

sag rag

29:6 Nov-Dec 2010



The inviting entrance to Hit the Wall Cave is triangular, 5 ft high, and 10 ft wide.

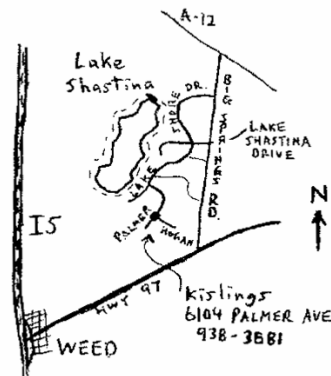
INSIDE – REGULAR GROTTO STUFF

The SAG RAG is published by the Shasta Area Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Grotto meetings are held at different locations on the fourth Friday of each month at 7:30 p.m. Meeting locations are announced in the SAG RAG. Membership dues are \$6 dollars per year and include newsletter subscription. Original material not otherwise noted is copyright to the SAG RAG. Such material may be copied with credit given to the author and the SAG RAG. For use outside of the caving community, please seek the permission of the author or editor first. Send material for publication any time to Bighorn Broeckel, 2916 Deer Meadows Road, Yreka, CA 96097 or <caverbill@live.com>. For more on SAG, check the web site at <<http://www.caves.org/grotto/sag>>.

CAVERS CALENDAR 2011

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Feb 25 | SAG meets at Kisling's 7:30 pm
Lake Shastina 530 938-3881
Next day – Pluto's Cave Clean-up |
| Mar 25 | SAG meeting at 7:30 pm, Chico/Redding
Later – Dye Creek hike to Ishi's Cave |
| Apr 29 | SAG meeting 7:30 pm at Wolff's, McCloud
Later – Cave survey trip somewhere? |
| July 18-22 | 2011 NSS Convention in Glenwood Springs,
Colorado |

Map to Meeting



February Meeting

SAG RAG SUMMARY By Bighorn Broeckel

Here goes the last issue of Volume 29, Nov-Dec out in February, getting closer now. The regular grotto stuff is the December meeting minutes and caving trip, thanks to Virginia Bobrow and Jim Wolff. Chairman Liz Wolff brings us some wisdom and reminders to help us get our caving going in the right direction this year. Remember the Pluto's Cave cleanup trip, coming right up, a great chance to get together as a grotto and give a little love back to the caves. A local (Virginia Rea) recently wrote a nice caving piece for the Siskiyou Daily News. She also happens to be my next door neighbor, so it wasn't too hard to leverage the two-part tome right here into the SAG RAG. She's a good writer. Two little Siskiyou lava tubes snuck into the issue, they almost overlap. Maybe they should only count as one cave. Maybe they shouldn't count at all. See what you think. Finally, here comes a November newflash from El Malpais in New Mexico. Here we see an example of Western U.S. lava tubes getting closed on account of White Nose Syndrome, a terrible bat disease causing huge trouble back east, and maybe coming soon to a cave near you. The associated fungus has been found in Oklahoma, a State which actually reaches over the top of Texas, and has a small boundary with New Mexico. Keep posted, as there is a national committee now working to make a response policy that will probably involve closing at least some of the caves even out here on the west coast. Regardless, you should still read SAG RAG for another year as there are already enough surveyed, but unpublished caves to keep the newsletter going for awhile. It is also good for starting fires, and as someone mentioned, bathroom materials?!? Cheerios- **BB**

COVER: Photo of the entrance to Hit the Wall Cave taken by Bill Broeckel.

The Rocking Chair Creaks Caving, Conservation and Ethics By Liz Wolff, SAG Chairman

Caving is a strenuous and hazardous sport. Loose rock, long hikes to entrances, vertical pitches and water, either running, ponded or the lack of it, may lead to problems. In addition, personal health conditions and allergies could lead to problems. Be aware of your physical condition, needs, equipment and abilities before going on caving trips.

