

GADSDEN GROTT

Newletter
SPRING 2014



GADSDEN GROTTO

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- 1st Vice Chairman
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David Teal
- 2nd Vice Chairman of Public
Relations: Selena Morton
- Secretary/Treasurer:
Michael Ray
- Newsletter Editor: Michael Ray
- Web Page Design: Michael Ray

NEWSLETTER

The Gadsden Grotto *Newsletter* is published on a semi-regular basis by the Gadsden Grotto (GG) of the National Speleological Society (NSS) as its official newsletter.

All material submitted for publication is subject to editing for clarity, grammatical considerations, and to meet space limitations.

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The Gadsden Grotto *Newsletter* is distributed free of charge to GG members and in exchange for publications of organizations with similar interests.

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.

Submit materials for publication to:

Michael Ray
4634 County Road 7
Leesburg, AL 35983
frogray@tds.net



WEB PAGE

<http://www.caves.org/grotto/gadsgrotto/index.html>

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MEMBERSHIP

Reminder!

Membership renewal is in May

Membership Plans:

Regular Membership Plan \$10. (*NSS Member*)

Is an NSS Member, Can vote and hold grotto offices.
Receives all grotto publications.

Family Membership \$5. (*NSS Member*)

Lives with a paid Regular Member. \$5.00 covers all members in the household of a paid Regular Member. (Example: \$15 includes one Regular Member's dues plus all others in the household of the Regular Member). A Family Member is an NSS member. Can vote and hold grotto office. Only one publication per household.

Associate Membership \$5. (*Not an NSS Member*)

Not an NSS Member. Receives publications. Cannot vote and cannot hold a Grotto office

Associate Family Membership \$5 (*Not an NSS Member*)

Not an NSS Member. Lives in household of a paid Regular or Associate Member. \$5.00 covers all members in the household of a paid Regular Member. Only one publication per household. Cannot vote and cannot hold Grotto office.

Honorary Membership - Free

Awarded by two-thirds majority vote

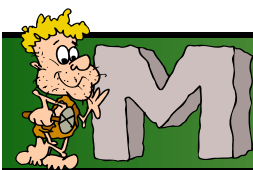
Life Membership - Free

All persons signing original Constitution. Also given to outstanding persons in speleology by two-thirds majority vote

Front Cover Photograph

Fricks Cave Open House. February 15, 2014. Jim Loftin in photograph.

Photo by Sharon Brewer



MINUTES

Of the Gadsden Grotto
Regular Meetings

The following are summaries of the minutes. For full details of the minutes, see the grotto secretary/treasurer

SEPTEMBER 10, 2013

TREASURY REPORT: Additions: \$10. General Fund: \$354.25. Rope Fund: \$175.00. Treasury Balance: \$529.25

OLD BUSINESS: J. Loftin met someone that had seen the Grotto sign located in Weaver Cave and gave a report. 2nd Grotto Sign: D. Teal reported that Big Whisnant cave is still a possibility for 2nd grotto sign. M. Medlen stated that Green Valley Cave is another possible location for 2nd sign. HCRU Tyrolean event was cancelled due to high water and will not be rescheduled for this year.

NEW BUSINESS: Stephen Brewer reported that there is a Facebook page for cave gear. Preregistration for TAG Fall Cave cost is now \$37 for NSS members and \$47 for non-NSS members. M. Ray began a discussion that the grotto may wish to give some honorary item to those that donate an amount to the grotto funds. Stephen Brewer made a motion that this be left to the discretion of the Executive Board. K. Lofgren 2nd the motion and the vote carried. J. Loftin made a motion to purchase a block for \$50 toward the NSS building project. D. Teal 2nd motion. D. Teal reported that camping was free to NSS members at the new NSS office grounds location. Stephen Brewer invited everyone to bring cave trip pictures to the meetings to show.

TRIP REPORTS: D. Teal discussed the dig on a Colvin Mountain cave. Teal gave information about the changes at Cherokee Village (Little Rock City). Visitation is free for a two hour pass.

PROGRAM: Jim Loftin presented photographs and then Michael Ray presented a short program on cave animals and ecology.

