



**Inside: Two new cave maps – Pink Mammoth and Overflow**

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## CAVE CALENDAR 2021

July 24 SAG meeting 7:30 pm at Melanie's in Yreka.



## SAG RAG SUMMARY

By Bighorn Broeckel

When we moved out west we left Chicago in a Conestoga wagon (actually a U-Haul truck). We had an almost 2 year old daughter in a car seat between us, and the trip took seven days, living in freeway rest areas. I warned Judy that we might see the elephant. But the only one that showed up was Akili, the pet elephant out in Scott Valley. That is until the other day, when I waved Joel Despain's Pink Mammoth Cave map in front of my screwy eyes, and sure enough, I could see the elephant. Yes, I could see it running across the page, thank-you Joel.

Thanks also for taking on the challenge to gain, explore, and map this hole in a cliff. I can't remember if it was Kenney or Pryor saying that it horseshoed. From that I assumed that 'the lower entrance hooked back into the bigger main entrance. We tried to climb up to that low one, but came up short by about 10 feet or so. I often thought maybe we could use an extension ladder, but all these years never got around to it.

Now that we can see this new map, I'm glad we didn't haul up the ladder. The "lower entrance" turns out to be a blind lead and would have been a frustrating disappointment. Caving is often a search for the truth of the underground, and the surprises can be found in person or on the pages of the cave maps and chronicles. This new map also reveals the climb in the back leading up to further passage. Again, thank-you to Joel and team, for what you did, and shared with the rest of us. Thanks also to Liz Wolff and company, adding Overflow Cave to the long list of surveyed lava caves in Siskiyou County.

**BB**

**Cover: Photo of Pink Mammoth Cave by Niles Lathrop.**

## May 22, 2021 Shasta Area Grotto Meeting

The meeting was called to order at 7:27 pm. at Wolffs' in McCloud.

Present were: Steve Hobson presiding, Melanie Jackson, Dave Smith, Mike and Pat Spiess, and Jim & Liz Wolff.

**Minutes from** the March 2021 meeting were accepted as corrected. Minutes from the April 2021 meeting were accepted as read.

**TREASURER'S REPORT:** The current balance is **bank:** \$654.94; **petty cash:** \$116.00; **total:** \$770.94. It is unchanged from April. Some dues have come in that are not yet recorded.

**WEBSITE AND E-RAG:** Website fixes are on the back burner, with photo presentations for the Western Regional taking priority.

**SAG RAG REPORT:** no updates.

**LISTSERV REPORT:** no updates.

**2021 SAG CALENDAR (Meetings are 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, with caving activities earlier in the day and sometimes Sunday):**

Sat. June 26 Dry Camp caving from June 26 to early July, SAG meeting Saturday at 7:30 pm.  
Sun July 25 – Thurs July 30 Western Regional in Weed, caving activities being planned.  
Sat Aug 28 TBD  
Sat. Sept 25 Steve's; Preparation for SAG/SAR rescue practice.  
Sat Oct 9 SAG/SAR practice, location to be decided.  
Sat Oct 23 TBD  
Sat Dec 4 TBD

### OLD BUSINESS

Matt Bowers is doing planning for the Western Regional at the College of the Siskiyous, including trips and a Zoom presentation with cave pictures.

### TRIP REPORTS

On Thursday Liz, Jim, Melanie and Logan Hellein visited 3 ice caves (3-level Ice, Jot Dean, Stick in the Mud Ice). There was a lot of ice and Logan took a good number of excellent photographs. Today Liz, Jim, Russ Yoder and Sharon and Thorne Bertrand were at Big Hole Cave and surveyed the north alcove and part of the south passage. The cave is Pluto sized with large breakdown.

