



Arch Cave photo by Joel Despain

**Inside: More Shasta County Limestone Caves – Arch, Pipevine and Canyon Dephinium**

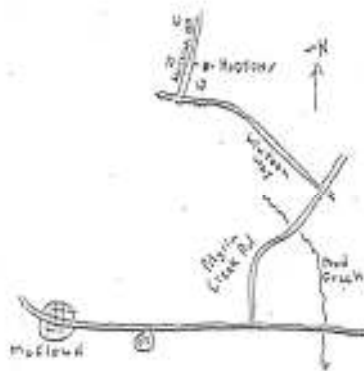
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## CAVE CALENDAR 2021

- July 24      SAG meeting 7:30 pm at Hobson's in McCloud.  
Oct 9        Cave rescue training at Pluto's Cave



## SAG RAG SUMMARY

By Bill Broeckel

Here again, Despain/Veerkamp contribute an awesome article with photos, this one covering three more Shasta County limestone caves. Pipevine Cave (depth 184-ft) takes its place with the area's deeper caves, such as Lake Shasta Caverns (233-ft deep from Lynne Sims 1977 survey). I'm not sure how Shasta Caverns pits measure out. Samwel's pit is said to be 87-ft deep, though there may be a higher starting point up in the ceiling. Anyway, I would submit that Pipevine is a likely contender for "deepest pit in Shasta County". Some might quibble on how deep it actually is, given its irregularities. But never mind, it is a great vertical cave with exceptional depth and significant resources. I added an old cave lead from Bruce Rogers & Pat Helton. I think it might be matching up with Pipevine Cave. It also says that some bones were collected in 1958. I wonder what came of those specimens, and if they were studied and identified. Meanwhile, congratulations to Joel, Heather, and team for some wonderful work – Shasta County ridgewalking is no joke. Thank-you also to Liz Wolff for the run-down on the recent Speleo-ed cave trip team. So many SAG members and Grotto friends showed up for multiple familiarization camp-outs, and then trip leading, I lost track of all the stuff everybody was doing. I do know that our Grotto is so small that we really needed all that help from the surrounding caving groups, especially during weird times. Thank-you everybody. **BB**

## **Cave Explorations on Wildlife Mountain**

Joel Despain

It all began in a wide spot on a quiet mountain road on a spring day. Mark Fritzke, Dick LaForge and I were feeling satisfied and relaxed. It had been a good day of caving and survey in a gorgeous and highly sensitive cave in the early Permian McCloud Limestone of Shasta County, California. As we slowly packed up, a vehicle pulled into the parking area from the adjacent motorway. A somewhat scruffy and unknown man hopped out and immediately said, “Hey, were you in the cave?” We tried to play dumb, but he wasn't having it. He knew all about the cave and had been in it. Early in the cave's human history it had been briefly mined for crystals by a few individuals. This man seemed to have been a part of that cave vandal crowd.

After a few minutes he began to tell us about another cave that he and his neighbors had found nearby. His descriptions rang true, and we were intrigued. Inside the entrance of the cave was a deep pit to a room. They had used some ropes and climbed down the first part. He told us to contact him on Facebook, and he would take us. He also told us not to tell the Forest Service (FS), the property owner, about this other cave. We did not let on that I worked for the FS at the time. Unfortunately, subsequent efforts by Mark and Heather Veerkamp to find the man on Facebook proved fruitless due to his very common name.