OCTOBER 8, 2013

TREASURY REPORT: Additions: \$10 renewed membership, \$20 donation by Jacky Masburn to the rope fund, \$3 purchase of decal, \$5.00 purchased grotto patch. Subtractions from funds: 15 copies of newsletter at \$18.48. PO Box in East Gadsden at \$54.00. Donation to the NSS Headquarters "Buy-a-Block" at \$50. General Fund: \$249.77. Rope Fund: \$194.00. Treasury Balance: \$444.77.

OLD BUSINESS: The Grotto cave sign was discussed. Mark Medlen had checked the sign in Weaver Cave and found that it was still there but had been hit with mud and rocks.

NEW BUSINESS: S. Neiswenter sent a request that the grotto investigate setting up a Skype connection for meetings. M. Elston volunteered to check on the possibility. M. Ray reported that the Block for the NSS fund raiser was purchased. Jacobs Mountain is open now by Forever Wild and is part of the Skyline Management area. The trailer for the movie "No Place on Earth" was shown and the movie discussed

TRIP REPORTS: M. Medlen reported on about four caves that he visited. The Brewer's reported on their western trip.

PROGRAM: "Into Darkness" video was shown from the NSS office.

NOVEMBER 12, 2013

TREASURY REPORT: General Fund: \$249.77. Rope Fund: \$195.00. Treasury Balance: \$444.77

OLD BUSINESS: Concerning the internet connection for meetings, it was found that there is no Wifi in the local meeting building. The 2nd grotto sign was discussed to put in Big Whisnant Cave or Green Valley Cave. The certificate from the NSS for the

Grotto donation was presented.

NEW BUSINESS: The \$10,000 reward for the 2013 TAG carbide bomb was discussed. The 2013 Gadsden Grotto Christmas party was discussed. The date is Dec. 14th.

TRIP REPORTS: Stephen Brewer discussed his trip to Surprise Pit and a new cave find on Skyline Management area.

PROGRAM: YouTube video of Fern Cave Surprise Pit was shown.

DECEMBER 10, 2013

OPENING BUSINESS: Mr. Brewer pointed out that according to the existing constitution, to conduct official Grotto business at a Regular Meeting, a quorum must be present. All the members of the Executive Committee are not present and therefore a quorum does not exist and so no official Grotto business can occur at this meeting.

TREASURY REPORT: General Fund: \$249.77. Rope Fund: \$195.00. Treasury Balance: \$444.77

OLD BUSINESS: Stephen Brewer reported that the TAG Carbide bomb victim fund reached goal, total of \$540 raised.

NEW BUSINESS: Proposed Constitution changes were discussed.

TRIP REPORTS: Stephen Brewer and T. Scott found a new cave and named it Red Ant Well, with a 36 foot drop in the Coon Gulf Wildlife Management area. Mr. Brewer also reported on a rappel trip and cleanup at Grace's High Falls in Little River Canyon. David Teal reported finding more cave passage in Grand Oliver Cave on Colvin Mt.

PROGRAM: J. Loftin presented 35mm cave slides from his collection

JANUARY 14, 2014

TREASURY REPORT: Additions: none. Subtractions from funds: \$40 for the Grotto Christmas Party. General Fund: \$209.77. Rope Fund: \$195.00. Treasury Balance: \$404.77.

NEW BUSINESS: The IO Report for the NSS was completed by M. Ray.

Constitution discussions and changes: J. Loftin made the motion to accept the Constitution changes and additions. Stephen Brewer 2nd. Motion passed. Stephen Brewer made the motion to accept the Bylaws changes and additions. A. Cline 2nd. Motion passed. Changes will be made by M. Ray Secretary/Treasurer and will produce a page for the Executive Committee to sign and then send a copy of the New 2014 Gadsden Grotto Constitution to the NSS office.

Goals for 2014 were discussed. Stephen Brewer requested suggestions. A general discussion began with no exact goals stated. Brewer announced that the NSS Convention is coming to Huntsville. NSS highlighting grottos on social media- and needs member input.