Specialized training is available to grotto members in many forms. Be it how to move through a cave, where to purchase and how to use caving or general outdoor clothing or gear, what vertical (rope climbing and rappelling) equipment you may need. If you need this kind of advice, the grotto can help you decide how you may want to equip yourself. Other available training may include underground photography, how to do survey & cartography, biology or botany, geology, expedition and/or alpine caving and learning the history of local cave areas.

Caving damages caves, either in unintentional or intentional ways. Spray paint and trash are the most obvious signs and forms of damage, but the local cave-dwelling biota may be decimated by our entry, therefore, be observant. Seasonally caves may contain either maternity or hibernating colonies of bats. If you see more than one bat, exit the cave. Water puddles or streams may be home to many different types of insects. Please do not collect any, but do note where they are and find out if any action should be taken to identify and protect them. Cave adapted critters are generally white or very pale colored, making them easy to spot, if you are crawling.

Once a year SAG does cave clean-up, and restoration work if needed, in three Forest Service owned caves. This, and other projects in four National Forests and two National Monuments, have been going on for many years in partnership with the agencies. Good relations have been established, but through careless action can be irreparably harmed. Please take care to protect federally owned caves, which includes nearly every cave we visit in our grotto's area. Respect gates on caves, the caves are closed for a reason.

Privately owned caves are visited only on invitation from the cave owners. As always, respect Federal or private road closures, and leave gates as you found them when crossing private land. To maintain good relations with private cave owners, a complete report with any map produced, is generally given to them following a trip on their property. Pick up trash that you may find, and leave the area cleaner than it was before you came. Practice 'leave no trace' camping and caving. Clean your gear between trips; cave mud and dirt, from one area and any organisms it contains, can contaminate and harm cave critters in other areas.

Cave locations are confidential information, please do not tell everyone where the caves are. In the past when location info for newly discovered or long-known (to cavers) caves has been leaked, the caves have become trashed, so if we seem hesitant to let you know where all the caves are right away, it is with good reason. Once you know cave locations, it is best to not let that info out to any but other cavers, unless not knowing could prove hazardous for land managers. Logging and road building activities over caves often lead to damage to caves and property when heavy equipment ends up underground, inadvertently. Chemicals picked up in roadside runoff water are generally toxic to people and animals; runoff water and mud from roads into caves has proved extremely harmful to cave biota, besides creating a hazard for cave visitors. We will occasionally divert the path of runoff, to protect caves on the road side.

"Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints" – leave no trace of your visit.
Enough said. Welcome to the Shasta Area Grotto.

LW

SAG MEETING MINUTES December 10, 2010

December 10, 2010 Shasta Area Grotto meeting at the home of Jim and Liz Wolff in McCloud, California. Present were Ed and Virginia Bobrow, Jim and Liz Wolff, Dave Smith, Neils Smith, Jed Medin, Ray Miller, and Sam Baxter. The meeting was called to order at 8:00pm. Virginia read the September minutes. Dave read the October minutes, corrected to reflect the December meeting change to the Wolff's home, with subsequent grotto cave trip (see further in Jim's article) instead of vertical practice. No treasurer's report. No SAG RAG report. Website: up and running.

Correspondence: From Bruce Rogers with info on Rippled Cave, if interested must sign up for trip through the Western Cave Conservancy (owner) and respond to Marianne Russo. If interested, contact Dave Smith to coordinate reservations. This will involve an overnight stay. Forward from Mother Lode Grotto regarding 2011 combined Federal campaign for Federal and military employees. NSS regarding white nose syndrome and plea for letters regarding Wisconsin, Save the Bats Fund, and Fish and Wildlife draft plan comments.

Old Business: Western Regional funds – don't know what our profit is yet as of this date. The regional host may donate portions of any surplus funds to the Western Region for science studies, expeditions, or Cal Caver. All in favor for science grants. Web page: Dave is suggesting changes to web page, we have given the go ahead. Sam suggested business cards for SAG, he would design and price it out, send him advise for content. He is looking at vistaprint.com.