**The meeting was adjourned at 8:08 pm.**

David Smith, SAG Secretary

**DS**

## Low Gap Shenanigans

Joel Despain and Heather Veerkamp

We had been out to the Triassic Hosselkaus Limestone along Wintu Woman Creek on several occasions starting in 2013 just after we moved to the North State. When we bought property on 299E in 2015, it was practically in our back yard. We followed in SAG's foot prints refinding caves at Low Gap and Grey Rocks. Heather and I did a long hike on the east side of the limestone in the headwaters of Flat Creek. We went out with Steve Hobson in his bright yellow Jeep one time, but on Fenders Road car sickness took over. Steve graciously turned around and took us back home. Bill Broeckel was kind enough to photocopy and send me all of the pertinent Rags with articles about caving in the area and let me know which caves had been mapped and documented. Jim Wolf emailed me about a cave he and Claude Smith had found years earlier high on the mountain of limestone near Devil's Rock.

Fast forward to 2020. Joel had retired and Niles Lathrop has moved north from the Bay Area primarily to go caving. We had spent an exhilarating winter caving and ridgewalking in the McCloud Limestone and had long talked about going out to the Hosselkaus. It was early June, 2021. Normally it is too late in the season to go out to the karst due to the heat, poison oak, dense brush and plentiful rattlesnakes. But, unseasonably cold weather set in, and we knew we had our window of opportunity. We loaded up our ancient Subaru with all of the gear, Niles and our sons, Forest Despain and Liam Tobin.

In one area was a large hole, 10 x 12 feet, up high on a cliff. Earlier SAG trips had most certainly noticed the hole but had been unable to reach the entrance. Rumor had it that a local person had managed to climb into the cave to report that it did not go far. Niles was a strong climber, so the big hole was our first objective. Almost immediately upon arrival, Niles realized that we could climb up to the left and above the entrance and then rappel down to it from some oak trees.

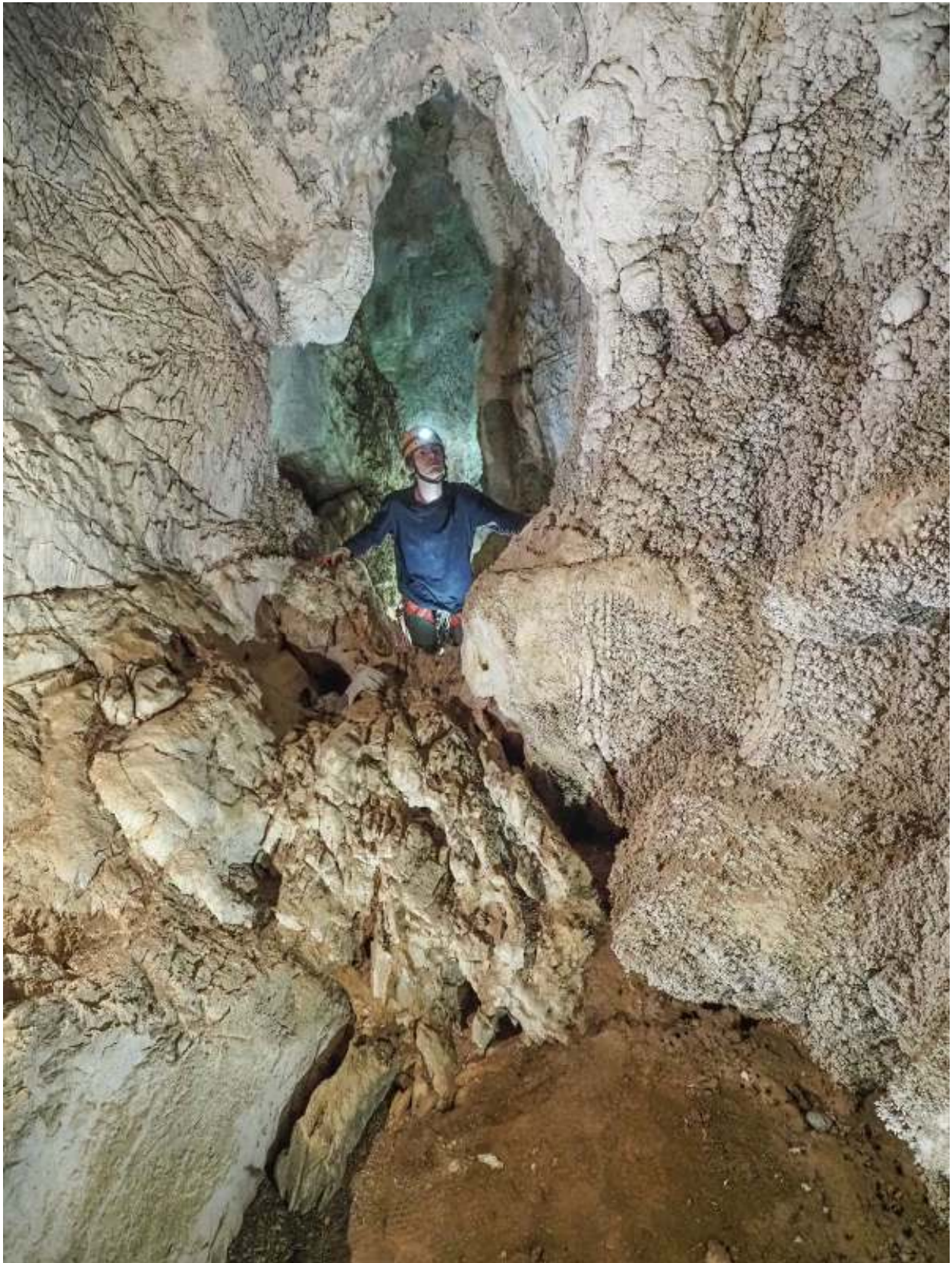
Niles and Liam and Joel headed up the slope whacking away at the dense brush with our Malaysian parang while Heather and Forest did a bit of ridgewalking. We passed Mississippi Cave, discovered and surveyed by SAG on the way up. About half way up, I headed back down to guide Niles as he rappelled. Heather and Forest returned, and we waited below for Niles and Liam to rig from an oak tree. Soon Niles appeared mid-cliff. I encouraged him to go higher and more to the right. Then he appeared some 40 feet higher on a ledge with a large bush, and directly above the big hole. He rappelled down, took two steps to the right and was in the entrance. He reported large spaces and darkness ahead. Cooool! But his rope was too short to rig the cave. Bummer! So he went back up and redid the approach a third time. This final time he took the direct lower route that left him traversing to the right more than rappelling. It was a bit of a fight but he soon made it into the entrance again and Liam followed on the awkward rappel. They reported a good sized room and multiple leads, but it was getting late. We left a rope and hiked out to camp for the night.

