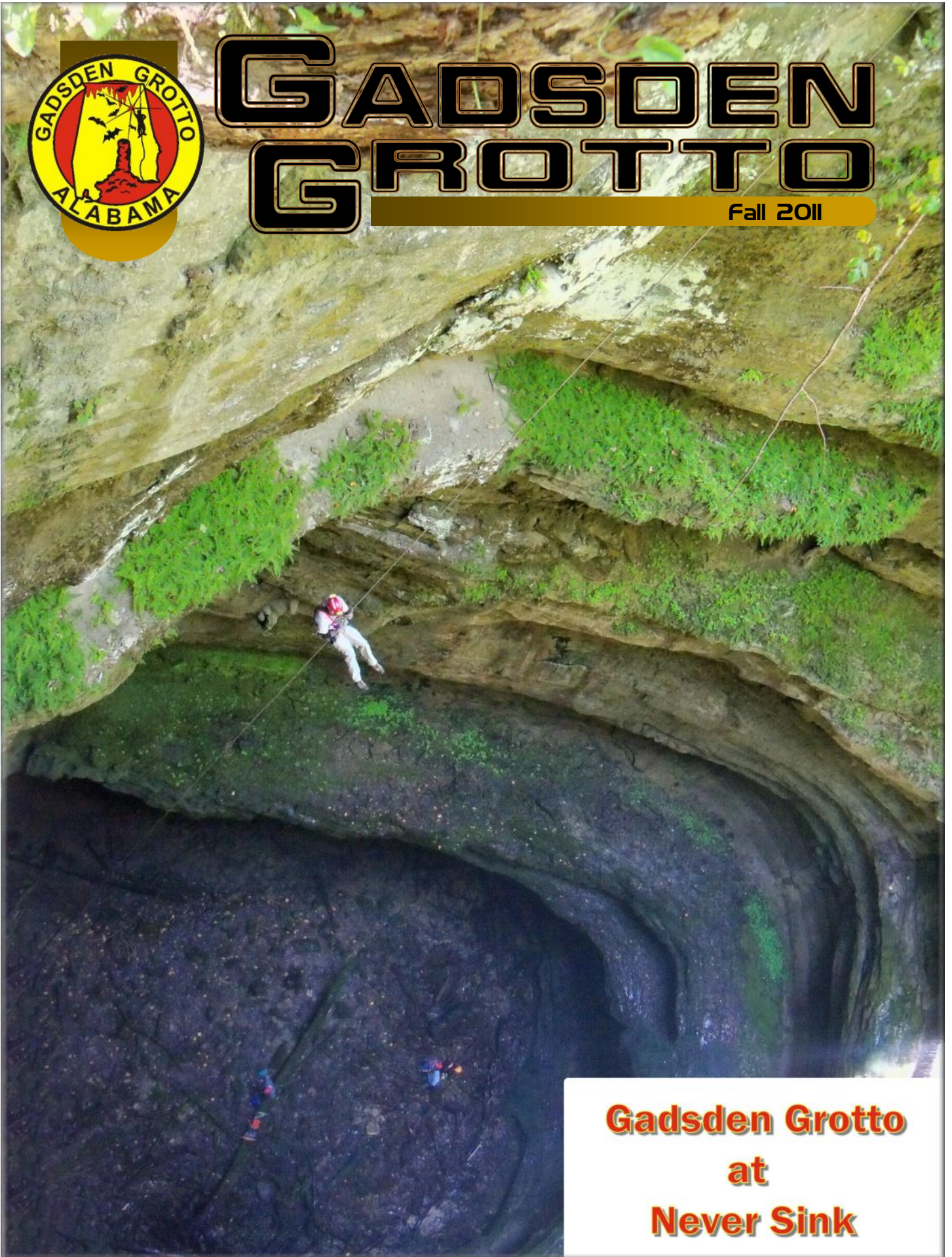




GADSDEN GROTTTO

Fall 2011



**Gadsden Grotto
at
Never Sink**

GADSDEN GROTTO

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NEWSLETTER

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All original materials submitted for publication will be returned to sender. Electronic materials will not be returned. Digital photographs need not be greater in size than 800 pixels wide.

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WEB PAGE

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Summary of Meetings

June - October Gadsden Grotto Meeting

The grotto is pursuing a company to make car decals and magnets of the Gadsden Grotto logo. First test run of grotto stickers was unsuccessful so the search continues. The stickers from zazzle.com were given a test run by 5 grotto members and 4 out of those 5 have either fallen off completely or started to roll up and wrinkle.

