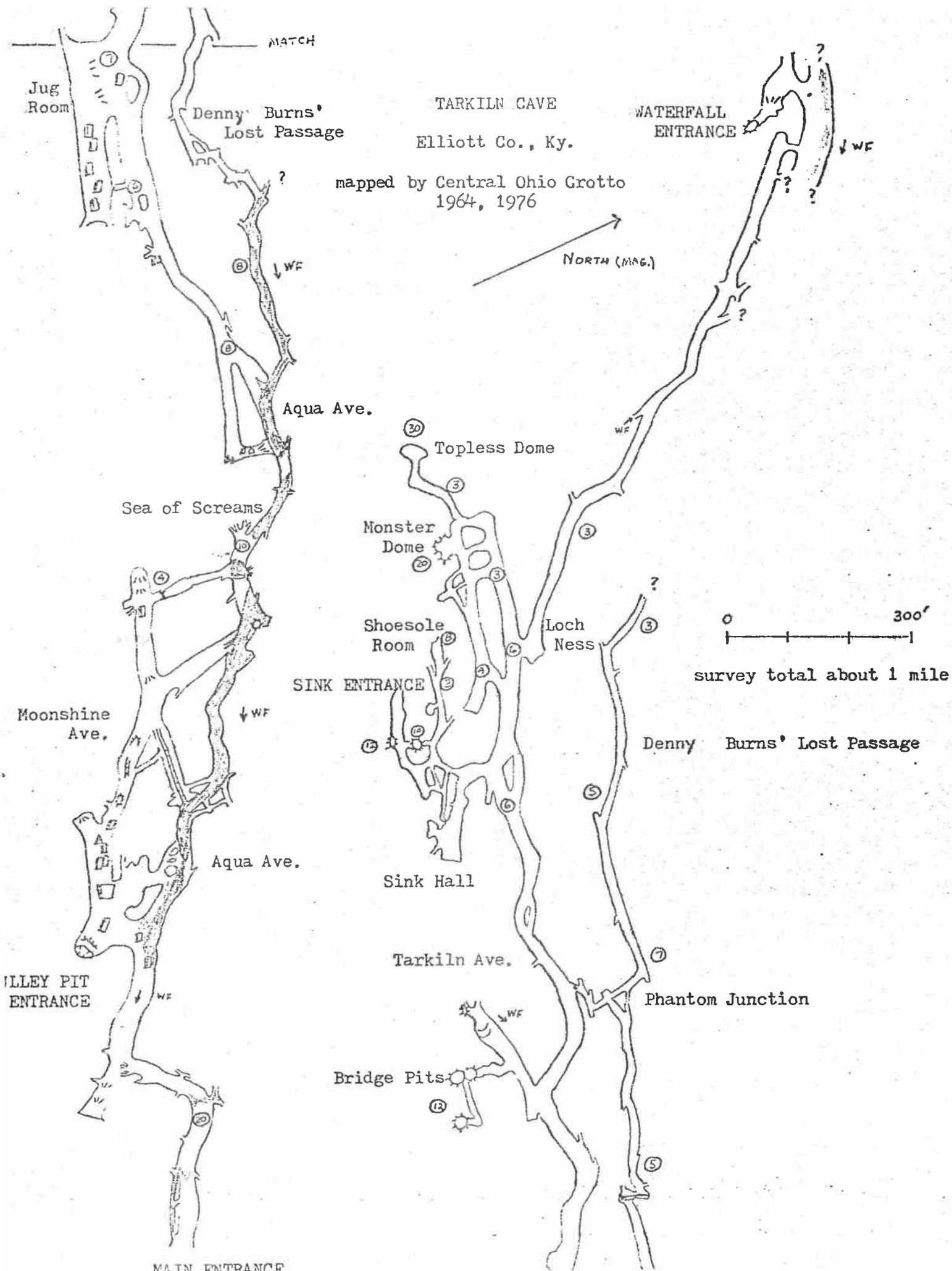
Program

1. Jake Elberfeld
2. Horton Hobbs
3. "Doc" Dougherty

First Aid Demo

Ohio Cave Survey

Region ??



MATCH

Jug Room

Denny Burns' Lost Passage

TARKILN CAVE
Elliott Co., Ky.

WATERFALL ENTRANCE

mapped by Central Ohio Grotto
1964, 1976

NORTH (MAG.)

Aqua Ave.

Topless Dome

Sea of Screams

Monster Dome

Shoeshole Room

Loch Ness



survey total about 1 mile

Moonshine Ave.

SINK ENTRANCE

Denny Burns' Lost Passage

Aqua Ave.

Sink Hall

Tarkiln Ave.

Phantom Junction

VALLEY PIT ENTRANCE

Bridge Pits

MAIN ENTRANCE

CAVE CREEK AFTERTHOUGHTS

BY PAUL UNGER

The U.S. Forest Service, in the Final Draft of the RARE II Environmental Impact Statement, decided not to include the Cave Creek Cave Wilderness Area Proposal as a part of RARE II. It has further recommended no subsequent consideration of this area be made for wilderness designation, and that this area be opened to all uses, including, but not limited to, timber harvesting, mining, and vehicular recreation. The government declined to include the Cave Creek system primarily because of the extensive flooding experienced by a major portion of the system.