New Business: Ray Miller – Dancehall/Teeter Rock Caves – how can we either gate or have a Conservancy buy these caves. Another permissioned survey of these caves is needed to see if there are still bat colonies, then continue from there – Sam will head this committee with Ray and Ed helping. Nominations for grotto officers: Chairman – Liz Wolff, Melanie Jackson. Vice-chairman – Sam Baxter. Secretary – Melanie Jackson, Dave Smith. Treasurer – Steve Hobson. Editor – Bill Broeckel. Webmaster – Dave Smith. Next meetings: Jan 28 – Melanie Jackson, Yreka, Pluto's Cave search for back entrance. Feb 25 – Kislings, Lake Shastina, Pluto's Cave cleanup. Mar 25 – Steve or Dave. Apr 29 – Wolffs, McCloud. May 20 – Lava Beds cave rescue, tentative. June – Star Peak, 2 limestone caves (tentative), 4WD needed. Need some current road conditions before setting this up, tabled for further discussion. Saturday trip – McCloud limestone, road clear, caves wet and muddy, but accessible.

Trip Reports: Jed, with Chris Kennedy and daughter, 9 people to Samwel Cave, four new on rope. Also, Banana Cave.

Meeting adjourned 9:25pm. Minutes respectfully submitted by Virginia Bobrow.

VB

McCloud Reservoir Cave – revisited 12-11-10 by Jim Wolff

After the December meeting, three members of the club went to just about the only cave that was available with easy access, that wasn't covered in snow – McCloud Reservoir Cave (MRC). I hadn't been to the cave for many years, so I was appalled by the trash-out appearance, beer bottles and cans, remnants of a highway flare, and scads of light sticks, the real thin/skinny kind, and a couple of regular sizes. Broken glass was everywhere, which we didn't pick up. Our packs bulged with just what we could easily pick up and store.

Anyway, Jed Medin and Dave Smith were my buddies for the day, and everyone had their own harnesses and helped carry the stuff to the cave. Murphy's Law and I realized that I had forgotten my coveralls, but that's OK, someone else forgot their slings for their ascenders, so it was the cable ladder – again! Well, at least we had a belay rope!

Once on the bottom of the drop near the entrance, we just slipped and slid around in very wet and muddy passage. One place where Dave and I bowed out, Jed energetically pushed ahead into the lowest point,

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just above the water level – to look in an area that hasn't been visited since Claude Smith (no relation to the two other Smiths in our club) explored it – it's incredibly tight and always has deep water in it. In fact, you can see standing deep water in several cracks in the floor of the cave.

After Jed was out of that area, we decided to leave the cave with our sacks of trash. So, back on the ladder, we sent Dave up first, figuring with Jed holding the ladder and Dave belaying me up next. Off to a bad start, with only gaining a rung or two, I fell off the ladder. On belay, I swung into the wall that was right next to me, bending my glasses, but no injury ... Once lowered to the ground, I immediately tried again, finally gaining the top without too much trouble. The packs came up next, then Jed. He had no problems, but commented that SRT up a rope is MUCH better than a cable ladder. We all agreed, again and again! So, a separate cave clean-up is due to this cave to get the remaining stuff – soon, as I lost a set of car keys in there! I guess I'm a vandal too. **JW**

Into the Depths, Part 1

by Virginia Rea

The following two-part article first appeared in the Siskiyou Daily News (local newspaper) on Oct. 22, 2010 and Nov. 12, 2010. ed.



My beloved and I recently took a tour of the Shasta Caverns, a lovely spot which I highly recommend, if you don't mind a few stairs and aren't claustrophobic. Personally, I don't mind the dark or small enclosed spaces, as long as I'm relatively certain I can get out at some point, and as long as no one turns on the lights so that I can actually see what I'm headed towards. It all reminded me of my first caving trip, many years ago in England

For my 30th birthday, my husband invited me to go caving. This seemed a fairly safe venture; how much trouble could I get into underground? Of course, every effort on my part to undertake any sort of physical endeavor invariably ends in some sort of disaster; but I decided to not listen to the small, still voice of reason. Thus it was that on my birthday, which happens to fall on the first day of winter, I took my first caving trip.

