



Central Ohio Grotto Squeaks Blog Supplemental March 2024



Cover photo by Mark Swelstad – Dave Long in the upper levels of Pine Hill.

THE CENTRAL OHIO GROTTO (COG)

The Central Ohio Grotto (COG) of the National Speleological Society meets at 7:00 p.m. the fourth Thursday of most months at the Presbyterian Church on the Square in Worthington, Ohio. Please contact a grotto officer to confirm meeting time and place or better subscribe to the COG list server at cog @ ontosystems.com by sending an email to cog @ ontosystems.com with the subject "subscribe." The meeting site will be announced there and on the Grotto Facebook page.

Check out our Facebook group:

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/centralohiogrotto/>

Check out our website:

<http://www.centralohiogrotto.com/>

Grotto Mailing Address:

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Johnstown, OH 43031 614-496-5345
Email: kd8ion@gmail.com

Grotto Membership Dues:

\$20 per individual or \$25 per family.

The C.O.G. Squeaks

The C.O.G. Squeaks is emailed to dues paying members and to grottoes with which the COG exchanges newsletters. Please send trip reports, caving articles, cave fiction, cave poetry, and cave photos to Mark Swelstad for publication: mswelstad@gmail.com

NSS organizations have permission to reprint material from the C.O.G. Squeaks so long as the author and Squeaks are given credit, unless otherwise stated.

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What's Happening?

From 2019 to 2022, we experimented with using a blog for trip reports, etc., instead of relying solely on a newsletter and Facebook. Believe it or not, not everyone uses Facebook! Aaron Deal (our webmaster) and I (newsletter editor) have agreed to get rid of the blog and are publishing most of the articles from there in a single newsletter. Hope this brings back some memories for some of you! I did leave out some things that were no longer relevant, and there were a couple of videos that I've left out as well.

Enjoy – Mark Swelstad

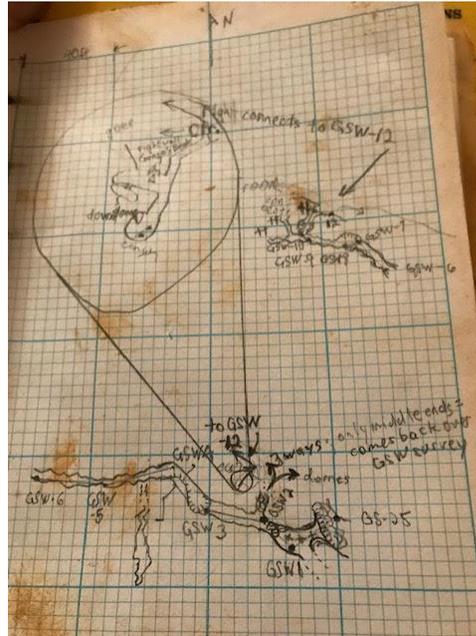
Monday, December 2, 2019
Bowman's Trip Report – Brian Devine

Trip report 11/16 Bowman's Pit; surveying-that-which-I=Brian scooped on connect trip in April.

As the April connection effort was being bolted, I had stayed warm by exploring & left of GS-25; much passage there was then left to survey. Yesterday, Clint, Philip, and I entered at 1pm Saturday in great weather, amid the leavings of close-by logging, to survey that. Once some brush was snapped off, our roped descent and further progress westward was uncomplicated, once underground. We attained GS-25 by 3pm and surveyed westward from there. The ensuing GSW survey mapped my April progress for 175.1 feet and established experientially that our EOS GSW-12 tied back to a cluster of leads off GSW-2 that I'd bypassed in spring.

The cluster of passages near EOS is passably pushed, but the initially bypassed leads, when pursued after Saturday's survey, are partly explored and sketchily mapped. Once Clint had summarized in back-of-the-napkin form those leads, we exited.

The exit trip was uneventful, with an out time putting us in the car & to the Hideout at 1am. The remaining leads are a mix of passages possibly trailing to known northwesterly passage & some southwesterly; all beckon future surveyors....."



Monday, December 2, 2019
Coach Cave Bat Reconnaissance – Bethany Widmayer

In Time: 10:40am

Out Time: 6:00pm

Breakdown of timing reveals Spring Ave haul takes 60" (??), maybe more.

By noon, we had gauged there to have been some footprints near puddled areas, but little drag marks consistent with recent traffic. Just past Cooper's we heard squeaks. By 2 we had dealt w. Bat recon and visited Emperor Pit, and by 3:15 having eaten, were back at cross canyon and continuing to exit.