TRIP REPORTS: Charlie, Shanon, Lin Guy, Tom Whitehurst and wife Genie found a new cave turned in and surveyed 12/31/13 in Big Coon Narrows area. Named "Tiff Pit," with two entrances. E1 is 50' pit, E2 is 39' and 28' pit.

FEBRUARY 11, 2014 meeting cancelled due to snow.



EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

Bosch GLM 80

Review by Stephen Brewer

These days many cavers are using laser distance measuring devices for surveying. They are smaller, lighter, and easier to carry than a traditional surveyor's tape reel. They also have the added advantage of allowing the user to measure distant ceiling heights accurately, as well as measuring pit depths before descending.

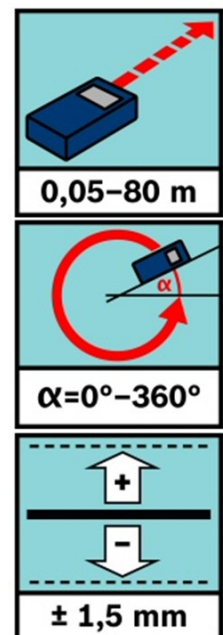
I have been using lasers for several years now, both for surveying and also for ridge walking. They are invaluable for doing quick and easy measurements of cave lengths and pit depths. A few months ago I noticed a unit being advertised that claimed to measure not only distances up to 165 feet, but also angles as well. When we survey a cave, we generally measure three things at each station: the length, the azimuth (compass reading), and the vertical angle. The vertical angle is generally measured with an instrument called a clinometer. I quickly realized that if the distance measuring device also measured angles, I could eliminate the need for one more instrument, and also speed up the surveying process quite a bit. I did a little research on the unit in question, the Bosch GLM 80, and read over the manual to make sure that it would do what I needed. Then I found a new one on EBay for \$140, and made the purchase. After using it for about six months, I would like to offer this assessment: The device seems to be very accurate, and holds up fairly well under harsh cave conditions. (I would recommend carrying it in a Pelican box) It is small, light, and thus easy to carry; I carry mine ridgewalking all the time. The rechargeable lithium battery lasts for a long, long time; I've had mine over six months and have only charged it maybe twice. Now the bad points: The main reason I spent a little extra for this device was that it also *claims* to measure angles, and according to the manual the range is 360 degrees. But when I switched to the angle function, I found much to my chagrin that the laser switched off! I soon discovered that the angle does measure and display dynamically when taking a distance measurement, but the only way to lock it in is to use one of the triangle functions. So I thought I had found a work-around, and felt like it would perhaps work for my purposes. Then I discovered another limitation: the angle maxes out at 60 degrees! I have no idea why the manufacturer designed it this way, and I recently wrote to them and complained about what seemed to me like a misrepresentation of their product. Their response: "Apparently they (the design engineers) never thought anyone would want this feature. They said they'd keep this in mind for future models, but they

would not be reprogramming any current models."

I did learn from their response that the range will go up to 90 degrees, but only when it is turned on its' side, and only when it is in the angle mode (which means the laser is turned off).

One more issue that I encountered a couple of weeks ago was the fold-out pin on the rear of the device. This pin is used to offset the origin of the measurement into a tight place such as a corner. On previous models this pin was metal, but this one is a very thin and fragile plastic. As you might have guessed, it broke on me. Bosch did send me two replacements free of charge, but this was poor design on their part.

I hope my review is not confusing, as it is hard to describe these issues to those who are unfamiliar with the device. Let me sum it up by saying that, while the device has its usefulness, the 60 degree angle limitation is annoying and makes it much less useful for cave surveying. If you are looking for a simple laser distance measurer, the Bosch DLR130K is about half the price. There are also a host of "knock off" lasers available now for less than \$50, although they may or may not be reliable. For those who need the distance and the angle measurement capability, I would recommend the Leica brand *Disto* model E7400x, which can be purchased for \$279 online.





TRIP REPORTS

Fricks Cave Open House

by Sharon Brewer

On Saturday, February 15, 2014, Stephen and I headed to the northwest corner of Georgia. Our destination was Fricks Cave tucked in a special valley between Pigeon and Lookout Mountain. As we headed through Menlo and up the mountain, the sun was rising.