The next morning we all ascended up into the cave entrance to start the survey. Niles and Liam began surveying in a back passage up another short rope, while Heather, Forest and I took the lower rooms, the entrance and associated sides. Pleasant survey. The cave looked old and largely phreatic with big, broad scallops across the walls. The walls and even some of the floor was heavily fractured and eroded bedrock. It was a crazy surface – infinitely complex with tiny limestone towers, walls and palisades in parallel rows. There were occasional patches of popcorn and small areas of stalactites and stark white flowstone. There were plenty of Shasta Salamanders and bat guano, but no bats were present in early June.

We mapped up a short climb, across a 30-foot diameter room with a 20 foot high ceiling and into a smaller lower room with a single crawl at the back that choked with sediment, but still had a slight breeze. Back up to the right was another room some 30 feet long and 15 feet tall with a nice loamy floor that was popular with the salamanders. At the back, a crawlway continued and Heather gave it a push. She reported breakdown, strong airflow and daylight. A tiny entrance lay ahead.

continued





**Pink Mammoth Cave. Photo by Niles Lathrop.**

With our survey done, Heather and I ascended up the short rope into the upper level to see what Niles and Liam had going on. Their passage was a comfortable hands and knees crawl 4 ft. wide and 3 ft. high with floors of flowstone and silt. It became wetter and more damp as we crawled in. Niles, Heather and Liam pushed through a low formation choke. The passage continued up ahead steadily becoming more decorated eventually reaching a "T." To the right and into the mountain the passage was completely calcite filled. To the left and toward the surface a small hole with a slight breeze continued. This entire passage echoed and reverberated as we made sounds talking and moving. This was particularly true from the small hole ahead. But to get through we would have to remove a small but handsome stalagmite. We decided it was not worth it and so wrapped up the survey with about 315 feet of passage. Liam and Niles finished up with a photo session to document this scenic cave.