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- Near Cross Canyon (close to where John saw “gypsum cotton”) – heard the flutter of bat wings
- At Cross Canyon:
 - Thin ribbons of roost stain
 - Large quantities of guano
 - Up to an inch deep in spots
- In large room near 5 IX – saw bat flying
- Shortly after, saw same bat (or different one) – John estimated wing span of 5 inches or more.





Sunday, December 22, 2019
Merry Christmas!

Merry Christmas to those of you who celebrate that holiday and for those of you who don't, enjoy the day off! Hopefully we all get to go caving soon.

Here's a pic from Bill Gort who was with a few people at Sullivan's Cave enjoying a holiday meal caver style....



Tuesday, December 24, 2019
Trip to Pine Hill Cave - 12.14.2019 –
Mark Swelstad

Here are some pics from our recent trip to Pine Hill Cave on 12/14/19. We were underground for about 5 hours and went to the Art Room, a place in the cave I hadn't been to in a long time, and one to which my kids had never been. In addition to my daughter and I, my son brought a couple of his buddies down with him, and we were also joined by Bill Steinhoff, Dave Long, and Bob and Julia Dobbs.

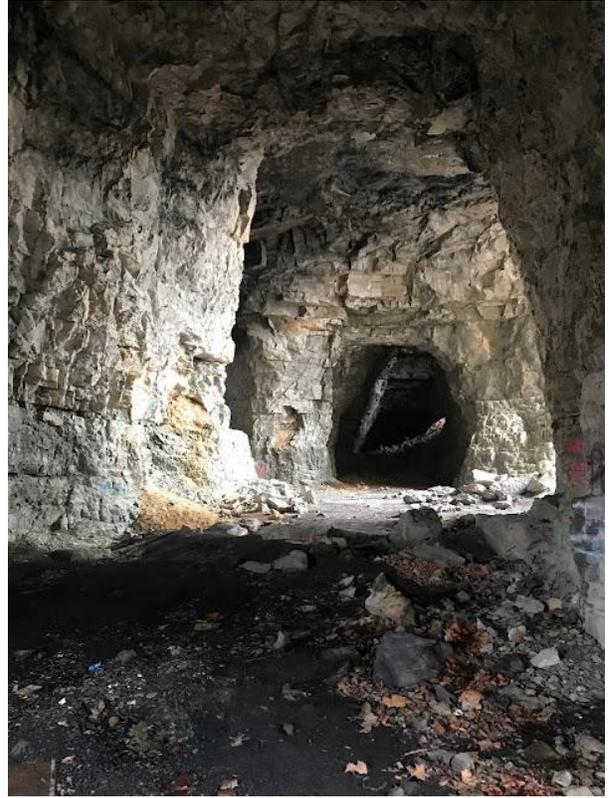
After the cave we enjoyed a meal at the Limestone Grille and then a few of us putzed around at the old quarry off Mullins Station Rd and looked at the Blue Hole resurgence. A good time was had by all. All pictures by Mark Swelstad.



THE CENTRAL OHIO GROTTO (COG)



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Mark & Amanda Swelstad say, 'Bah Humbug!'

Saturday, January 25, 2020
The First Couple of the Central Ohio Grotto

The election results are in and lo and behold, COG has its first husband and wife pair for Chair and Vice Chair! I thought it would be nice to get to know our new power couple!



COG: How did you two meet?

Kim: We met in college (Case Western Reserve University). We lived in the same dorm freshmen year, but we didn't start dating until our sophomore year when we lived in different suites on the same floor. I was hanging out in his suite one night and read a little bit of a paper he had due the next day. It...needed work... So I stayed up with him until 5am helping him to revise the paper. That started off a friendship that turned into dating a few weeks later.

COG: How did you each individually start caving?

Kim: We started caving together, actually! I found out Mammoth Cave offered wild cave tours so I planned a trip there to celebrate our 5 year dating anniversary. I assumed Aaron would use the opportunity to propose so I wanted to make the trip special and memorable. The first day of our trip was the wild cave tour and at one point we entered a

room which the guide said was called Cathedral Domes. He then said, "This is a popular room for men to propose to their girlfriends...any takers?" Aaron then....did nothing. And waited two more years to propose.



COG: What do you guys do for a living?

