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Lowell Burkhead

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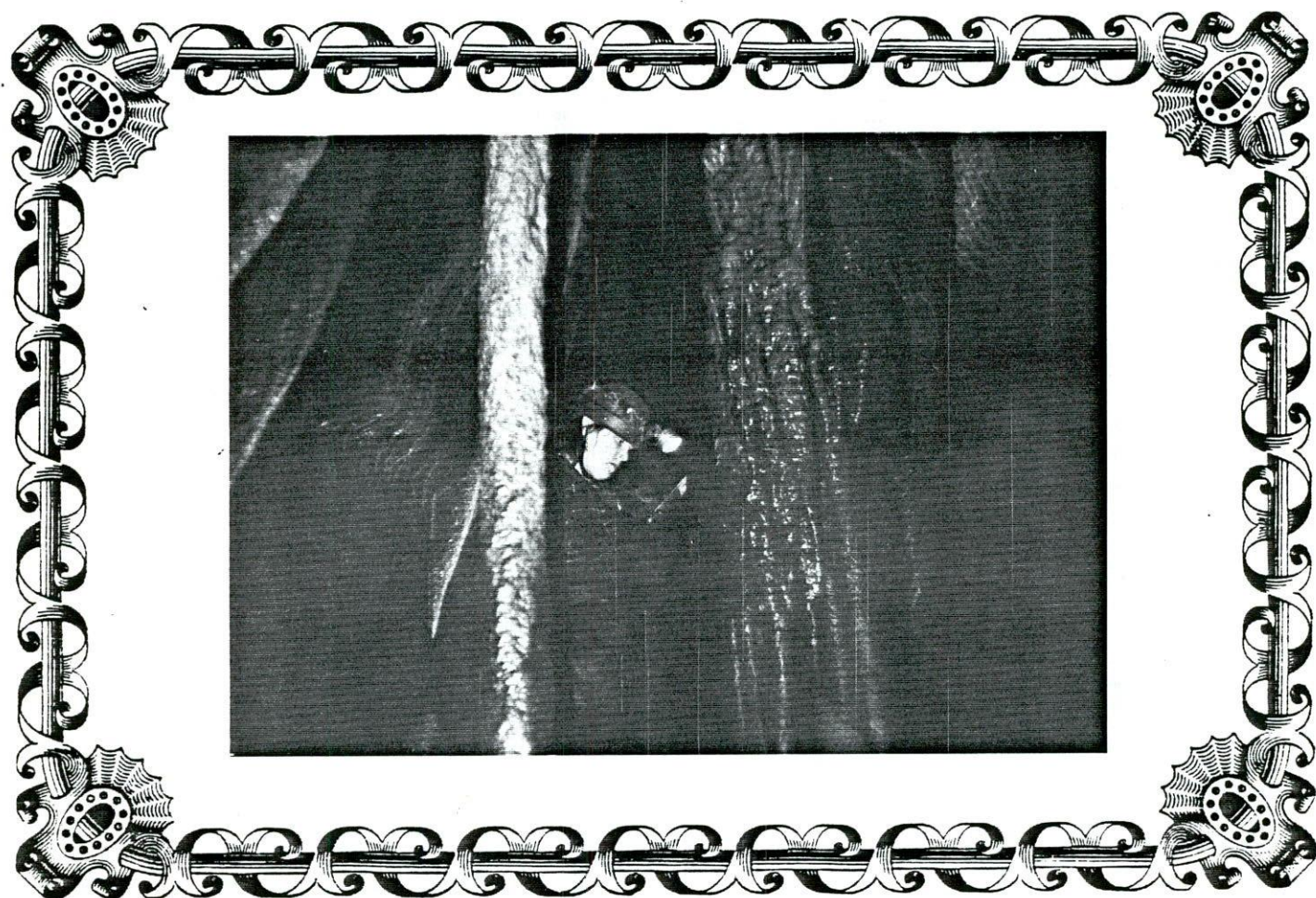
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IOWA GROTTO

INTERCOM



VOLUME XXIV ISSUE 3

May - June 1988
Volume 24 Number 3

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The Iowa Grotto meets at 7:30 p.m. on the fourth wednesday of each month in room 236 of Trowbridge Hall on the campus of the University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa. The Iowa Grotto was founded in 1949 and is the third oldest grotto west of the Mississippi.

Cover: Sue Ecklund records survey data while standing by the six meter Stalagtite in Coldwater Cave, Winneshiek County, IA.