We drove out to some soggy moor in Yorkshire, England (we were living in Scotland at the time). It was raining, or more accurately, sleeting. "Bit cold, isn't it?" I inquired hopefully. As always, he responded cheerfully: "Much warmer underground. Besides, the hike will warm you." "Hike?" We hiked to what was euphemistically referred to as a farmhouse to change. First comes the wetsuit. Perhaps there is a less comfortable, more excruciating instrument of torture in the world; I, for one, am not interested in seeing it. Threaten me with a wetsuit and I will tell you anything you want to know. My husband, who is of a somewhat smaller build than I (i.e., he is thin where I am fat), had loaned me his wetsuit. By means of a great deal of yanking, tugging, groaning, sucking in and cursing, the thing was put on me. I felt like a wheel base wearing a Goodyear tire several sizes too small. In fact, my husband is a frugal soul, so where the rubber of the wetsuit had been ripped, it had been patched with pieces of inner tube. Since most caving tends to be done on the hands and knees (when not flat on the belly or sideways down a slot), these areas wear out first, which means that is where the patches were.

Two facts now emerge – one of physics and one of physiology. First, the point of physics: tire rubber does not bend much. Next, the point of physiology: knees and

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elbows bend a lot. Now when we put these two facts together, I had a difficulty. Nothing bent easily where it wanted to. In fact, as I discovered during the course of the trip, when these joints were bent, it resulted in a loss of feeling from the knees and elbows down. Although I had no desire to move in any direction at this point, we set off across the sodden fields. We hiked for many miles (I use the term “hike” loosely; “forced march” springs to mind more easily) through potholes so deep and thick with oozing mud that I occasionally sank hip-deep and had to be yanked out, usually leaving behind at least one shoe.

At last we reached the “cave” (how they managed to distinguish this particular hole in the ground from all the others I shall never know), consisting of a hole about two feet in diameter. Before descending however, I was introduced to the ritual of lighting the carbide caving lamp (the curious will find one in the small museum at Shasta Caverns, which will tell you about how long ago this was). I observed in fascination as my husband poured crystals of some mysterious substance (carbide, no doubt) into a small container, sucked up some water and spit in it, poked it with what appeared to be a long stiff hair, and attempted to light a flame with a (by now) wet flint. Apparently an electric battery would have spoiled the ritual fun of it all. Then the entire affair was affixed to the front of my helmet, which promptly fell down over my eyes. Actually, the majority of the trip was completed in darkness, as very little can be seen with one’s helmet over one’s eyes. In retrospect, this was probably a mercy.

This astounding piece of technological achievement does have occasional side effects. I heard of a caver who accidentally leaked water into his supply; it exploded, making a large number of bats very unhappy, not to mention the caver. The lamps also have an irritating habit of going out about every five minutes, necessitating a repetition of the above-described process, usually at the most inconvenient of times.

To be continued in three weeks; it was a very long trip, and hence a very long story. I hope nobody’s claustrophobic about being left underground that long ...

Yreka-area Virginia Rea works for the Siskiyou County courts.

VR

Into the Depths, Part 2

by Virginia Rea

Now it was time to descend into the depths. My husband had referred in passing to “ladders” in order, no doubt, to pacify my terror of abseiling into the cave on a rope. I have a literal mind, and when the “ladder” was produced I argued this was not a ladder as anyone sensible would define the word. The object he produced was rolled (no self-respecting ladder in my memory was ever able to roll; they were without exception rigid structures of wood or metal which could be extended, collapsed, tilted, or propped, but never rolled). When it was unwound, it was about six inches across – enough to hold one (narrow) foot or one hand, but not both simultaneously. It was – there is no other word for it – flimsy.