This rejection will undoubtedly be met with disappointment by those groups who worked long and hard for inclusion of this proposal in RARE II. But in other ways, the proposal was a success. The USFS recognized that subsurface areas qualify as manageable natural assets under the scope of their jurisdiction which have the attributes classifying them as "wilderness." Before conservationists embark on new wilderness projects, analysis of the Cave Creek rejection is in order, if for no other reason, to identify underlying factors which played a significant part in this rejection.

When the emotional pleas from devout conservationists and terrified residents are removed, the proposal's merits are rather self-evident on the basis of the physical environment. Conservationists seemed to hang their hat on the fact that Cave Creek caves received an almost perfect wilderness rating, much higher than the vast majority of RARE II proposals which were accepted. Little wonder - no roads, no power lines, no residents, etc. - all would rate nearly any cave well above most surface areas. Therefore, it would seem that a cave rating system must be developed if we are to accurately compare subsurface environments with not only other areas of like nature, but more importantly, also with above-ground alternate proposals.

The original proposal apparently contained only praise, but did little to refute the negative or undesirable characteristics present in Cave Creek, which ultimately defeated the proposal. Perhaps only including areas of the cave not affected by flooding would have been sufficient to establish Cave Creek

as wilderness area. Cave conservation, in this case preservation, projects in the past have easily gained broad support among cavers, but not so with Cave Creek. The instigators of this proposal seem to have been virtually the only supporters. The most support any of the local grottos gave was, at best, a lukewarm rubber stamp. Some members, on a past Grotto Conservation Chairman, took a very active and serious part in working successfully for its defeat. Since the supporters of this proposal did not gain active endorsements from local grottos, little is known of why grotto support did not materialize. Fear of local reprisals directed against cavers and attracting attention and traffic to their "private" caving areas certainly played a significant part.

Local residents were predictably against "loss of their homes and land." This fear was further increased by USFS personnel's open, abrasive and often arrogant attitude toward the residents' feelings, both in private conversations and at public meetings. Little wonder the USFS is despised and looked upon with contempt. Until the USFS is willing to conduct itself in a manner befitting a governmental agency, the USFS' antagonistic attitude will retard cooperative efforts among public interest groups.

While "preservation" of any natural environment for present and future generations is desirable, the end is not always justified by the method used in protection. The Cave Creek Wilderness Proposal exemplifies this situation not only on the natural merits, but more significantly, on the social implications. The Society lent its support to this project through its volunteer representative, but this rejection should not be construed as a rejection of the Society's purpose and principles. If the Society supports projects which are dubious at best, then we will not be regarded as anything more than a loose group of cave conservation misfits.

* * * * *

TIME IS RUNNING OUT - IF YOU HAVEN'T PAID YOUR DUES, WE'LL BE CLEANING OUT THE MAILING LIST AGAIN SOON. DON'T MISS A SINGLE BREATH-TAKING ISSUE OF THE SQUEAKS!!!

HORROR HOLE

Fiction

PART 2

BY LARRY BALDWIN

Gathering their courage, Strunk and Zero opened their packs and took inventory of their supplies. Two carbide lamps, three flashlights, six candles, waterproof matches, four bottles of "gorp", and enough carbide to last maybe 48 hours if they used one light at a time, so it looked like they could hold out 2 or 3 days, until their light ran out. Strunk estimated that they had fallen about 1500 feet, an unbelievable drop, since that would put them 300 feet lower than the bottom of the valley made it all the more baffling. Strunk filled his Justrite, hit the striker, and the flickering light gave everything a ghostly glow that sent shivers down their spines. They agreed to follow the red marble wall to the left first, and then back-track the other way if nothing was found. After 3 hours of continuous walking, they were about ready to turn back, when they heard a mysterious moaning sound ahead that made the hair stand up on top of their heads. Their curiosity overcame their fear so they plodded ahead toward the origin of the weird noise. The sight that they beheld was unbelievable. They came upon an arch-shaped hole in the wall, flanked by two black marble

columns. Above the ornate arch was a golden head that resembled an ape, with long pointed teeth and small horns; the eyes were red jewels and in its mouth was what appeared to be a human leg bone. Below the head was ancient writing, which Zero remembered from his college days as being a form of Latin. He started deciphering the message as best he could and it came out thus:

PASS THROUGH HERE, AND THOU WILT SEE
 WONDER OF WONDERS, AND THEN BE FREE
 TURN BACK AND GO THE OTHER WAY
 AND THOU WILT NOT LIVE ANOTHER DAY

The moaning sound was found to be a powerful wind whipping through the arch from somewhere below, which immediately extinguished Zero's light. Strunk held the flashlight while Zero installed his windshield over the burner tip and fired up his Justrite again. Neither was prepared for the sight that appeared before them in the sand - huge footprints with forepaws like a tiger, and human soles and heels leading through the arch and into the black depths below.

(To be continued)

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 c/o Paul Rowley
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