IOWA GROTTO
National Speleological Society
P.O. Box 228
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

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Volume Twenty-Four

Issue Three

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IOWA GROTTO MEETING MINUTES

There was no business meeting in May due to the lack of a chairman or vice-chairman to run it. Several members conducted some informal business on the front steps of Trowbridge Hall. This non-meeting broke up around 8:00 p.m.

Regular Meeting, June 22, 1988

The meeting was called to order at 7:37 p.m. with six members present. The treasurer's report listed a balance of \$289.75 in the club treasury. Old Business: Beth Patel presented the master copy of the March/April Intercom to be reproduced. Mike Lace reported on the pursuit of non-profit status for the Grotto. Lowell Burkhead announced the recovery of Iowa Cave Book #1 (circa 1957) as well as some other Grotto Library materials. It was decided that to avoid confusion Lowell Burkhead will be listed in the INTERCOM as the senior editor while Mike Lace and Stacey Cyphert will be listed under the heading of "Editorial Staff". New Business: Mike Lace suggested that the meeting agenda should be reorganized to one beginning with trip reports and ending with new business. The motion was passed with the hope that it will draw more members to the meetings. Trip Reports: The Spring Grotto Trip was held at Backbone State Park on May 14, 1988 with nine members attending. The day's activities included vertical training on the Backbone as well as a vertical exercise in nearby Willard Cave, Delaware County. A new nameless pit was also discovered in the vicinity of Willard and it contains a second drop which remains to be pushed. Coldwater weekend, May 19th, saw a tourist trip led by Doug Schmuecker, a trip by Mike Bounk and Lowell Burkhead to the Jumping-off Point, a mainstream resurvey trip led by Dave Ecklund, including Scott Wickwire, Bill Nelson, and Bryan Bain, which netted 2300 feet; and a trip out Wanda's Walk to the waterfall by Bryan Bain, Mike Nelson, Warren Netherton, Larry Welch, Stacey Cyphert, and Mike Lace. Due to the high Carbon Dioxide level in the cave, only Mike Nelson, Warren Netherton, and Mike Lace went as far as Grappling Falls where they ran the survey to the top of the waterfall before returning to the shaft. Future Trips: Mike Lace announced that there will be an April Cave trip on June 18th and again on the last weekend of July. The Coldwater Cave Fieldcamp will take place on July 4th. The Summer Grotto Trip will take place at Mystery Cave, Forestville State Park, on the weekend of August 13th. The meeting was adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

What a Weekend!

Pulaski County, Missouri

by Mike Nelson

Friday, May 6th, Doug Schmuecker, his friend (and now mine) Jay Wells and I took a long ride to Waynesville, Mo., to do some diving and dry caving. Diving the huge Roubidoux Spring was our primary intent, though, which we did immediately after scoping out the area frequented by the recruits from the nearby Fort Leonard Wood. We imagined the boys out for a weekend on the town might provide a setting a little livelier than the wholesome atmosphere required by clean-cut cavers.

Roubidoux Spring

May 6, 1988

After signing in at the police station, the three of us took a thirty minute orientation dive into Roubidoux's Cavern. It is, in itself, huge, and even though he had been there many times before, Doug found niches and sights he had not seen on previous dives. Of course, being Jay's and my first dive of this type, we were in total awe. From a depth of forty feet, the opening and the fish swimming there, were clearly outlined at the top of the rubble slope, which angled up at forty-five degrees from the floor. We snooped around at our leisure, finding several little air bells and survey markers and a note, asking divers not to mess with the markers. The handline into the cave itself, was no longer there, complicating the dive Doug and I had been contemplating to the vertical drop at the 100 ft depth level later in the weekend. Doug planned the trip well, though, and the dives were to be done to incrementally accustom me to the cave environment and depth. Jay would not be diving the cave proper so running a handline would become part of our exercise.

May 7, 1988

Doug and I geared up, Jay waited on the surface and prepared to join us as we returned from the cave to the cavern area after a planned twenty minute dive. It occurs to me that I should have explained earlier that the cavern portion of the cave is that which is all within view of the light from the opening of the cave.

We laid in a short piece of line, discovering the permanent line just beyond the NSS-Cave Diving Section warning sign. Doug tied off our reel to this line and we progressed into the darkening depths.