Bobby Whorton donated a 35mm slide projector with case to the grotto. Michael Ray purchased a LED video projector for the use of the grotto which will someday become grotto property. Caretaker of grotto equipment was designated as Michael Ray.

The grotto agreed to help Gary Stewart's wife with a yard sale when it is scheduled.

Grotto trips during the late summer and fall were to Neversink in August and to Bluff River in October. A rope training workshop was held at Cherokee Village on Sunday, October 23rd. Many members attended the event. Thanks go to all who attended and helped make the session a great success. September's program was a photo presentation from various members of their cave trips. The October program was from Expeditions at the Edge video by Benjamin von Cramon featuring the reenactment of the rescue at McBride's cave back in 1997.



Neversink Pit Grotto Trip

Photo by Sharon Brewer

Pictured from left to right standing: Sharon Brewer, Michael Ray, Michael Elston, Stephen Brewer, and Wendy Fletcher. Pictured from left to right kneeling: Anthony Cline, Shanon Richey and Art Molter

PHOTO CREDITS

Front Cover:

Photo by Michael Elston. Neversink grotto trip. Michael Ray on rope.

Back Cover:

The "Big Boy" flowstone cascade. Photo by Alan Cressler, subject is Emily Davis. Article reference is on page 5.



CAVE BIOLOGY

Blind White Crayfish

by: Horton Hobbs, Ph.D

Crayfish are an old group. They've been around a long time. And one that has, pretty much, no eyes is an obligate, highly specialized organism. There are around 41 or 42 species of blind, white crayfishes. They may look very spindly and very dainty and, and weak, but in reality these things are pretty tough. Out here the local streams will have crayfishes that live two and a half to three years maximum, that's their life history. But blind crayfishes kick it up to 50,



60, 70 years, or more. I think it's part of the adaptations that, you know, we think of some of these very elaborate traits that we begin to see appearing in obligate organisms,

some of which include longevity. But loss of eyes, loss of pigments, those are really sort of characteristic things that occur across these major groups of organisms. So it's in response to moving underground into that type of environment.

To see an organism that has given up so much to live in this environment and altered everything that we think of as a classic surface form to show some of these derived traits that they have, that are so different from the surface things. And how they modify their life history. It's sort of this channeling of the speleo-environment that you end up producing organisms that have so many of these similar sorts of traits and I think a lot of it can be certainly traced back to the energetic problem.

You're looking at an environment that has limited energy. They have to make a little bit of food go a long way and anything organic. And so what we're talking about primarily in these caves would be leaves and sticks and acorns and walnuts and things like that. And they're getting something from eating that vegetative material, but where they're really gaining their energetic kick is from the microbial community. And it's sort of like the analogy of having a saltine cracker and you eat that and you get a little something, it tastes okay, and you get a little kick from it. But if you take a big slab of peanut butter and you go across it, and eat it then you're really getting the energy. You're really getting something for the effort. And in essence that's what happens. The microbial community that begins to coat and break down organic materials, that's the peanut butter and that's where they're getting the, the real kick.

From: <http://cavebiota.com/transcripts.htm>



TRIP REPORTS

Rivertop Drop AJK 4351

By: Stephen Brewer

It was a cool spring morning in March of 2010, and I was solo ridgewalking on the western slopes of Sand Mountain. I had walked much of the upper elevations around the limestone-sandstone contacts, and was getting discouraged because most of my finds were small and insignificant pudholes. So for a change of scenery, I decided to head down to the lower elevations, in hopes of maybe finding a horizontal cave just above the lakeshore. When I got down around 800 feet, I stumbled across a small pit about 40 feet deep that appeared to be nothing but a dead-bottom pit. It was still not what I was looking for, so I headed down closer to the lake and soon found myself on a bluff about 100 feet above the water. "A nice view," I thought, but any horizontal caves were probably going to be found at the base of the bluff, and not up at the top. The drop-off was too steep to free climb down, so I made my way along the length of the bluff, hoping to find a way down. Then, to my surprise, I spied a small, rectangular-shaped hole that went straight down. I found a rock to drop into it, and the sound that reverberated made my heart start beating faster. My light revealed a ledge about 12 or 15 feet below, but I could not make out much beyond that. So I rigged my 38 foot rope, and tied a knot near the end, since I was fairly certain that it wouldn't be long enough. Before I descended, I called my wife on my cell and gave her my coordinates and let her know what I was doing. The hole was a little tight at first, but once I reached the small ledge, it opened up a little and had a nice display of stalactites. Just below this was the end of my rope, but at this point I could see a large room opening up and at least another 50' to the floor. I changed over and climbed back out, full of excitement and anticipation. I could hardly wait to go back and find out what was down there!