After a lot of back and forth we decided to call the cave "Pink Mammoth." We blame the younger males of the team for the name. The walls are multicolored with pastel shades of pink, gray, blue and the stark white flowstone. We assume that, as usual, the colors were largely due to the microbes and minerals. The pink, in particular, stood out. And the entrance room was plenty big enough for a mammoth. And if you squint real hard and stand way back to look at the map, the cave is sort of shaped like an elephant head, so somehow we ended up with Pink Mammoth Cave.

Unlike the local rumor, a few people had been in the cave. Not many, but more than one. If they had indeed climbed to the cave, they were very bold. We couldn't imagine down climbing what we were rappelling past. Perhaps they climbed in from the left – a potential, shorter route. Or perhaps they did have a rope.

Below the big entrance was another smaller hole some three feet in diameter. Joel rather awkwardly got off rope and into the crawlway to check it out on his last rappel down from Pink Mammoth. It ended in a calcified sediment choke after about 15 feet. He gave it the disto treatment for a single 5 m shot, made a quick sketch and proceeded down the rope.

It was a little sad and disconcerting to pull the rope. When would someone return?

We still had a couple of hours left in the day and so headed up slope and up canyon to ridgewalk. We had not found much until Liam yelled down that he had an entrance. An interesting cave for sure. The passages were small but the entrance tube led to a narrow pit at least 50 feet deep, and ahead we could see small passages on two levels. We will be back.

The next day Joel was sick and Forest was a bit under the weather, too. So Heather, Niles and Liam decided to head up on top of the mountain and look for Jim's lost cave.

Brad Rust had recommended that we start the hike from further south on one of the north facing hillsides that are free of brush. But this route was a long uphill slog with no limestone. We decided to reject his advice and start at Low Gap. It would still be a long steep slog but we would be on the limestone, and we could try to avoid the brush. We left Low Gap about 9:30 following the road east. After a short walk we cut up the slope to begin our climb to Devils Rock.

The hike up started out great, not too steep and lots of very wide and well used animal trails. These great trails only lasted a short time. The terrain soon became steep, and we often ended up climbing rocks to proceed, rather than actually hiking. The rocky limestone crags were now interspersed with lots of lovely brush. The weather might have been cooler than normal, but it was still summer and that meant beautifully leafed out poison oak ten feet tall. Everyone expected this, and we covered up as best we could and accepted that steroids might be necessary after this particular trip.

continued





**Pink Mammoth Cave. Photo by Miles Lathrop.**

About half way up the mountain Heather stepped out from under a bush and scared up a Mountain Quail family. The mom flew a short distance, and a couple of babies followed her. But, the male quail was pissed with lots of flapping and squawking. Heather hadn't realized the rest of the baby quail were all around her feet. They were tiny and all but invisible with their markings. Now that is camo. They must have been only a day or two old and still unable to fly. As Heather slowly backed away more and more babies made a run for it. Even after they had all made it back to their parents, Heather and Liam changed direction to avoid further upsetting the still flapping father quail. It was only shortly after this that Niles came upon a swarm of angry hornets above their hole. We all turned and ran the opposite direction to avoid getting stung, luckily we were unscathed. Of course, changing directions again ran us into a large Western Diamondback who was enjoying the cooler weather by sunbathing. We gave him or her a wide berth and continued our "hike."