I immediately discovered four uncomfortable truths: 1. The “ladder,” not being of the sensible, civilized, rigid type, swung with me on it. 2. Not being of the afore-mentioned rigid type, the ladder conformed itself to the wall upon which it rested, thereby making it impossible to get foot or finger-hold on it. I was able to swing myself and the “ladder” away from the wall briefly, enabling me to wrap my finger round the rungs, where I had

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time to briefly congratulate myself before discovering: 3. If one does manage to get a finger-hold, the “ladder” will then promptly swing back, consequently mashing one’s fingers. 4. I have amazingly weak arms and legs that tend to shake when I am frightened; this was accompanied after awhile by the stiffening of the limbs into a rigidity of which any self-respecting ladder would have been proud.

After climbing down a distance of 15 feet, the real caving begins. This can apparently only be accomplished by means of squeezing oneself into improbable openings at every conceivable angle, normally in one or two feet of water. As my husband explained to me at about this point, caving involves expanding and contracting muscles in order to keep one’s body upright (or sideways) and avoid falling down into various holes and “slots.” After examining several of these at a close view, it was my firm opinion that nothing short of dynamite would blast me out if I should fall in; this provided a valuable incentive. They told me later of cavers who had not sufficiently expanded and contracted at appropriate times who did indeed, have to be blasted out, resulting, needless to say, in injuries which might put one off caving forever, or sometimes in death by slow starvation.

As I say, they told me this much, much later. Suffice to say that for three days afterwards every muscle in my entire body ached – knees, elbows, hands, ankles, ribs, back, shoulders, shins, thighs, feet – have I missed any? All this to gaze in exhaustion at a few nice stalactite and stalagmite formations. I shall draw a veil over the tears, the pleas to leave me there to die rather than force me to climb back up that evil twisting metallic snake of a “ladder.”

The caving was over at last – a trip normally completed in two or three hours had taken me seven. I emerged shaken, exhausted and tear-stained, but triumphant, and ready for the pub. Unfortunately, the farmhouse was closed, so we were able to enjoy changing out of clammy wetsuits in the sleet by the side of the car in pitch black. Warm dry clothes never felt so heavenly in all my life (I am gradually becoming convinced that the real reason my husband participates in these activities is because it feels so good when you stop – and of course, he doesn’t mind the odd pint, either).

Our friend assured us that he knew of a good cavers' pub nearby. When we opened the door, conversation immediately ceased. Instead of the hearty companionship of similar lunatics, we gazed upon a crowd of nattily dressed, business-suited and angora-and-pearl-studded “trendy types,” who gazed back at us with expressions akin to those you might observe upon the faces of people who have turned over a particularly well-entrenched rock and discovered nasty things underneath. When we stepped forward, a path opened before us in a manner highly reminiscent of Moses parting the Red Sea.

I was surprised, as I had taken particular care to “wash up” in the cave water; snotty group, I decided, and proceeded to the bathroom, where I got the shock of my life. Not only did my hair look as if I’d been dragged through a hedge backwards, my attempted ablutions had succeeded only in smearing an amazing quantity of mud over my entire face. I did my best to repair the damage (doubtlessly stopping up their drains for a week with mud), skulked back into the pub, and drank up. Amazingly enough (is there no limit to the body’s resilience and the brain’s stupidity?), within a week I was warm, ache-free, and enthusiastically ready to descend once more into the depths.

Yreka-area Virginia Rea works for the Siskiyou County courts.