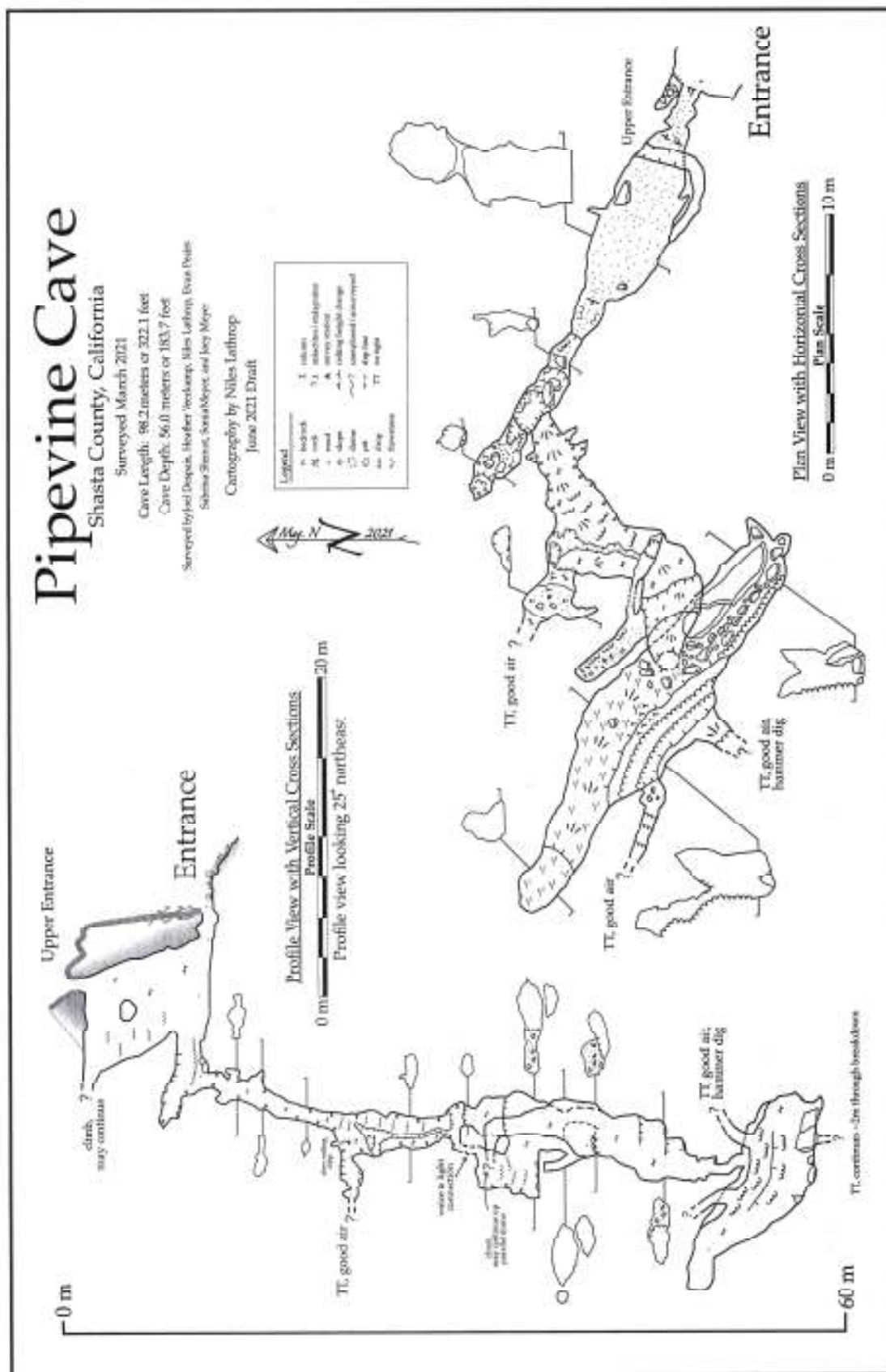
The McCloud has long been popular with those interested in caves. This starts first of all with Native American groups including the Winnemen Wintu along the McCloud River. Ancient human remains and artifacts have been found deep within multiple caves in the area. This includes some of our new cave finds. As is typical, hunters and miners reported many caves in the late 1800s. Some of the McCloud caves were excavated by geologists from eastern universities and the US Geological Survey in a successful search for paleontological and archaeological discoveries in the early 1900s. This put the caves on the map scientifically with many new and extinct Pleistocene species discovered and described. The Permian fossils of the McCloud are also well studied and many papers have been written about them. Cavers have ridgewalked the area for decades and many caves have been found and documented. But some of those cavers passed before their time when no one else knew their cave secrets. In recent months we have been spending a lot of time looking for and surveying caves in the area. But, with this history we don't say we are “discovering” caves, rather that we are finding them and documenting them in partnership with the Forest Service.