Kim: Outdoor Adventure Programmer at Columbus Metro Parks

Aaron: Software engineer at Battelle.

COG: What are your favorite caves?

Kim: Pine Hill

Aaron: Pine Hill and Roppel

COG: What are your plans for the grotto?

Kim: Not break anything. Seriously though, I believe the past chairs have set us in a good direction and I'd like to continue that. I'd love to see more people taking on leadership roles.

Aaron: Come up with engaging and interactive programs.

COG: What other hobbies or fun things are you guys into?

Kim: Hiking, backpacking, fishing, kayaking, hanging out with my birds.

Aaron: Soccer and frisbee.



COG: Do you plan to change the bylaws of the grotto to make it so only married couples can be chair and vice chair?

Kim: No, however I would like to explore the possibility of making Patrick Gibson Grotto King which would eliminate any need for a democracy!



Saturday, January 4, 2020
Big Newt Cave - Wayne County KY -
12/31/2019 – Bethany Widmayer

Around 12:30 pm, Chad Leeder, Brian Devine, and I entered the cave via the recently “Bob-ified” entrance. It only took us a few minutes to get to the terminus, which appeared to have additional passage beyond. We just needed to get rid of the rock blocking our way, but we had a nice array of widening tools to help out with that! We also had proximity to the surface in our favor. It was very tight



and “contortion-y” in there, so for about two hours, we decided to move as many of the rocks out of the way as possible from the previous dig to make more wiggle room for us to work. With the help of a plastic bucket and our own strength, we did a not-too-shabby job of rolling, pulling, and stuffing some massive rocks into various nooks and crannies. Next up, a few more hours of widening followed by moving even more massive rocks! Our

widening efforts revealed that there's potentially even more passage to explore!

Sometime around 5:00 pm, we decided to wrap things up and head back to the hideout to ring in the new year. Until next time and happy New Year!



Friday, February 28, 2020
Dig in Elimination Hole - February 4th, 2020

Jason Glancy, Adam Mathis, Angela Pullano -
Elimination Hole - Wayne County, KY.
February 4th, 2020



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Wednesday, April 15, 2020
Salts Cave trip report - Bill Gort

On March 14th 2020 I went on a caving trip to Salts Cave near Mitchell Indiana. Since I live in Columbus Ohio, I had to plan my trip the day before. I went to the Whetstone branch of the Columbus library and printed out a waiver just before the library closed down for Covid-19. I packed my car and set my alarm for 3:30 a.m. The next morning I left Columbus by four and drove to Indiana while listening to the BBC on NPR. The stories were about disease and how Chinese companies are cutting down all the Rosewood trees in Senegal and shipping them out through Gambia.



After skirting around the southern edge of Indianapolis, I arrived at McDonalds, where I met our trip leader, Paul Uglum. We continued on to Mitchell where we met up with Kyle Hoyt, Timothy Trine, and Steve McQueen. Proceeding to the property the cave is located on, we parked in a field next to an old horse barn. By this time it had begun to

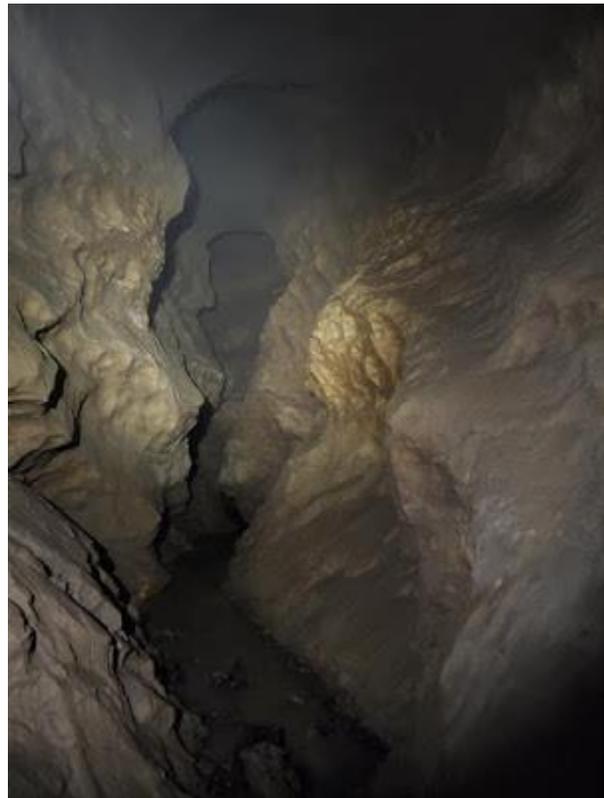
rain. We used the shelter of the barn to change into caving gear, before heading across a field and into the woods to a sinkhole. At the bottom of the sinkhole, we ducked under a ledge and entered the cave.