VR

Hit the Wall Cave and Sneaky Cave By Bighorn Broeckel

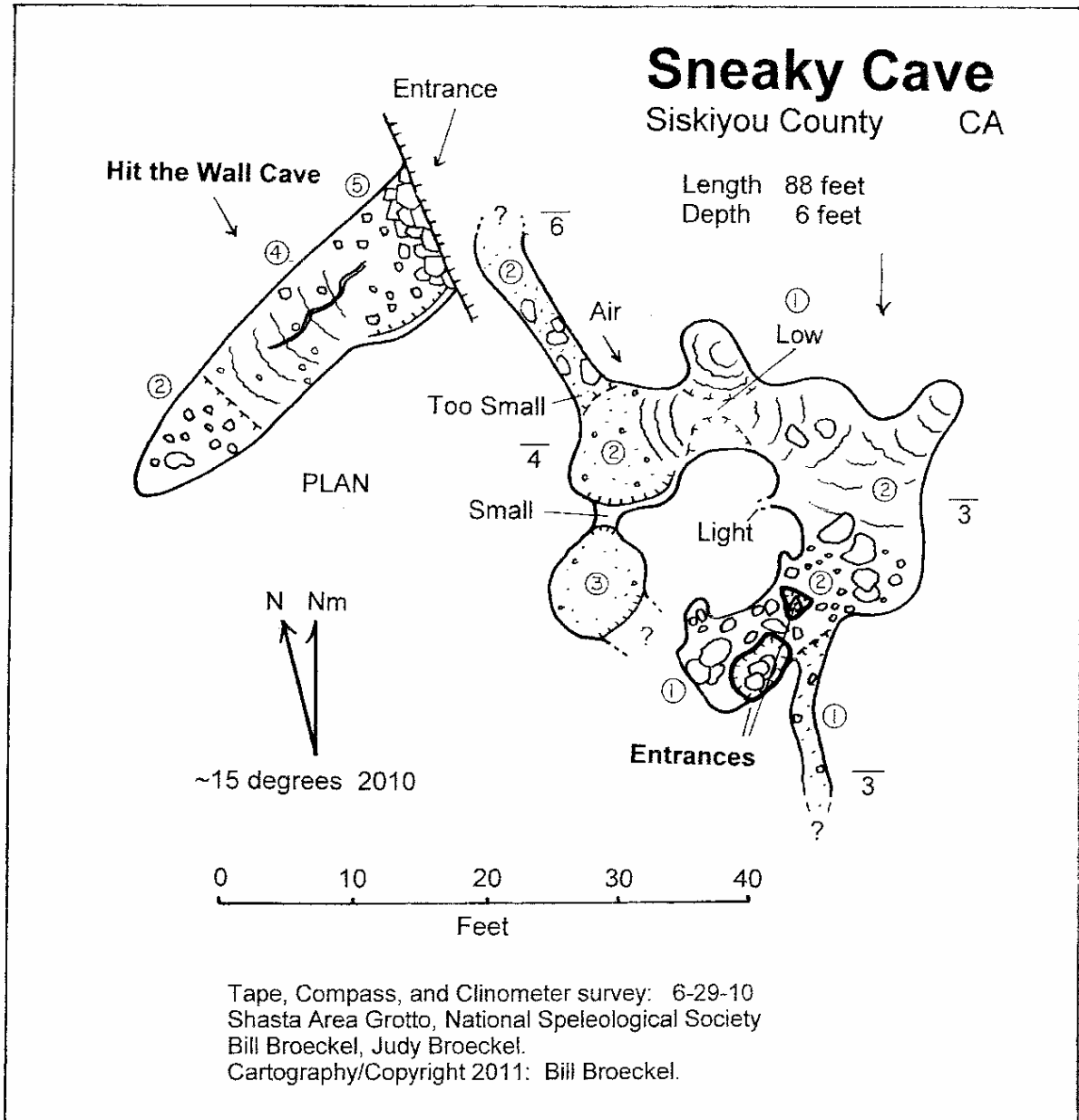
Now we are going to dig into my Stupid Caves file, and come up with a pair of caves probably better left forgotten. But as everyone knows, we are cave crazy, so here goes nothing. Far out in the Siskiyou lavas, there is a secondary trench near a dirt road running along the edge of the flow. Yes, access is quite simple, so one day while waiting for somebody, I was idly checking this hopeless trench. Down at the lower end is the obvious and best-looking entrance, five feet high and ten feet wide. Looks can be deceiving. I went in to check the tube, and hit the wall at about 30 feet. The floor was deflated, but the end was a lava seal.