Driving down Daughtery Gap, we saw large snow boulders on the edges of the road where the plows had come through to clear the roads. The area is such a quiet, secluded, beautiful place. The fields still had some snow. We were told that the area had received eleven inches of snow the week before.

We pulled into the parking area of the open house around 9 a.m. and went to track down E.T. Davis.

My hope for the day was to capture some nice images inside and outside the cave. Stephen was undecided on his plans, but had hopes of ridge walking. For an hour or two, we mingled, greeted, and hugged cavers that we had not seen since last year.



Above
First large room in Fricks Cave
Photo by Sharon Brewer



Jim Loftin headed to cave entrance
Photo by Sharon Brewer

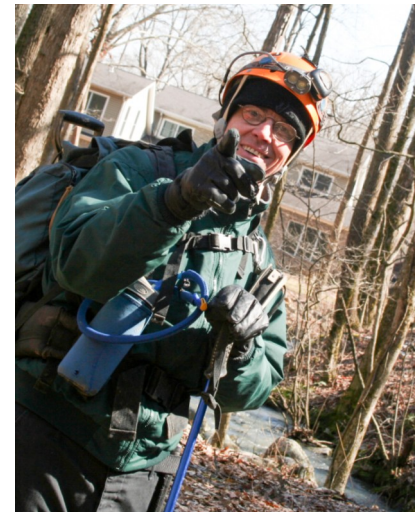
Jim Loftin also showed up for a trip into the cave. After signing his name on the dotted line, loaded with gear, Jim headed across the little bridge and into the cave. Stephen was able to meet with a land owner and get a grand tour of his property

down the road on 4 wheelers, while I made my way into the cave.

Around 12:30, I entered the cave. I loaded my photo gear into my Keltey external frame pack and heaved it up on my back. I felt like a wobbly toddler under the top heavy pack. I did make it into the first large room a short ways into the cave.

I stayed in the cave trying to get the perfect shot almost four hours. My toes froze in that water, but I was determined. I am disappointed with the majority of the shots, but I was able to rescue a few images.

All in all it was a great trip. I was able to practice photography. Steve was able to spend the day hunting for caves with a landowner who was just as curious to see what caves were on his land. We both were able to see wonderful cavers that we would not normally see. To top off the day, we enjoyed a gorgeous sunset.