(Continued on page 4)



Decorations along the way down the entrance pit.

Trip Reports continued....

The next weekend the return trip was made, but this time I had some company. The party consisted of: Lin Guy, Tom Whitehurst, and Jeanie Johnston. First, we (Lin, Tom, and I) dropped into the 40-ish foot pit that I later named "Windflower Well." I also surveyed it, and it qualified as a



Descending the entrance pit
Photo by Jeff Davis, subject is Elliot Stahl

cave, although just barely. Then we headed down to the bluff to look at the main attraction. Lin and I were the only ones to descend, and I surveyed as I went. The pit turned out to be 72 feet deep, with a large and very nicely decorated room below.

At the southeastern end of the room was a window about 13 feet up with a flowstone cascade coming out of it. The window was about three feet in diameter, and we could only make out that there was some nice flowstone in the room above. After we climbed out, Lin and Tom asked me if I had seen another nearby hole in a wash/gully area. I wasn't sure if I had or not, but it appeared to choke, although it had a little air flowing out of it. Lin and I discussed possible names for the new cave, and I said it should have something about the river in it. He suggested "Top of the River Cave." While I liked that, I wanted

something a little catchier sounding. Later that week I settled on the name "Rivertop Drop."



Looking up into the unknown. Photo by Lin Guy

I pondered all week as to how to get up and through the window, and finally decided that a ladder would be the best way. But hauling a ladder from the top of Sand Mountain (1400') to the cave entrance 1.5 miles away at approximately 700 feet was out of the question. So instead we decided to carry lumber and materials on our canoe across the lake.



Hauling the ladder-making materials on the canoe
Photo by Sharon Brewer

When we (my wife and I) got to the bluff, I found a way to climb up and rigged a rope. We hauled the lumber and materials up the bluff, and then Sharon climbed up the rope as well. I then lowered the 2x4's down the drop, along with the rungs and a bag containing the hammer and nails.

After constructing the ladder on the floor of the cave, I set it up and it was long enough, but just barely.

(Continued on page 5)

Trip Reports continued....