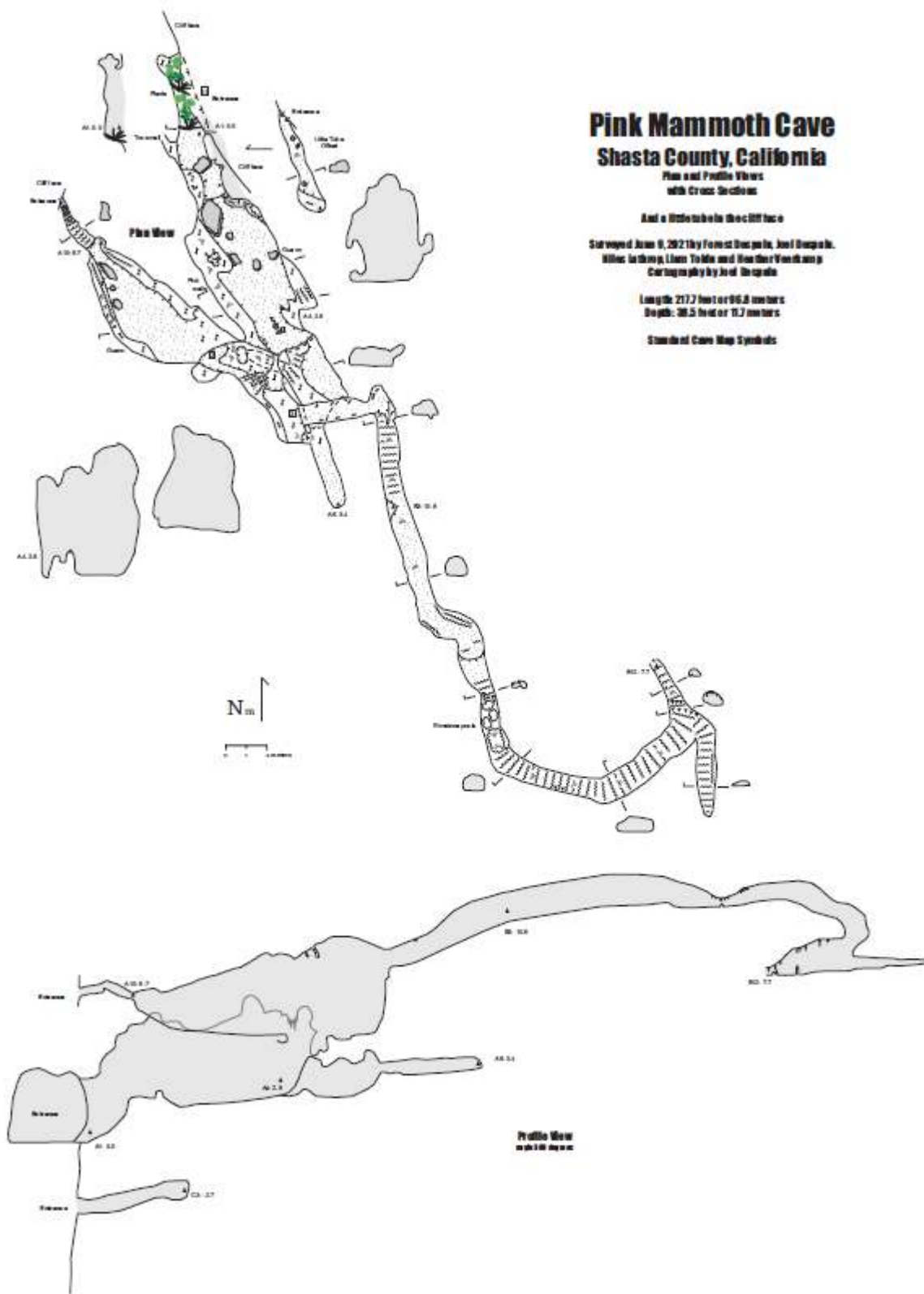
We were shooting to hit the ridge and then follow it up to Devils Rock and beyond to search for the lost cave. We got a bit off course and ended up in the exact area of impenetrable brush that we were trying to avoid. Trying to find a path through, Heather, Liam and Niles split up but stayed in voice contact. None of us found an easy way through or even a moderately horrible way through. It was just a solid wall of brush. There was random yelling, swearing, and groaning. We managed to regroup on the other side of the worst of it. None of the three escaped unscathed. Liam's ankles, around his too-short socks, were shredded and he'd been whacked in the face multiple times. Niles had blood running down both his arms from cuts and Heather had broken off a stick in her eye near her tear duct. We bitched for a few minutes, ate a snack, drank some water and continued on our trek.