Stephen Brewer
Photo by Sharon Brewer

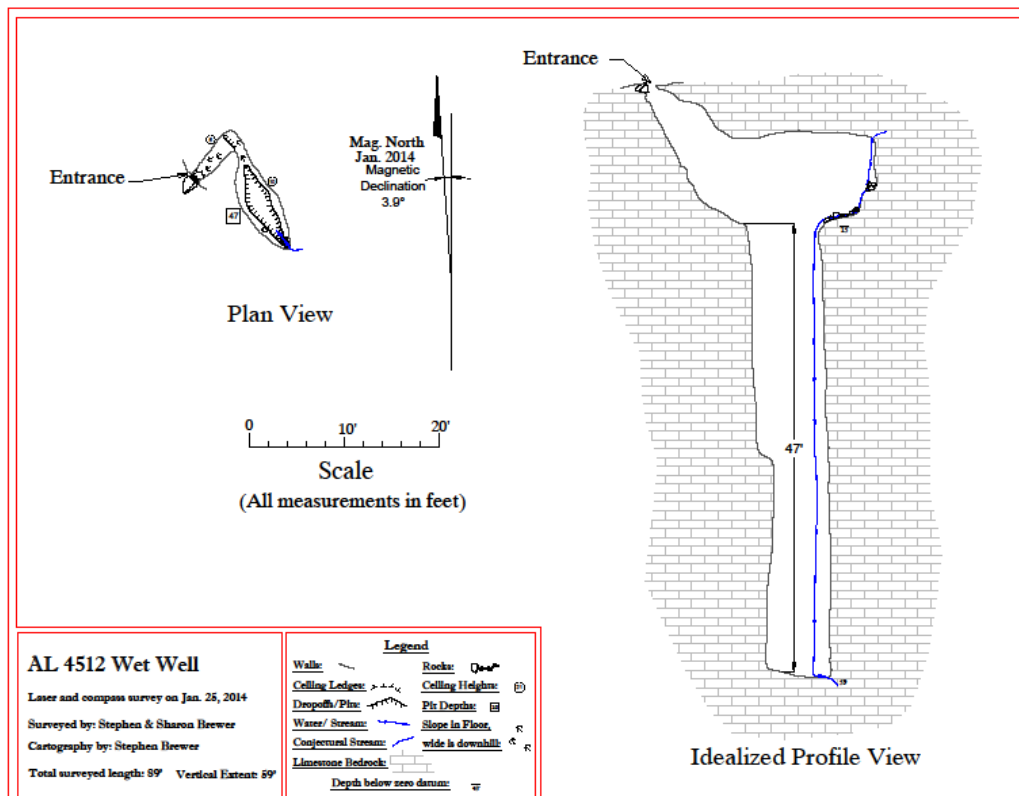
Wet Well & Dry Hole

By Stephen Brewer

I arose 2 hours before sunrise on the cold morning of January 18, 2014. The temperature in Scottsboro was hovering around 20°, so I pulled on a couple of extra layers and headed out. The area I planned to walk was one I hadn't been to before, down a dirt road aptly named "Cave Springs Rd." To get there required a 2 hour drive from my house, hence the early starting time. When I arrived the sun was coming up, and many of the roadside rock exposures were

across a small stream that tumbled down the hillside into a small sinkhole, where it disappeared into a pile of boulders. After moving a few rocks, I was able to enter a hole that went down a few feet and then promptly ended. Since there was no noticeable air flow in the hole to encourage me to dig further, I decided to pack up and move on. After walking about one half of a mile at this elevation, I became discouraged by the lack of limestone, so I turned downhill. At around 1240 foot elevation I started to see a lot of small karst features, so I leveled off and started heading back toward my vehicle. By this time it had warmed into the upper

30's, and my warmer outer clothing was shed and stowed away in my pack. After walking about six miles, I came upon an open-air pit that looked promising. The initial drop was about eight feet, but I could tell there was more cave just below that. I normally carry a very minimal vertical rig when I ridgewalk, consisting of a small-diameter 38 foot rope, a Swiss seat webbing harness, and a foot loop and handled ascender. I rigged the rope and went down the short drop, where I landed on a leafy slope at the bottom. I had tied a knot at the end of the rope, so I worked my way down the leafy slope about 12 feet further, where the passage turned right and



decorated with fabulous displays of icicles. My primary motivation for getting out so early on such a cold morning was, of course, to find some new caves. When the temperatures are very cold, many cave entrances give themselves away with a plume of mist rising out of the opening. This is due to the fact that cave air is usually around 58°F, and is also saturated with moisture. As a result, this relatively warm air sometimes creates a plume that is visible from a long distance.

I parked at a low spot in the ridge where the elevation was about 1600 feet. In other locales I would have expected to see mostly sandstone, but here I noticed quite a bit of limestone exposed on the surface. I pulled on my pack and headed into the woods, fighting through thickets of small trees here and there, until I reached the 1540 foot elevation. I had encountered a few karst features at this elevation on other mountainsides in the area, so it seemed logical that the same would hold true here. Sure enough, I soon came

came to the edge of a pit. I was near the end of the rope, so I looked over the edge and measured the pit with my laser distance measurer. It was 46 feet deep, so I knew that the numbers would add up to make it enough to qualify as a cave. Full exploration, however, would have to wait until another day.