Preparing to lower down the ladder-making materials.
Photo by Sharon Brewer

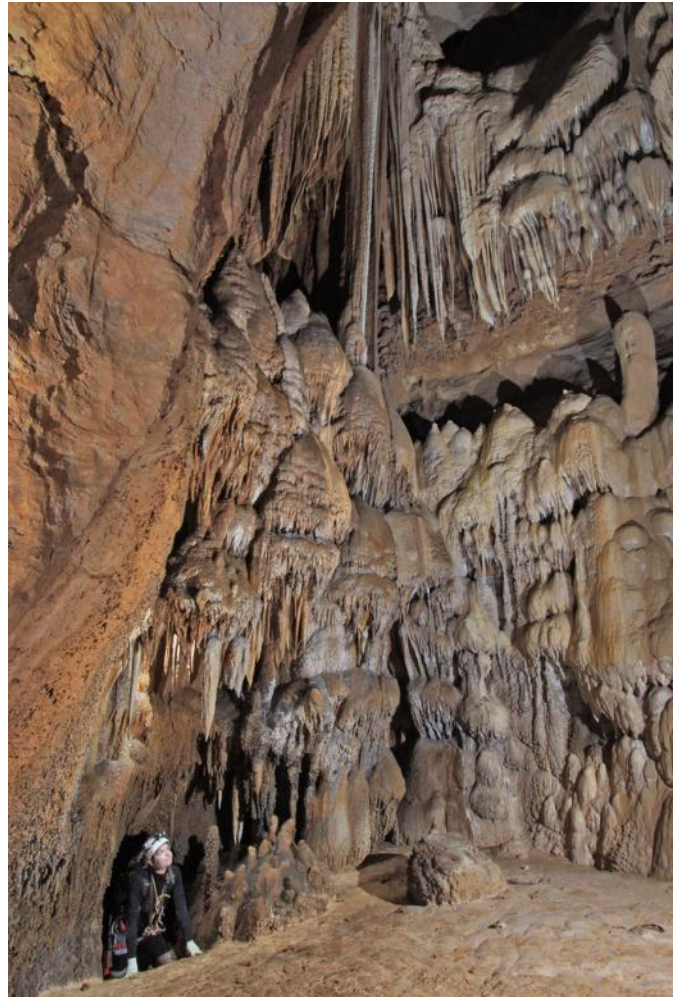


The ladder is in place
Photo by Sharon Brewer

Sharon had decided not to come down, so I was solo as I climbed the ladder and was the first to lay eyes on the spectacular room. It was a dome with a 70' ceiling, profusely decorated with all sorts of drapery, flowstone, stalactites, and stalagmites. On one side of the room was the real attention-getter- a 30' high massive flowstone cascade that I decided to name "Big Boy." (see back cover



Looking up at the ceiling of the 70' dome
Photo by Sharon Brewer



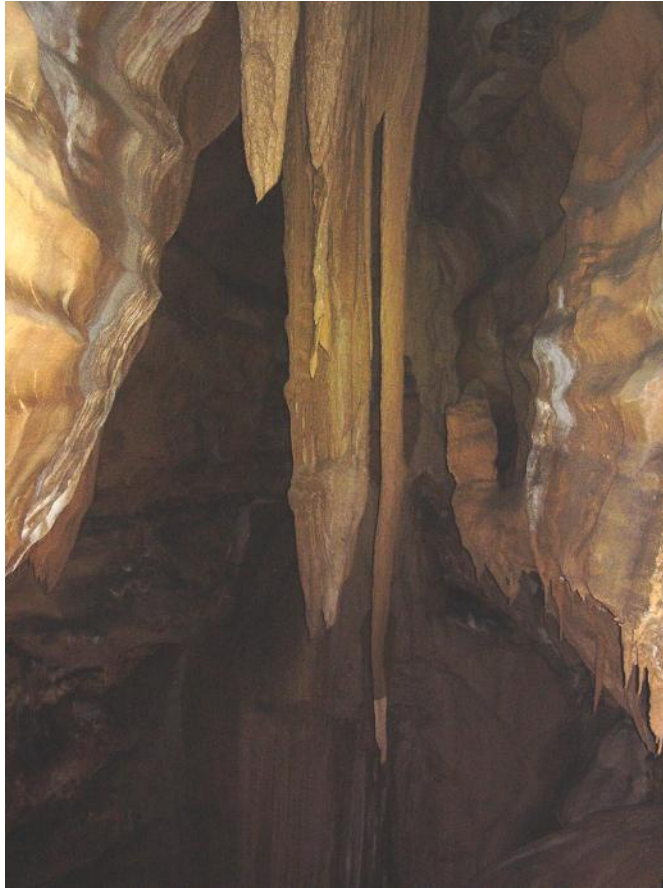
A visitor's first look at "The Wax Museum"
Photo by Alan Cressler, subject is Emily Davis

I continued the survey into this room, and once again encountered a wall with a window about 8' up that hinted at more passage beyond. On a subsequent trip I used a pole to climb this wall, which revealed a 15' drop on the other side of the wall, which lead to another tall 72' dome/canyon. Beyond this was another wall with another window, this one approximately 12' up. The 72' dome turned out to be Entrance 2, which had to be enlarged a bit before I could get through. The drop was actually 79' deep. The newly found window had to be checked as well; so another ladder-building project was launched. This time I enlisted the help of Doug Strait, and we found about 100' more of small but very nicely decorated passage, which we surveyed. I also discovered an additional 70' of mid-level passage about 2/3 of the way up E2 by way of a ledge. This allowed me to go around to the top of "Big Boy" overlooking the room that I decided to call "The Wax Museum." It provided a spectacular view of this room, and I saw that there were two incredibly long stalactites hanging from the ceiling that had not

(Continued on page 6)

Trip Reports continued....

caught my attention from the floor below. I measured these with my laser, and the longest one was an impressive 30' long! Looking at these same formations from the floor give an entirely different perspective and it is difficult to believe that they are really as long as they are.



**The view from the top of "Big Boy."
The stalactite on the right is 30' long.**

The color on the tip is a photo anomaly; it is actually not that color



Looking up at the long stalactites
Photo by Sharon Brewer

Any visitors to this cave are strongly encouraged to bring some clean footwear (river shoes, flip flops) to change into when walking on the flowstone areas in the Wax Museum room.