The initial part of the cave was relatively dry walking passage. As we went further in, conditions got wetter and muddier. Eventually we dropped down and found ourselves walking in a stream passage in an upstream direction. This passage became narrower and turned into a canyon. We had to turn sideways to squeeze between the curvaceous undulating walls. In at least one place we saw blind crayfish in the stream.

At the end of the narrows, the stream passage got wider and we began to negotiate a series of steep muddy climb ups and climb downs. Steps had been carved into the mud, but one had to be very careful so as not to go sliding down a slick slope and collide with a rock. Our efforts were occasionally rewarded with views of formations including flowstone, draperies, and helictites. In the back of the cave, we found a room with a circular domed ceiling. The stream led to a short low crawl ending in a sump. In order to confirm that the passage sumped I got down on my belly and crawled in the water until I reached a spot where I could sit up and see the sump.

On the way back out of the cave, I decided to see how many of the treacherous muddy climbs I could avoid by crawling in the stream. I was already wet so I didn't mind trying this. I found that almost all of the slippery exposed sections could be bypassed by crawling in water. After passing through the narrows and returning to the entrance we walked across the field and changed into dry clothes.



During the time we were in the cave, it had continued to rain and the ground became softer. After Paul left, we found that two of our remaining cars were stuck in the mud. We found some shingles in the barn and tried placing them under the tires for traction, but this did not do much good. The two non-stuck cars were Subarus which have all wheel drive and consequently had no problems. I remembered that my car had a towing bolt which could be screwed into the bumper. I had never used this, but decided to give it a try.

One of the other guys had a long piece of webbing. The towing bolt has a ring on the end, so we tied one end of the webbing through that, and the other end to the other vehicle (a van). To my surprise, this actually worked and I was able to tow the van out of the muddy field and down the driveway. The other Subaru driver then installed his towing bolt and used his Forrester to free the other stuck car.

After resolving the automotive issues, we bid each other farewell. I then drove to a coffee shop in Bedford where I rewarded myself with blueberry pancakes and coffee.

Editor: All photos by Kyle Hoyt



Wednesday, April 15, 2020 **GSP Closure - Please Read**

From the desk of GSP Chairman Scott Pavey:

Tonight, the GSP Committee voted on and approved the following:

Effective immediately, GSP will be closed until May 8th due to Coronavirus and in compliance with government recommended restrictions. We will reevaluate the situation at that time. The lock will be changed during this time as well.



Tuesday, August 18, 2020 **Baby's First Trip to GSP**

We did an overnight at Great Saltpetre Preserve (GSP) with our 10-week old baby, Elliott. We arrived around mid-afternoon on Friday and set up camp. I've never brought so much stuff camping in my life. I wanted to "rough it" so no electronic toys were allowed. But I just couldn't give up my nursing pillow. After loading him up in a carrier, we hiked to the creek and took a few minutes to dip in our toes.

Elliott did not appreciate the cold water, but he liked looking around. After that we hiked up a trail that led from the backfield to the top of the hill near the cave. There were lots of ticks so as soon as we returned we went to the shower to scrub down and check for any

missed ticks. Elliott got checked twice but he didn't get any.



Aaron went caving in Pine Hill so I took over baby duty at the camp site. Camping went really well. He woke up a little more than usual because it's really hard to be quiet in a tent. Each time he woke he got a layer changed or added so he ended up in a fleece sleeper and mittens by morning. I, on the other hand, hardly slept at all and constantly worried he was too cold or getting dripped on since we didn't put the rain cover on the tent and the trees were dripping water. (He was perfectly fine and never complained).



The next day after packing up camp, Elliott went on his first cave trip in GSP! It was a quick tour because we had to get on the road and he was hungry. I stayed near the pig pen as the others explored Russian Dome. I was reading a sign and learned that the area was possibly haunted. But I convinced myself that no ghost would be mean enough to bother a mom with a baby. After spending some time in Echo Auditorium we made our way to Fat Man's Misery where Elliott decided he was tired of waiting to be fed. If you've never tried to squeeze your way through a tight passage with a crying infant, you can count yourself lucky. As soon as he can crawl we'll start prepping him for his first wild cave trip!