### **Shake, Rattle and Roll**

Using a few clues from the man on the side of the road, Heather and I headed out a few weeks later to begin to look for the cave ourselves. We hiked up a steep ridge of limestone that looked promising with many cracks and holes. We could hear a creek down in a deep stream canyon on our left as we made our way up. We dodged the poison oak, loose rock and large logs. As is often the case with the faulted McCloud, the limestone suddenly ended. In front of us were oak woodlands underlain by Jurassic diorite and the hodge-podge mélange rocks of the Baird Formation that are always found in and around the McCloud. No caves had been encountered in this first block of limestone. But up ahead we could also see more cliffs of limestone above the creek. And across the stream canyon lay a large block of the McCloud, a veritable mountain of limestone. We headed for the cliffs on our side of the canyon.

It was a gorgeous day with lots of spring flowers in bloom. We saw lots of deer and indications of bears. But ridgewalking on the McCloud is always a challenge. The landscape is very rugged and steep and there is a lot of dense brush. With these obstacles we slowly made our way to the nearly white rock. Soon enough we were there and these cliffs also looked promising for cave development.

continued



Map: Pipevine Cave

Heather was out in front when a loud a piercing rattle rang through the air from beneath her feet. Snake! She moved to leap forward but her boot caught on a sharp edge of stone bending the top of her foot backward. She landed hard a few feet from the snake and with an apparent broken big toe. The serpent crawled away, and we charted the shortest route back to the car. Our ridgewalking outing would have to end. We gathered a couple of sticks to act as walking poles and Heather began her long painful hobble back to the car. We headed down the canyon between the ridge we had hiked up and the large mountain to the north. As we slowly made our way, I snuck in a few looks at the limestone cliffs off to our right at the base of the mountain. Up high I spotted a large dark hole. It was a tricky climb, and I was in a hurry to get back to Heather, but I managed to scramble up. Just inside the entrance was a pit and at the bottom of the 30 feet deep hole I could see daylight. It was a cave, but a tiny one.

Heather's toe healed. On other caving outings she and I and Mark and Dick and our other caving companions would discuss the lost cave and wonder about it. . . .

### **Back Again**

In 2020 I retired, Niles Lathrop became very active caving in the North State and Heather always wants to go ridgewalking. That basic combination and with a lot of help from our caving friends from several grottoes (including Anna Chinchilli, Spencer Haggard, Jacob Ergov, Brad Ellis, Sabrina Shemet, Evan Peirs, Dustin and Claudia Schultz, Sonia and Joey Meyer, and Mark and Dick) meant that a new informal caving project appeared. As we went caving Covid raged. We all discussed some basic behaviors at home and while caving. We became our own small "caving infection pod." We all were vaccinated as soon as possible and wore a lot of masks. This article is part of multiple write-ups that we will be undertaking to document our caving adventures and the caves themselves.

Early in 2021 Heather and I returned to the mountain with lots of wildlife, this time approaching from the north side. We hiked up a steep hill and within a half an hour encountered a fractured cliff face with multiple cave entrances. I headed for the one on the left. It looked like a large entrance, but it was pretty broken up and was clearly becoming a pile of breakdown. I stuck my head in to see a lead ahead and another downward hole that led to a pile of shredded vegetation – a bear den. I dropped my pack to dig out a light and ended up dumping nearly the entire contents to find it. With the light in hand I again looked down the hole and panned my field of view to the right to see a seemingly huge brown and furry back that rose and gave slightly with each breath. AHHHH! Bear three feet from my head!! I jumped out of the hole and somehow managed to pick up all of my loose crap and run across the mountain side to the south toward Heather. I told her what had happened and after a quick breather we left the area to Mr. or Mrs. Bruin. Okay, Wildlife Mountain it is. After calming down and climbing a couple of hundred more feet, we headed south across steep and open limestone with scattered grass and trees. As the day wore on we found several more entrances including a series of deep, tight cracks. Heather found an interesting entrance, but was not feeling inclined to enter after the bear. She also found a pit just back from a cliff face down lower on the mountain. The entrance and the pit remained unexplored, at least by us.