As is my habit, upon exiting the cave I did a walk-around to see if there were any other nearby leads. I had walked just a few feet when I heard the sound of running water. Those who know me know that if it was loud enough for me to hear, it was loud indeed. The water had that distinctive sound that water in a cave usually has, and I quickly located the source of the sound. It was a very small, mossy hole about 50 feet away from the pit I had just come out of. I determined that the opening was (barely) passable, and I could see that it was a steep downward sloping passage that turned hard right after about 8 feet. I moved the rope to a tree next to this hole, and quickly popped through

Trip Reports continued....

the entrance to see what lay ahead. The passage opened up immediately to comfortable, but definitely not spacious proportions, and after the right turn the passage leveled off and ended after about 15 feet. At that point was where the water was entering from, falling into a narrow pit. I dropped a rock into the pit, but couldn't hear the sound of it hitting the bottom. I checked it with my laser, and got a reading of only 24 feet which was very disappointing. Through the water and the spray it was impossible to tell if my beam was hitting the bottom; perhaps it was much deeper. The fantasies of a 200 foot deep pit were playing large in my mind. After taking some video, I headed back aboveground, packed up my gear, and started walking towards my vehicle. I was thoroughly exhausted when I got there, and my GPS told the reason why; I had walked 7.8 miles, up and down the mountain and through some very rough terrain.

The following weekend I headed back to follow up on the two promising leads. I was joined this time by my wife, Sharon. We bundled up for the cold morning temperatures, but this time I found a place to park that was within ¼ mile of the leads. Our packs were fairly heavy, mine with a 120 foot rope and vertical gear, and hers with photography equipment. I stashed much of my gear at the two leads, and went off to do some ridgewalking while the temperature was still cold. In addition, I was expecting to get wet in the second hole, and wanted it to be as warm as possible when I exited the cave. I showed Sharon a nearby karst feature I had found the week before, and she set herself to digging it open. It was a soccer ball sized hole, and I wasn't too optimistic about it, so I left her there to dig while I walked.

After a few hours I returned and was amazed to see how much she had progressed. She had removed a large amount of dirt and rocks, and I was able to go a few feet into it. However there were still some rocks that blocked the way, so we decided to leave this project for another day.

During the interim I had decided on two probable names for the pits; Wet Well and Dry Hole. I rigged Dry Hole first, and surveyed as I went. The 46 foot pit was well-decorated, and had a few short passages branching off in different directions at the bottom. I surveyed these, and also took some video of the cave. One of the interesting things I noticed was a couple of charred log segments that were coated with flowstone. I had seen this once before, in Scottsboro Mt. Pit. What made it intriguing was the rapid rate of growth of the flowstone, fast enough that the wood hadn't yet rotted out from beneath it. After completing the survey I climbed out and shifted my attention to Wet Well. The water flow had subsided a little since the previous week, so I was hoping I wouldn't get *too* wet. At the top of the pit I took a reading again with my laser, this time the reading was 47 feet That was certainly a lot better than 24 feet and it meant that this pit would qualify as well. The pit was nondescript, and was only mildly wet for the first 30 feet or so. Then I was forced to move over into the water in order to bottom the pit; needless to say, I didn't spend a lot of time sightseeing down there! A quick look around told me it was a blind pit, with the water flowing into a too-

small exit hole at the bottom. I climbed as rapidly as my Texas system would allow, and was soon out in the chilly late afternoon air. Fortunately my wife had some spare dry clothes for me to don, for which I was very grateful. When I got home I added up the numbers. Dry Hole had 51 feet of passage and two pits of 7 and 46 feet. Wet Well added up to 24 feet of passage and one 47 foot pit. I do intend to return to Wet Well in drier weather and double check the bottom of the pit, just in case I overlooked something in my haste to retreat. All in all it was a fairly good day walking the ridges of North Alabama. But even a bad day ridgewalking beats just about any other activity I can think of.



Christmas Fun by Sharon Brewer

On December 14, 2013, friends and family of the Gadsden Grotto found a way to celebrate the season by having a party at

the home of Michael Ray. Our own Frog-ray hosted a wonderful, fun party complete with meat, veggies, and desserts paid for and brought by the Grotto and guests.

We played a rousing game of charades. Shanon won the annual calendar giveaway. Thank You Michael Ray for all you do!





Gadsden Grotto 2013 Christmas Celebration

GADSDEN GROTT
P.O. BOX 2092
GADSDEN, AL 35903