Shortly after the "Brush of Death," we came to the lowest point of the rocky ridge. We all love limestone but you can't possibly imagine how excited we were to see it and climb up on to it and out of the brush. The limestone on this ridge is amazing and dramatic. It had very deep and well-formed epi-karst with jutting pinnacles and rocks that were like the edges of giant knives. Traversing that kind of terrain is fun, but it is rather slow going. We continued up the ridge line, alternating between limestone pinnacles and brush patches. Halfway up and 6 hours in, Liam's shoe sole fell off; the situation was far from ideal. Turns out not one of us brought duct tape. Yes, I know, WTF. Niles cut holes through Liam's boot and we took the string off Heather's Life Straw and "sewed" the sole back on. We then backed it up with a cinched up belt and the headband off a headlamp. After all, we weren't to the top yet, or the reported cave location, and the fastest way back was forward. We did reach the top not long after with only a few stops for boots adjustments necessary. It was a beautifully clear day and we could see Mt. Shasta, Mt. Lassen and the valley floor.

We descended down the ridge towards the saddle and some of the sinkholes that are up on top. The area was a pleasant oak forest with no brush. The large shallow sided sinkholes create an interesting landscape for the top of a mountain. We went down the west side of the mountain to get to the "x" that was on the map. The cave was reported to be in a narrow canyon with a horizontal entrance. The outcrops contained several narrow canyons we checked out. Liam located a small awkward hole, but upon investigation we realized it did not meet the description of the cave we were looking for. But still, it was cave!! Niles headed in and immediately found a 30 foot down climb. He rigged a hand line and descended, followed by Liam and Heather. At the bottom of the down climb was a room, oriented along a crack and large enough for the three of us to sit in. On the left was a short 10 foot climb down that led to the bottom of the room. Niles climbed down and noted lots of animals' bones on the sediment floor. There were a couple of leads visible. One hole appeared to pinch out but the one on the opposite side of the room and up a sediment bank appeared to continue. On the right side of the room was a very small lead that lead to a descending crack. A rock thrown down bounced for a couple of seconds before hitting the bottom. The hole would require some very tiny people or enlargement to push. Liam named the cave Broken Boot Cave.

continued





Map: Pink Mammoth Cave

After climbing out of the cave, we continued to search the area looking for the lost cave. We did not find it. As Mark Fritzke had told us, the cave is not at that location and it is likely the “x” on the map is not in the right spot. It will take some further searching, probably slightly south of where we were to find it. Since it was 7 pm we decided we should start our descent. We headed down the slope, south of where we headed up and where Brad Rust had suggested we go up. Wow, we should have listened to Brad on that one! Nice open hillsides, no brush. We pretty much jogged down the hill to the road. There is nothing like stepping on a nice flat dirt road after 12 hrs. of steep slopes, horrid brush and knife sharp rocks; there were many hoots of joy. We headed north on the road and after about a half a mile Joel pulled up in the Subaru and drove us back to Chirpchatte.

We all took a frigid bath in the creek to try to get the poison oak and caked blood off ourselves and then collapsed into exhaustion. When we go back, we will definitely go up the hill the way we came down. It will be a long uphill slog, but not a total thrasher. And yes, the next day Heather and Liam ended up in an urgent care clinic and had to get steroid shots in their butts for their terrible cases of poison oak. But it was totally worth it.