Monday, October 5, 2020

**Trip Report - 9/11-9/13/2020 Bowman's Pit;
Camp re-charge & Walden Room
Abigail Mack, Phillip Francis, Darryl
Marsh, Brian Devine (reporting)**

We had some divergence from the planned rendezvous, i.e. meeting at the landowners ready to salvage last light for the hike to the cave, and ultimately had just left the car after 9pm. Then, the orienteering along the dark path got scrambled and we were pretty quickly reduced to looping back to the car as last known point once we had found Buck Creek and established our directional sense again. It was only 12:30 before Brian started to drop Bowman's, and Phil was last off rope at 00:50 when we started out to camp. We would feel the ripple effects of this late start as our objectives got compromised, but would do it all over again. The revisit at the car definitely gave a pretext to guzzle more water against the soupy, August heat.

We arrived at camp at 04:30am and deployed to the various, sandy flat spots at MZ8's camping footprint & promptly got some sleep. There was no real push to collectivize a wake-up time, and personally I figured I'd let my body dictate when I'd feel recharged.

Unfortunately the upshot of the variance in wake-ups was a departure time at 12:35, initially to visit The Source (=vestigial remains of the downcutting waterway that

formed local passage) to fill up our water containers and dump liquid waste. The refill went great, and an idea I'd had to bring a length of garden hose and siphon into containers got them absolutely full of undisturbed water, which we then treated with iodine. By 2:30pm we grabbed the bags we had shed while refilling, stashed the water for later reversion to camp, and by 4pm were up in MT survey effectively above The Source, en route to the Walden Room.

Our objectives there were to splinter the four of us into a bolting and a digging twosome, and (respectively) deal with beckoning passage up the north wall & groom a window in a ceiling shale layer to get up and through. With a 5pm Walden Room arrival however, and remembering how wobbly our decision-making became in last night's wee-hours camp approach, we scaled back our objectives considerably. My personal recall of the bolting objective was actually an amalgam of 2 passages, and this amalgam drove my planning. Yet the actual climb projected as more involved and not particularly enticing as a breakout possibility. We did some scouting, explored a bit, and decided to devote energy reserves to falling back to camp and the water transport that would require.

We made it back to camp by 8:30pm with enough water cached to fill most of two big 'cubes', a smaller Platypus, and several bottles amongst us. I finished off the remnants of that morning's breakfast and enjoyed a nice wind-down to lay out the sleeping gear, steam off some dampness in my suit, and prep to bed down. The 2nd night's sleep afforded me some bonus sleep, since I think I awoke around 6 & fell back asleep for a nap before the alarm. At 9:15am, we left camp in a condition of very high readiness and organization, with recharged water, stove fuel, desiccant, supplemental gear, and a current inventory. The trip out, like the trip in, was pretty uneventful except I, as last exiting caver, had to descend & re-ascend the pit to

unhitch a snag right when it looked like the only thing left was to coil rope.

Tuesday, July 13, 2021

Virgin Cave Ahead! Trip Report - Bethany Widmayer

Coach Trip Report 5/30/21

Participants: Brian Devine, John Sies, Bethany Widmayer

Objectives:

- 1) Rappel into a newly opened hole at survey marker II 40,
- 2) Check for bats and note their locations.

Trip synopsis:

During our approximately 11 hour trip we bolted the initial drop into virgin passage after finding the hexcentrics we brought were just a little too large to be used as temporary anchors. We surveyed just short of 60' of passage at the bottom with a little more that can be easily accessed needing to be surveyed. There is a promising lead going down but it will require some modification of several rock ledges to permit access to humans.

No bats were seen in any portion of the cave that we traveled through.

All pictures thanks to Bethany Widmayer.

Perspective: This trip was a follow-up trip after finding a new pit had formed at the bottom of a known depression deep inside Coach Cave. The trip also came after an almost 2 year absence from Coach cave and limited caving for all of us participating in this trip due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We really started this trip with low expectations and a number of potential issues. The common thought among all of us was that we likely would be dropping a nuisance pit into a single room with little or no new passage. We also were all tired from leading trips for Speleofest in the days previous to this trip, had been warned by Charlie that we would likely have issues removing the plate

that protected the lock due to rusting resulting from limited use in the previous 2 years, and had at least some worries about the state of wetness in Spring Avenue after a couple of days of rain just previous to this trip.