As we left the lighted zone, the visibility became subject to the power of our lights, and 30 feet was about the max. There were more times than not when the left wall and ceiling would disappear. The vastness of the submerged passage, the awe experienced, the personal feelings, are not readily transferable to paper. So I will keep them as part of my private memories. We swam alongside the line for some distance, but at one point I somehow managed to snag myself and became entangled, a relatively common, but still dangerous situation in cave diving. Doug started to free me, then thinking I realized what the problem was, tried to help and made it

worse. That's when I realized "that's what a buddy's for" and placed myself fully in his hands. I let go of the line while both of us stood there on the floor of the cave over 40 feet deep in water, on the mud bottom. The possibility of losing all visibility while dismantling me was great. Trust. I did. Thanks Doug.

Freed, I followed Doug, a full arm's length from the line, to its end. After reaching a depth of 55 feet, we came back up to 50 feet at the edge of the crest, from which the floor dropped steeply out of sight. If we were to reach our intended goal, we would have to lay line from here, on the next dive. We returned to the cavern after a total dive time of 25 minutes, and dived in that area for another 25 minutes with Jay. We had entered the cave an estimated 300 feet from the cavern.

Pippen Spring

Taking a little respite from Roubidoux, we took the very scenic drive out to Pippen Spring. The road there, traversing the border between meadow and woods, was alive with a myriad of colorful songbirds and wild flowers. The site of the spring is a rather sore spot with the local folks, though. Pippen Place was obviously once a very beautiful estate. The site was once a hotel along the stage route, later according to some stories, a high class brothel, and yet later, the host to school proms and social functions. It changed hands a couple of times, losing its collection of period antiques along the way, before succumbing to fire while in a heavily insured state. Waynesville, though quite old (established in 1826) had lost something that its inhabitants had reason to hold dear. The lady at the police station told us she couldn't bring herself to venture out there anymore.

The spring was in a little hollow, near the ruins. The rise pool was large enough for the three of us to explore without getting in each other's way. Jay was swimming around, just having a good time, Doug was playing with his underwater metal detector with the visions of \$20.00 gold pieces swimming in his head. I, of course, was intent on inspecting the enticing horizontal slit from which the water issued. The story, as Doug had heard it, was that the passage dropped in at a mild angle of 60 degrees (length, not depth) beyond the entrance, where the water rose through gravel. Because of the differences in the water coming out of the hole, fine gravel was sloped from the shores of the rise pool to the cave. Digging some out would be necessary to both enter and exit. Inside the cave, the rocks were coarser for as far back as I could see. I didn't partake.

Tunnel Cave

Leaving Pippen, refreshed from the pure, unstressed fun, we took our diving gear back to the motel and tossed cave stuff into the truck. We headed toward a lead, Railroad Cave, that ran under a ridge, a through trip of about 1700 feet. In the area that we were sure the cave was supposed to be in, a man we talked to gave us directions further up the road, and a landowner's name. The directions were poor and the next folks we spoke with

straightened us out, but cautioned that the accessibility had been curtailed. It was with much hope and crossed fingers that I spoke with the landowner, and he graciously gave us permission and directions to the cave.

The entrance room, on the downstream end, was tremendous. The views from both the outside in and visa versa, were extremely breathtaking. We explored the nooks and crannies of the adit for several minutes before starting into the cave. My judgement of heights and widths is of legendary poor stature, so I'll suffice to say that we were in huge, walking, dry passage, for a ways, anyhow. We came to where the stream filled the floor, and not being properly prepared, thought we might be done with this trip. I noted that the ledge on the right side looked walkable and climbed up. It was and we were on our way.

This added a fun dimension to the trip, the walls were clean and beautifully sculptured, the cave scrubbed by the water that could obviously run through it much deeper than it was now. There were a few speleothems in the high reaches of a gigantic side alcove, but they were secondary to the overall grace of the winding meanders, deep pothole pools, and intricate water-carved features of the walls.

We scampered around curve after curve, inspecting side leads and shining our lights into ceiling holes and passages, walking the gravel bars in the streambed where we could, and climbing along the rock walls where we had to, never realizing that the 1700 feet should have come and gone a long time ago. I did find myself walking slower and taking more time looking, not wanting this cave to end. And though it did finally, it was probably an hour and a half later when we emerged on the other side of the ridge, exiting through a portal every bit as impressive as we had entered. (I didn't keep exact records, as is generally my habit for caves large enough to merit it, as I never expected the cave to be so large).

An interesting side note is that we were scarcely dirtier than when we started, one would have to go looking for the mud. One side passage toward the end would have required crawling in the stream to explore; we didn't. The cave is relatively free of both vandalism and trash.

We walked back up over the ridge to let the owners know that we were safely out of the cave. This was when they told us that we had been in Tunnel Cave, not Railroad Cave. Later, when we looked it up in the book "Missouri, The Cave State", the only listing we found under "tunnel" in Pulaski County was "Tunnel Spring Cave". At 7000 feet, it was a class A cave, one of only eight in the county and thirty-nine in the entire state. It seems likely that this was the cave we were in.