### **Pipevine**

We came back with Niles a week later. We took a long look at the deep cracks and Niles tried to get as far into them as possible to no avail. The cracks were not the lost cave. We continued our ridgewalking south and east seeing turkeys and squirrels. After crossing over a ridgeline we dropped lower and circled back. Near an interesting cleft in the rock, I noticed a pile of faded Natural Light beer cans. A few feet away lay several broken chunks of calcite crystal in front of a small cave entrance. I was surprised, crystal mining?

continued





Drop from Rebelay in Pipevine Cave photo by Heather Veercamp

The cave entrance seemed small with maybe slight air, I continued forward. More beer cans and a digging tool lay ahead and around a corner lay an obvious crawl-in cave entrance with a dirty rug lying in it. I lowered my head and felt a cool breeze. Whoa, I think we may have found it! Niles soon appeared from below and Heather from behind. Heather crawled in first and reported that it opened up and that there was a bunch more trash inside. Niles and I piled in. And sure enough at the back of the tall entrance room was a pit with fishing line and knotted yellow polypropylene rope hanging down and disappearing from sight. We could hardly believe it! The cave was scenic with sculpted phreatic walls, popcorn encrusted stal, and there was an upper entrance. It looked very old and is up high on the mountain side.

We had a rope, and Niles got to rigging, while Heather and I started to size up the trash. The rig was to two two-foot stall stalagmites on the wall. It was where the earlier explorers/vandals had attached their lines. Niles and Heather dropped down about 75 feet that afternoon to run out of rope. As reported, the upper part of the pit can be climbed by the very daring. There were empty beer cans set on ledges and rocks way down the pit. They had been drunk shotgun style with a hole in the bottom of each can. We called it a day, but came back the next.

After some consternation on my part at the top of the pit, Niles graciously made the trek back to the car for his drill and bolting kit. Two bolts firmly in the wall, Niles and Heather bottomed the pit, and I surveyed down to the 70 foot mark to a very casual rebelay on a small ledge. Just above a short side passage comes into the pit. The upper part of the pit is a slope with a couple of ten foot tall vertical sections. Just like the top of the cave, the pit is very phreatic with big, broad, shallow scallops lining the walls of the bedrock tube. One side of the pit was lined with popcorn, crystals and tiny aragonite all in an array of colors. The other wall side of the pit is bare and dark. Condensation corrosion and deposition and microbial action came to mind.

Niles and Heather reported that pit was maybe 170 feet deep with a room at the bottom. The pit is very oddly shaped. Below where I had stopped was a constriction, then the rappel went down the middle of a large room to a much smaller in diameter but longer in length constriction and then twenty feet to the floor.

The next weekend we invited the entire team to come on up and see the new pit. We wanted to gather a lot more information for the FS before telling them about the cave and we needed help. The cave was largely mapped including the upper entrance, many photos were taken and Niles started a climb that still continues from the bottom. Everyone got a chance to see the deep and weird pit. And we got a bit of ridgewalking in. It was a successful and rather straightforward weekend.

We named the cave Pipevine for the happy little pipevine plant right at the entrance. In keeping with the plat theme, the nearby much smaller cave was named for the super abundant and pretty red Canyon Delphinium that carpeted the slopes around the caves. This cave is a single passage crawl with a mud floor and a good number of speleothems. The Pipevine Cave pit has a depth of 144 feet, but a length of 168 feet since the upper part of the drop is sloped. With a few leads left this pit cave is 322.1 feet or 98.2 meters long and 183.7 feet or 56 meters deep. Canyon Delphinium Cave is about 10 m long and 2 m deep.

Ridgewalking to the east that weekend I had stumbled upon another cave with more beer cans outside of the entrance. A scenic little arch some 8 feet tall, 6 feet wide and perhaps 5 feet thick is adjacent to the entrance. The cave itself went immediately up a climb, past a second entrance and then back down a pit. It looked promising. I continued east and north and eventually re-found the pit I had encountered the day Heather broke her toe.