This whole area is regular grotto stomping grounds, so I am sure that others have seen this before, probably somebody I know who looked in and said "Wow, that's really insignificant." They were right too. But me, I look in there and say "maybe its 30 feet." Some folks require caves to have dark zones. All I ask is thirty feet, what you might call a more "enlightened" definition. So I got out my survey stuff, and minutes later had the thing mapped. It was exactly 30 feet long. Being a bothersome sort, I went ahead and submitted Hit the Wall Cave to the Liz Wolff/Ray Miller data base.

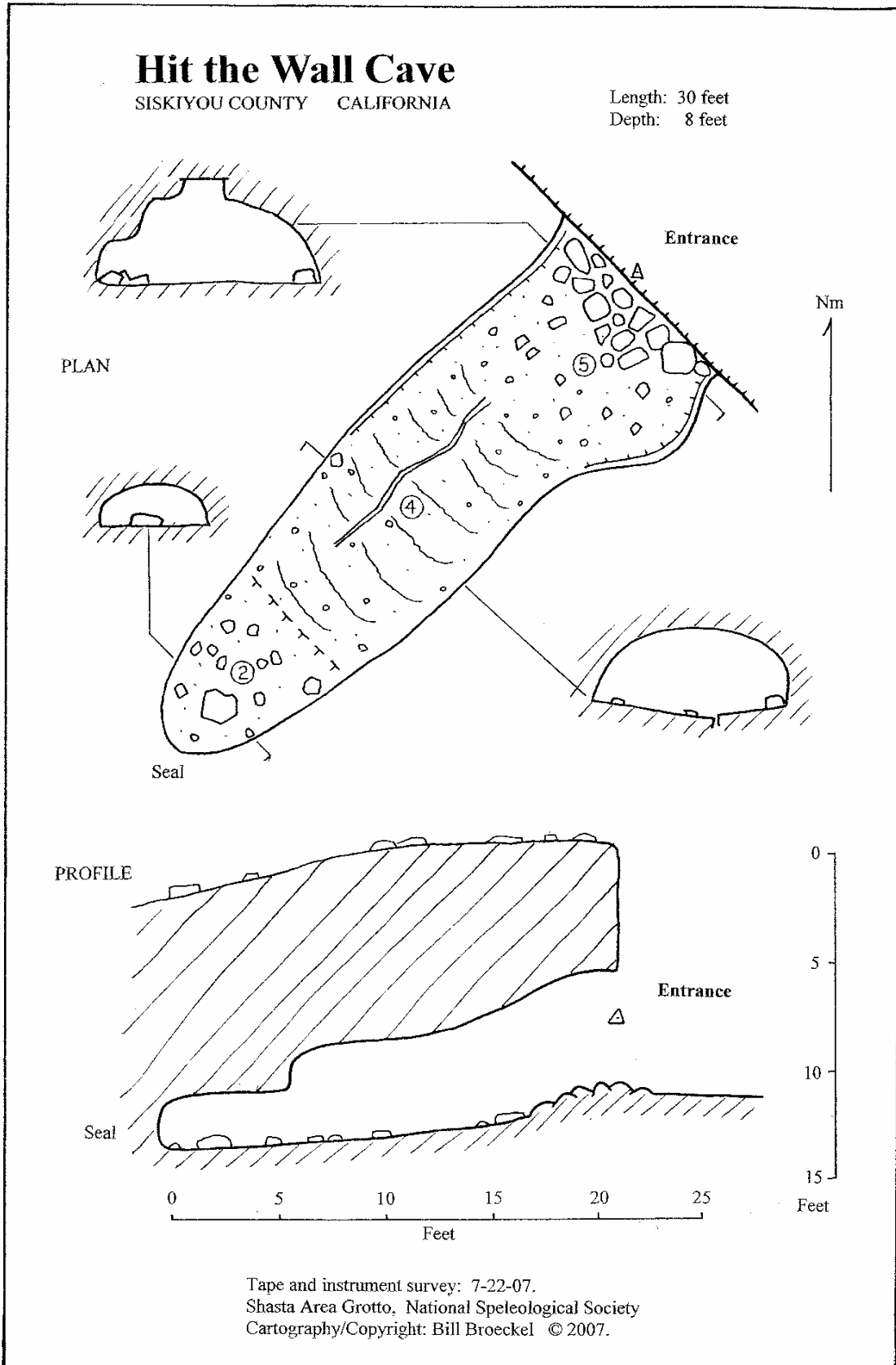
Well, a couple years later, word came back that they needed GPS data for this great and wonderful cave. As noted, access is no problem on this one, so it wasn't too hard for us to go back. We did the GPS deed. Then just poking around like cavers do, we found some surface tube openings in the floor of the ponded area near the end of the trench. They were sneakily hiding behind some rocks. The little triangular skylight entrance was actually easier to use. We popped in to take a look. Thirty feet of cave appeared, so out came the survey gear again. Off we went crawling and pulling tape, to the cry of "On Station!". This one went around some corners. This one got dark. It ended up 88 feet long, almost three times the length of Hit the Wall. We couldn't fit into the last passage, the one that blew cold air and turned out to be sneaking directly under the Hit the Wall entrance (remember, the cave with the deflated floor). Hmm!