Thankfully, in the end, none of these issues/worries played any real role in our trip.

Report: Sunday morning May, 30 2021 was a comfortably warm, dry day in central Kentucky. We arrived at the Coach entrance around 10 am local (central) time and proceeded to gear up for the long trip ahead while exhorting each other sarcastically other about how "great" this trip would be. This talk was capped off when I offered both Bethany and Brian some prophylactic Ibuprofen for the aches and pains we all knew would be coming long before this trip had ended.

The gate was reasonably easy to open (for Brian), steel plate notwithstanding, as Charlie had previously removed the more difficult of the two locks. We did take some time to clear a significant amount of dirt, debris, and leaf litter directly in front of the gate to make it a little easier to open and close. The sleds were parked in the usual spot just before the bathtub and ready for the long grating journey to Lea's Loft (and Used Sled Emporium) over a reasonably dry Spring Avenue that was only wet in a 12" ring at the very lowest spot inside the bathtub. No bats were seen anywhere near the entrance or throughout Spring Avenue even though we saw a great deal of roost stain.

In a change from previous trips, all of us brought large volume packs filled with vertical gear, survey gear, a drill, rope, multiple means to rig the drop, and other group items. In spite of the larger packs that we dragged not only through Spring Avenue on sleds, but also through the sand from Lea's Loft to Cross Canyon, we made good time to our objective at survey marker II 40.

Reaching Cross Canyon, I got turned around briefly and tried to go down the IX survey rather than the II survey that we should have been following. Brian scouted ahead in the

correct direction while I looked in the wrong direction just far enough to both realize I was going the wrong way and that there were, indeed, no bats in the room where we most commonly have found them in that part of the cave. There were, in fact, no bats seen anywhere in the cave during the entire trip.

Brian got us back on route and moved far ahead of Bethany and I, stopping around a corner to comfortably repose with his 6'+ frame across nearly the entire passage, feigning sleep. Coming on this sight, I did my very best narrator voice for a wildlife program and started talking about finding the rare and elusive "Subterranean Sasquatch". Bethany giggled and Brian quickly moved back into full crawl/drag mode towards our objective that was only a short ways ahead.

A handful of stations away from II 40 Bethany stopped in front of me and said, "So. Many. Spiders!". I crawled up to find a spot where there were no less than 3 spiders all with webs and one of the with what appeared to be a large, white egg sack that it (she?) was guarding. Bethany also noted what appeared to be many discarded spider legs on the sandy floor of the cave beneath each of the webs. Bethany captured a number of photos of the spiders at this stop and more of the same were seen a little further on in the same passage, again at the actual opening that we were to drop into and also inside the newly entered passage at the bottom of the drop we completed. Bethany managed to grab a few pictures of the arachnids.



Not long after we reached survey marker II 40 and our hole that we had not seen in nearly 2 years was still there. Not only was the hole still there but the overall depression in which it was located had become larger in diameter and looking below we could now see that a very tight canyon passage floored the drop that had looked relatively smooth on our previous trip.

Everyone opened their packs and started to get gear out. I removed the roughly 80' of

rope I brought and a set of hexcentrics normally used for anchoring by rock climbers in hope of using them as a conservation friendly way of rigging what might be only a quick drop with no really passage below. Brian removed his rock hammer to be used for slightly enlarging the opening to make it as easy and safe as possible to get into and out of the narrow fissure of an opening on rope. Bethany had her camera at the ready to document what we were doing.



The first thing I did was grab Brian's rock hammer and comment, "You've got a cute little hammer there!" (I normally use a 3# sledge in cave). Since it was in my hand, I started to pound away at the ragged edges of the entrance to the pit where it was narrowest. Leaving Brian hammerless, he started to scout around for where we might rig using the hexes. He found a likely spot and traded me the hammer back for the hexes. His spot was a no-go as my smallest hex was just a little too

large. I found a second spot close by but it also was just a bit too small to fit a hex. In the mean time, Brian was going to town on the rock projections with his hammer raining small sparks as he worked.



Realizing there was no place to use the hexes for rigging I put them away about the same time that Brian got out the drill and Bethany produced the battery from her pack. Brian picked a spot for a bolt, explained why he thought it was a good choice and asked Bethany and I if it looked good. We concurred and helped to make sure he had the correct angle from our disparate angle of view and the bit started to sink into the rock.