continued

# Arch Cave

Shasta Trinity National Forest

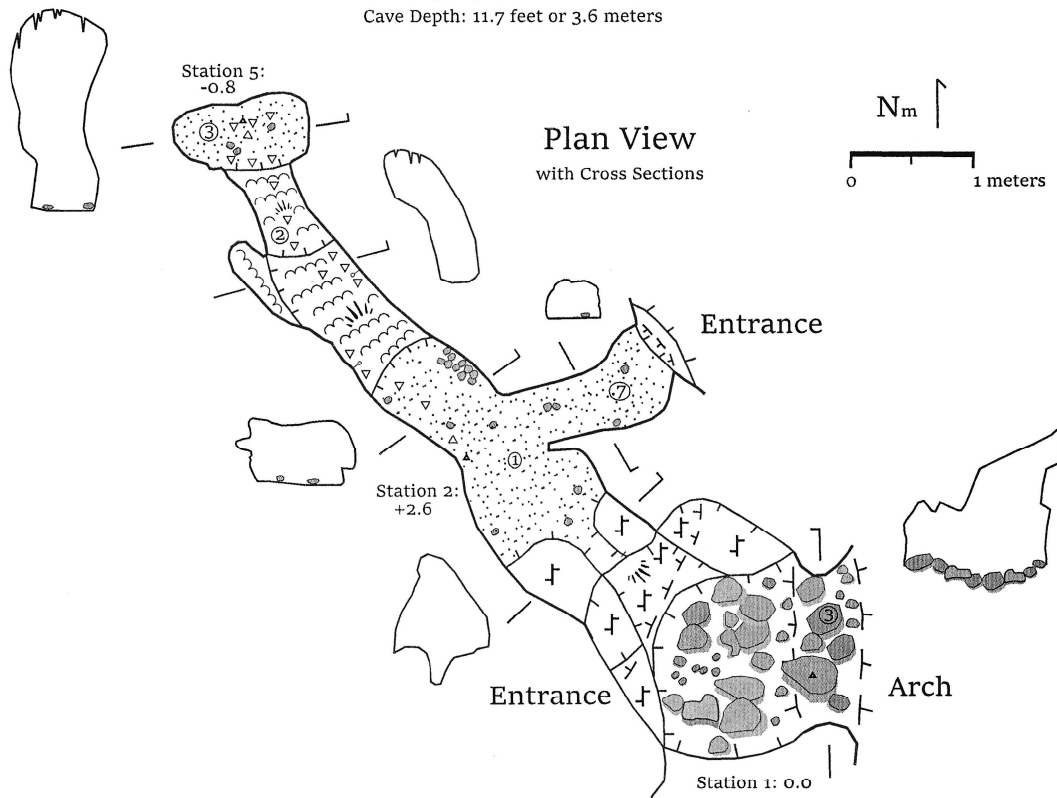
Shasta County, California

Survey by Heather Veerkamp, Niles Lathrop and Joel Despain

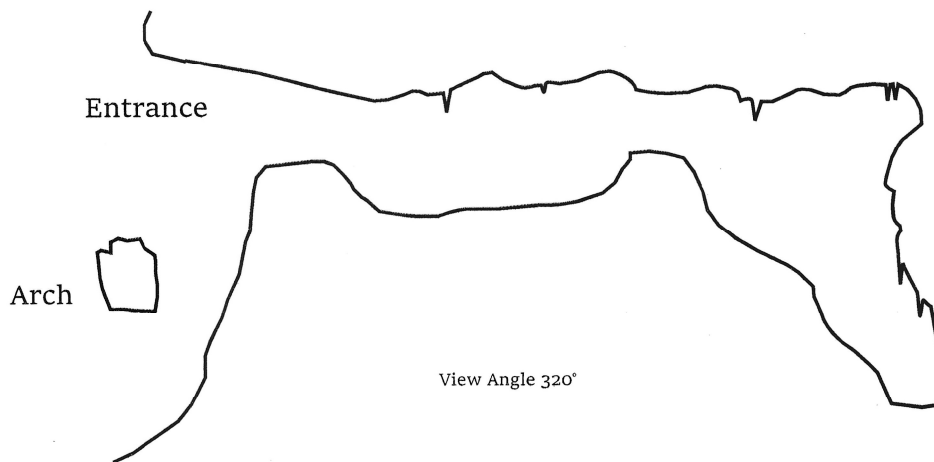
Cartography by Joel Despain, 2021

Cave Length: 52.7 feet or 16.1 meters

Cave Depth: 11.7 feet or 3.6 meters



## Profile View



Map: Arch Cave



Niles and Heather and I returned a few weeks later to explore and map Arch Cave. Niles climbed down into the pit at the back of the cave and reported that it was 20 feet deep but silted shut. Nice arch, but a very short cave. Nevertheless we mapped it to document it for the Forest. Arch Cave has a length of 52.7 feet or 16.1 meters with a depth of 11.7 feet or 3.6 meters.