There have been several good photo sessions in cave, during which Alan Cressler, Jeff Davis, and Eliot Stahl, and Sharon Brewer took some fine photos.

The total passage length surveyed came to 696', and the depth is 95'.



Iliad Odyssey Trip Report

ACS #1568

**By:
Shanon
Richey**



I wanted to be there early. We were to meet at the Jacks in Collinsville at seven in the morning. But, sitting right there was Gene sipping coffee.

I hadn't been with Gadsden Grotto for more than a couple of meetings and I almost didn't recognize him. We sat and talked, while I had my biscuit and coke, waiting for Michael and Steven to arrive.

There are many caves in the Scottsboro area. Our destination was the Iliad / Odyssey cave. When the others arrived, we started the drive. A half an hour or so to the middle of nowhere followed by 15 minutes up a pig trail to "Oh my god where are we?"

Having no equipment of my own, the guys opened up their gear bags and supplied me with what I would need for the trip. I am especially gratefully to Gene for the "caving" pants that were handmade by his mother in law.

With backpacks on and ropes slung, we started the mile or so hike to the cave entrance. The hike was up hill all the way. It was a beautiful morning, warm and sunny, the walk through the forest opened to an amazing sight of the mouth of the cave. A hole in the ground that lead to who knows where. There is a natural bridge over the top of the entrance that was just beautiful.

David from the Grotto was against me going on this trip. My first and only experience in caving was at the Neversink Pit just a couple of weeks early. This cave required more experience and I know he was concerned for my safety as

(Continued on page 7)

Trip Reports continued....

well as the safety of the group. I felt excited and terrified at the same time with a little “oh my god what am I doing” thrown in for good measure.



Gene, Steven and Michael took a moment to organize the equipment, being the only woman there I didn't want to intrude on their “man” time. So I watched and listened to what they were doing. Soon we started down the entrance, crawling and climbing over boulders until we reached the first drop. At one point just before the “Nozzle”, Michael said “do you know what we do when we come across “good” mud like this”. I wasn't looking in his direction but when I felt the mud ball splat against my helmet I figured it out.

Gene took the lead and took me under his wing as well. The cave was cold and damp but as I later learned it was much “drier” than normal. I was very grateful for the poly-pro underwear that Michael lent me, let me tell you.

At the first drop my only thought was “Let's do this” and we did. Crawling backwards in the dark, trying to find my footing, found the ledge and made my way down. It was incredible, the stone around me glistened and the smile on my face told it all “I can do this”. Then the realization that “there's more” hit me. My confidence way high but my feet were slow to move. I felt like this was enough for me but after a “can't back out now” moment, we moved on. I'm so glad I did.

Although we moved fairly quickly we still took time to smell the roses. The guys were all about the rock formations. We stopped along the way just to check out the “soda straws” that dropped down from the cave ceiling. Steven even tried a trick where he tried to use the flash from his camera to make the phosphorus rocks glow.

We made four drops in the cave before stopping for a meal break. MRE's Meals Ready to Eat. I had the Ravioli, and I was thankful for the meal more thankful for the heating pad that came with it. It was cold, I was cold. Hand and foot warmers are now on the top of my list of things to bring.

Break over, it was now time to ascend. It was also time

for my moment of panic. My ascender wasn't working right and “Freaked Out” is the only way to describe how I felt. Thank you Steven and Michael for your cool heads and for helping me to adjust my gear. Three deep breathes, and I started up and it worked just as I knew it should.

We made it back to the mouth of the cave 10 hours after we entered it. The moon was up, the air was fresh and warm. We hiked back down to the cars, packed up the gear in the cars and said good night. There was talking, laughing and teasing, beautiful sights and wonderful company all day long. This was my first big cave exploration.

I am so very thankful for the opportunity and so grateful to Gene, Steven and Michael for their support and guidance and for allowing me to share this adventure with them.

Thanks guys!

And now..... MORE!



Editors note:

According to the Alabama Cave Survey, the Iliad trip has ten drops of 20, 63, 15, 7, 35, 54, 8, 21, 40, and 18 feet. Andy Zellner's information indicated the following rope lengths for the Iliad entrance route: 50 (pad this drop), 80, 70 (pad this drop), 25, 70, 70, 60 (pad this drop), 80, and 40 feet. There is no current map of the cave.





The "Big Boy" flowstone cascade.
Photo by Alan Cressler, subject is Emily Davis

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