So now we have Sneaky Cave, a real crawler mostly 1-2 feet high. This is yet another great and wonderful cave in Siskiyou County, and a perfect example of what my detractors like to say – "One stupid cave leads to another". **BB**





Map: Sneaky Cave



Map: Hit the Wall Cave



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

El Malpais
National Monument

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El Malpais News Release

11/22/10

For Immediate Release

Leslie DeLong 505-285-4641 x18

El Malpais National Monument to Close Caves

As a preventative measure to preserve cave environments, protect bats and slow the spread of white nose syndrome, all caves at El Malpais National Monument will be closed effective December 6, 2010 according to Superintendent Kayci Cook Collins. While nearly all of the caves in the park have been closed for some time, this notice affects the five caves - Junction, Xenolith, Big Skylight, Four Windows and Braided – which have remained opened.

“Federal and state agencies in New Mexico are very concerned about the spread of the fungus, *Geomyces destructans*, which causes white nose syndrome in bats,” said Collins. “The disease has already killed more than one million bats in the northeastern United States and has spread from New York State all the way to northwest Oklahoma in four years.”

It is unclear exactly how the fungus spreads. “Researchers believe bat to bat contact is one of the ways the disease moves from cave to cave, however the disease may also be spread from cave to cave by humans on their caving gear,” she said. Collins said the discovery in Oklahoma could easily threaten bat populations at El Malpais. “The species that tested positive in Oklahoma, the Cave myotis, is the first uniquely western species to contract the *Geomyces* fungus,” she said. “And, more importantly, the Cave myotis is found at El Malpais.” Collins said research is underway to see if the fungus may already be present in monument caves. “Currently, we have no evidence that the fungus is present in our caves, however we have been doing research over the summer and are currently testing cave soil samples to see if the *Geomyces* strain is here,” she said. “There are several other bat and cave research projects we hope to get underway later this year and next spring that will add to the information we are currently collecting.”

While testing for the fungus and monitoring cave environments is the prime focus of the ongoing and future research efforts, Collins said the monument is also seeing which caves do not have bat colonies. “Caves that have maternal colonies, are bat hibernating sites or have agency species of concern must be closed,” she said. “Once we have more solid information from our researchers, we will look at recreational caving options.”

For more information regarding the cave closure or white nose syndrome contact El Malpais National Monument by phone at (505) 285-4641; by email at ELMA_Superintendent@nps.gov; or by mail at 123 E. Roosevelt, Grants, NM 87020/

IF YOU HAVE NOT RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP/SUBSCRIPTION ALREADY, THIS WOULD BE A PERFECT TIME TO DO SO. ed.

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_____ I want to subscribe to CAL CAVER too for another \$10.

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**SAG RAG
2916 Deer Mdws. Rd.
Yreka CA 96097**

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