As Brian worked on our anchor point with Bethany's assistance at various points in the process, I got the rope completely untangled, fished a 'biner from my pack and sorted my personal vertical gear out. I also grabbed the descender from my pack that Brian would be borrowing from me for this trip. By the time I had my gear completely on, the two of them had set the bolt and hanger in place and were rigging the rope.



An interesting side note about our gear was that a good portion of what we used for this particular trip is designed for and/or used in canyoneering rather than caving. The packs that Both Bethany and Brian brought were large and tubed shaped, made from PVC, and featured grommeted bottoms to allow for the drainage of water which is pretty typical of canyoneering packs. My pack was a Lost Creek Gorilla pack that I had custom built with a PVC bottom, also with grommets in it for use on a trip to the canyons in and around Zion National park a few years previous. To save weight, the rope I brought was a very low stretch, 8.3 mm rope made from polyester that was purchased from a canyoneering site. Rather than using relatively heavy, bulky, rappel racks for what appeared to be a short descent I brought an aluminum Sterling ATS for myself, lent Brian a Petzl Pirrana - both canyoneering descenders - and Bethany

brought a small aluminum figure 8 which is also very typical of canyoneering. I clipped into the rope with my QAS and threaded my ATS for descent and called, "On rope!". Even though we had widened the entrance to the drop it took me a moment to wiggle my body through the opening to fully bring my descender into play. It took all of 10 seconds to do the nuisance drop and then I was down. Calling, "Off rope!" I started looking around, I had dropped into a canyon passage that was about 5-6' across and I could see that it stopped at a rock wall 20' to my right (roughly south) and looking around the corner the other direction I could see there was perhaps another 30' or so before the passage ended (roughly north).



The really interesting part was that I could see through the crack in the floor to multiple small ledges below me but I could not get my light into the right place to see a bottom. I finally took my helmet off and angled it into the

crack deeper than my head would fit and I could see what appeared to be a slightly sloped mud bottom about 30' below me. I dropped a small rock near at hand and heard, "clatter, clatter, clatter, thunk!". I could not see where the rock had landed and there had been a considerable pause after the clattering sound had ended. I could hear Bethany and Brian were getting their vertical gear on above me and they were taking their time so I grabbed the extra 50'+ of rope and carefully fed it down the hole where I could see the "bottom". The rope hit that and then continued to disappear while being gently pulled out of my hands by gravity. I have no idea if the rope ever reached bottom!

My companions were now fully geared for the drop and the Brian got out his trusty Disto-X and together he and I searched for a spot where he could take a shot from an existing survey marker in the passage above and get us onto something that would start things off below from a good spot. Luckily, the nearest survey point was almost dead on above our hole and a good sized rock that rose about a foot off the true floor of the canyon I was in was in line for the shot. I marked our new survey point and Brian booked it and then they both descended to join me.

Upon getting down, Bethany took over the job of point and picked the next station. Brian's immediate question was what we should designate the survey. Bethany and I quietly discussed this matter while Brian started to setup his book for the sketch. We decided on the designation DSW for Devine, Sies, Widmayer. Brian, concentrating on his book misheard us and Bethany repeated it and I added that we were busy shopping for shoes while he was taking his time setting up for survey. The joke was lost on Brian as he kept scribbling away.

We only set a total of 4 points for this quick survey. Our first point was the drop from the passage above at survey marker II 40 to a boulder wedged into the crack on the bottom of the new passage for 20.1'. With an estimated passage height of roughly 7' in the overlying passage and the boulder at the bottom standing about 1' off the floor, the drop is only about 14'. We also took 2 shots roughly to the south that terminated the passage in that direction and one shot to the north that will allow us to complete the survey with only another shot or two in that direction but that will also allow us to get into a short crawl just below where we were surveying. Total survey was 59.4".

It is not clear if the crawl below the newly surveyed passage will allow us to just move laterally below the current survey a short distance or if we might be able to drop below another of the ledges. I suspect the real payoff for this new passage will be removing enough of the rock projections from several shelves below this passage to see where the rocks we dropped end up. While Brian sketched, Bethany and I pulled up the rope from the first spot that I had fed it into and fed it into a new hole that she had spotted that also went to the lowest spot that could be seen from our vantage. This hole had the benefit of being in line with the natural hang of the rope from the bolt above. The rope, again, pulled via gravity out of my hands and hit no discernible bottom after only a brief hang up on a small ledge. My best guess is that there is a pit of unknown depth that is slightly offset from the narrow canyon passage in which we were surveying. No air movement was felt from the crack in the floor but it is rare that we have felt air movement anywhere in Coach.