So that is our story of Wildlife Mountain so far. But, many leads and areas to ridgewalk remain. There may be a part two to this story in the future.

**JD & HV**

## **Drip Cave**

Email from Bruce Rogers and Pat Helton dated 12-22-10.

Best of the season to you two (Jim and Liz Wolff)! While looking in a Secret Cave Book, I came across an entry outlining a cave (Shasta County) that I am not familiar with: Drip Cave. Discovered June 12, 1958 by Keith Howard, Lou Goodman, & Dave Rottman. No signs of previous entry noted. Located approximately a mile up unnamed? creek from point? About half way up hill on left side of creek. About 40 ft. up from creek bottom? equals between 200 & 350 feet above stream. On limestone cliff on left right? side of loaf-shaped hillside. Bare, white limestone patch on right side of hill. Narrow shelf leading left from bare patch to entrance, which is 1 ft. x 3 ft. Large pine nearby. Essentially a 150 foot deep pit; required 120 ft., 50 ft. rope, & 30 ft. cable ladder to drop. "Class 6", referring to something? Very wet, even in June, with mixed rock, soil and coralloids on bottom. Moderately decorated with fine draperies and extensive coralloids. One 6-10 foot side passage. Hydromantes salamander colony at entrance. Some bone material on surface of floor collected. Shallow pit dug at bottom of drop – nothing found. Apparently there is another marginal description in Ray deSassure's Notebook #10 on p. 28-29 – now in the hands of Tom Aley in Missouri Underground Lab. Hydromantes salamander is a listed Species ... and of great interest to Gary "Geo" Graening at Sacto State. Now this doesn't fit with any cave descriptions I know of – does it ring a bell with you folks? And while you're mulling this one over, I also found a reference to Ham Cave, Crystal Shasta Cave, and Surprise Cave visited in mid-June, 1958; all in the same general neighborhood, and all of which were known in 1958. Cheers, Bruce & Pat.

**BR & PH**

Ed. Note: Might this Drip Cave and Pipevine Cave be one and the same? Man, I was 3 years old in 1958, why didn't I hook up with these guys?



Arch Cave photo by Heather Veerkamp

**Gratitude to the Speleo-Ed July 2021 Cave Trip Crew**

By Liz Wolff

Re: regional trips table staffing

Hi gang, trip leaders and table staff,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of you for the work you put in to facilitate the regional meet cave trips. There was not one word of complaint (that I heard of) and many, many compliments. It could not have happened without any of you! The bulk of the cave trips went out to Bobcat and Octopus, a few people even dropped into Rooty-Tooty Cave. One person wanted to go into all the caves offered and ended up helping Bill survey a vertical entrance cave that was not on the list. Sorry about the Barnum Cave key – it did make to the regional for one day and had only one taker to visit that cave. Everyone was impressed with the caves and thoroughly enjoyed their trips.

Thanks for doing a prodigious map copy job and organizing everything Matt Bowers!

The map envelopes/packets were a great idea – Thanks Steve!

Alphabetizing the packets made it easy to find the desired one – Thanks Mike & Pat!

Mike & Pat again, Thanks for cobbling together the sign out & guided trip sign-up sheets.

Steve, Mel, Mike, Pat – Thanks for being available to man the table while Jim & I were gone.

Bre, Katrina, Matt, Spencer, Mel – Thanks much for working around your work schedules to lead trips!

David, Don, Bill – Thanks for being available to lead a trip anywhere at any time!

Vandy, Chris, Katrina & Gretchen – Thank you for putting the effort in to doing the vertical trips!

Dave S – Thanks for putting together & maintaining the latrines at Dry Camp for the cavers.

Thank you to everyone who helped out! LW

Again Thanks to everyone who helped.

Liz, much kudos for a job well done.

Steve Hobson, SAG Chairman





**Bones at bottom of Pipevine Cave    photo by Dick LaForge.**

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**STAMP**

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**TO:**