**JD, HV**



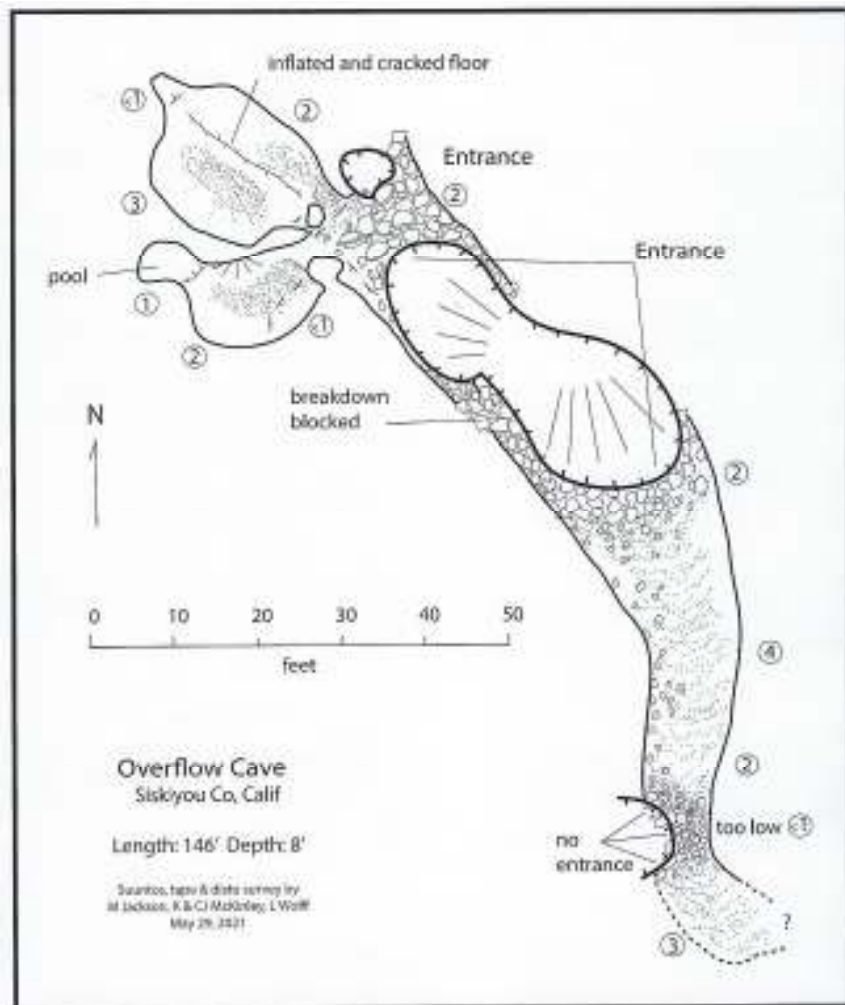
**Pink Mammoth Cave. Photo by Niles Lathrop.**

## Deep & Pallet Ice Caves and the Overflow Tube By Liz Wolff

May 29, 2021 saw six SAG cavers out on the lava flow containing Deep and Pallet Ice Caves. Kit & CJ McKinley, Melanie Jackson and Jim & Liz Wolff were joined by prospective member Logan Hellein. The ice in the ice caves is spectacular this year and we couldn't pass up another trip to see the ice. Two weeks before, Three Level Ice Cave had all sorts of fragile and delicate ice formations so we had to try to find more fancy ice, and weren't disappointed. A handline eased entry and exit of the ice slide, while yak-trax gave a sure grip on the ice floor. Near columns of ice adorned the room that used to have many ice columns in the bottom of Deep Ice Cave. Beyond the columns the cave ends with rubble fill. Portions of the ceiling and some of the ice formations had large ice crystals coating them. Pallet Ice also had a lot of ice formations, not as spectacular as Deep Ice, but definitely a lot of clear ice formations. What fun! Is the ice coming back after several years of it diminishing?

While everyone but Liz entered Deep Ice, she went over to a surface tube, located about 50 feet south of Deep Ice, she had noticed a few years ago, and commenced a solo survey of it. She had gotten the easy passage done when she was joined by Mel, Kit & CJ, who all helped with the survey. Kit was intrigued by a small-looking side passage through a squeeze. In the room beyond the tight spot was an inflated floor with a long crack running its length. Sand cushioned the floor on both sides of the inflation. A tiny skylight allowed Kit to stick his hand up into the air and wave at Logan. So far all passages had ended in lava seals. The "easy" passage had a small pool of water at its end.

Back out in the main passage we surveyed through a sink and into another bridge. This one proved to be over 40 feet long and the exits were too tight, without some digging. This bridge was wide and stoop-walking height with a smooth floor. Breakdown blocked entry



Map: Overflow Cave

continued



into another room or passage continuation; Mel couldn't tell if it sealed or went around a corner; nor could we find another entrance on the surface below this. The Overflow Tube is 146 feet long and 8 feet deep.

On the surface again Jim & Logan joined the survey party to hike back to the cars. It was very hot, probably about 90 degrees on the barren lava flow. Kit & CJ had already left to meet some friends in town. Jim & Liz retired to Bartle Lodge for a late lunch, yum. **LW**



**CJ in Deep Ice Cave. Photo by Melanie Jackson.**

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**STAMP**

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