After our short recon and survey we ascended back into the upper passage where most of our gear was located. We took our time getting out of vertical gear, stowing what we would not

need for the trip out, and getting a quick bite to eat before heading toward the surface.

The trip out was relatively uneventful. We made a brief stop just outside of Cross Canyon for a breather and a snack. We stopped at Lea's Loft where I made sure to drink the better part of a bottle of Powerade to stave off leg cramps I had suffered on a previous trip through the 1000' foot crawl of Spring Avenue. I paced myself on the crawl as I was exhausted from 3 days of caving. I think my two friends probably appreciated this as they also were exhausted. Brian entertained us by keeping a running count of how many drag cycles of the sleds it took us to reach the bathtub, letting us know the new total every time we stopped to rest. Final tally was 325, ugh!

We exited the cave just before 10 pm local time for a trip of roughly 11 hours total in cave.

A return trip to this area is being planned for Labor Day weekend. I (John) may drop some supplies at the far end of Spring Avenue in support of this objective in early August while working with Mammoth Cave Restoration Camp/James Cavers to remove wood and other debris from the cave.

Sunday, May 1, 2022

Skert Well - Brian Devine & Lee Florea

On a perfect early spring weather Saturday, March 26, Lee Florea, Sarah Burgess, Nathan Canaris, and Brian Devine entered the Skert Well entrance to the Sulfur Mountain System around 11am. The goal was to revisit leads in the Moonage Daydream Borehole. Nathan had some residual leads checks to do dating from some 2017ish trips, and Sarah and Lee had been availing themselves of multilevel passage to survey for several trips by this point.

We added almost 1,300 feet of new survey, bringing the total of the system to 9.24 miles (9.5 miles with Eaton Spring and Red Altar added). At present, the cave is ranked 86th in the US and 17th in Kentucky. None of the 2017 revisited lead developed enough to do more than just need survey from Nathan and Brian, and team 2 had targeted a big bunch of stuff previously on visits, and contributed the lion's share of footage.

At the last waterfall in the Lost World, Nathan and Brian spend a bit of time installing a quasi-Tyrollian webbing traverse with the single bolt brought, to help reduce water saturation. Note...this works better on the way down. Climbing up still presents some challenges, and in fairness it needs to feel like you're doing the Fosbury Flop going up the rope & it's abnormal feeling.

Lee and Sarah started from where they ended their survey in January. Starting at F25, they added another 419 feet in the Moonage Subdream GF13-GF22. This passage flirts with the F survey above and eventually merges upstream near UF2. Sarah pushed a lead at GF21 with a chert ceiling that needs modification. This lead was trending downward and east of known cave.

Next, Lee and Sarah returned to GF5 and surveyed the active stream level, the Moonage Wetdream. In this GU survey, they added 525 feet. Downstream, this ties into the G survey from years ago that leads toward the terminal sump. Upstream, this passage weaves below the F and GF surveys. At GU 14, ponded, deep water prevented further advance. Dry season work with expectations of immersion should tie this passage to the cascading water observed at UF5 and from the Lost World at F13. Back at GU8, an infeeder, the GT survey likely carries the water coming in from the FU survey at F25. This needs survey.

In the meantime, Nathan and Brian appended more than 350 feet ahead and above the end of F35 in an infeeder above a flowstone mound. Both the FU and F35x surveys appear to bringing additional water from the northwest, a great direction to keep pushing further. At a streamway near their EOS it was possible to hear the other team through a wet crawl neither duo tackled. Lee/Sarah had already qui the area by the time N & B began exiting. I/Brian was last out at maybe 9:15pm, dragging behind Nathan by 40'' in large part due to time to peel a base layer before I got sweat-logged after topping the rope out of the 1st dome room. I thereby avoided a serious bleed of electrolytes that can typify heavy perspiration, and the awful cramping that can then kick in during sleep after trips.

Author's note/Brian:

Lessons learned:

- A rubber band that keeps Velcro sleeve cuffs static would be smart, to thwart mud.
- BRING a PANTIN with any amount of rope this adjacent to walls, not to mention the long, penultimate climb heading out.
- Yoga is pretty good mindfulness training to keep the old wits when no hard cave trips for two years FYI