The owners indicated that we would be welcome back, and our volunteering to clean what little trash we found was not deemed necessary for future access, but it would still be a relaxing way of spending a hot Missouri afternoon sometime when I'm down there with my wife and son. They also told us of another cave on their property and one on adjacent land. Not wanting to be more of a bother and already having had such a rewarding trip, we stashed this fact in our memories for "next time".

We headed back to town, planning on running the first piece of

handline to expedite tomorrow's dive to the 100 foot level of Roubidoux Spring. Back at the motel, we could see the weight of the day's activities heavy on each other's eye lids. In lieu of this dive, we opted for a long night's sleep.

Roubidoux Spring Cave

May 8, 1988

Jay stayed on the surface to mind the gear, as Doug and I entered the cavern to begin our "big" dive of the weekend. Even though the permanent line was within the light zone, we still still ran a jump reel to it from the near entrance. We moved in smoothly and found ourselves at the end of the line in short order. I had noticed that my right fin felt a little loose, which was hard to figure, as it was cinched up and taped up in keeping with suggested practice. Then my compass came loose and dangled on my arm. I tried to remedy the compass, at least, while Doug tied on for the decent down the steep incline, which dropped to the 100 foot level, where our goal on this dive lay. At that point the floor opened up and fell right out of sight. It was only a 35 foot vertical expanse, but Doug had guaranteed that it was a sight I'd not soon forget. We started down the slope to 60 feet, and I couldn't equalize the pressure in my ears and I had not managed to properly secure the compass. I did not want to call the dive and tried to indicate to Doug to just proceed slowly. He recognized the look in my eyes that said every little thing was not just right and checking the time, saw that even under the best conditions, that we could not complete the dive without having to decompress. He called the dive. I headed out, after he had untied the reel, with him close at my fin tips. As I got more positively buoyant, coming up from the depth and carrying less air in the dual 80 tanks, I accidentally squeezed more air into my compensator while attempting to expell some. I headed straight for the cave ceiling, away from Doug and the line. Getting my finger off the inflate button and solidly on the deflate button, I sank right back where I had been. We got out of the cave, through the cavern and I proceeded to the rise pool while Doug retrieved the jump reel.

As he surfaced, I thanked Doug for the wise decision. I had not dived over 35-40 feet deep since being certified and had forgotten how one's body and wetsuit compress at depth, causing the loosening problems. I learned some new things also. The most important, though, being getting out alive is the ultimate goal. Most of that look in my eyes was from frustration. Frustration at myself and my gear, frustration of being the reason Doug might not be able to get all that he wanted out of our big trip down here, after putting so much into it. The biggy though was being a mature diver and achieving the ultimate goal. Doug was not in the least upset and enjoyed the dive for the dive it was. Next time I will make the wise choice myself, when it is called for. Again, thanks Doug, you're a great teacher.

I headed for the beach and doffed my gear while Jay and Doug took one final dive into the cavern.

Shanghai-Blue Spring Cave
May 8, 1988

Leaving Roubidoux, we returned to the motel and packed our gear. From there we went to look at but not dive Shanghai Spring. It apparently gets its water from much more immediate sources than the other springs we'd seen, as it was considerably cloudier. The cave looked like fun, but the floor was covered with water once the passage reached walking size, about 30 feet inside.

Starting indirectly home, we followed another lead we had picked up, which took us first near Boiling Spring, but we failed to get permission to look at this one. The lead eventually took us near the town of Duke, where Doug recognized the cave as just a shelter that was popular for parties. He had spent a little time at Fort Leonard Wood himself, once.

The long ride home was shortened by the race track experience Doug had picked up in his youth. Coming through Jefferson City, we ran up against a storm front packing 70 mph winds. At a construction site we passed, the gale was peeling 4 ft by 8 ft pieces of styrofoam off a stack on the roof like cards flying out of a cupped hand showing a youngster how to play 52 card pickup. Then the rain came down so hard, we almost stopped to put on our side mount diving tanks. Luckily, it soon let up and we had clear sailing most of the way home.

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Spring Grotto Trip

May 14, 1988

Backbone State Park, Willard Cave, and a newly discovered pit;
Delaware County, Iowa.

participants: Larry Welch, Mike Lace, Beth Patel, Mike & Ben Bounk,
Mike Eviston (Sr), Mike Eviston, Gary Engh, Loren
Schutt.

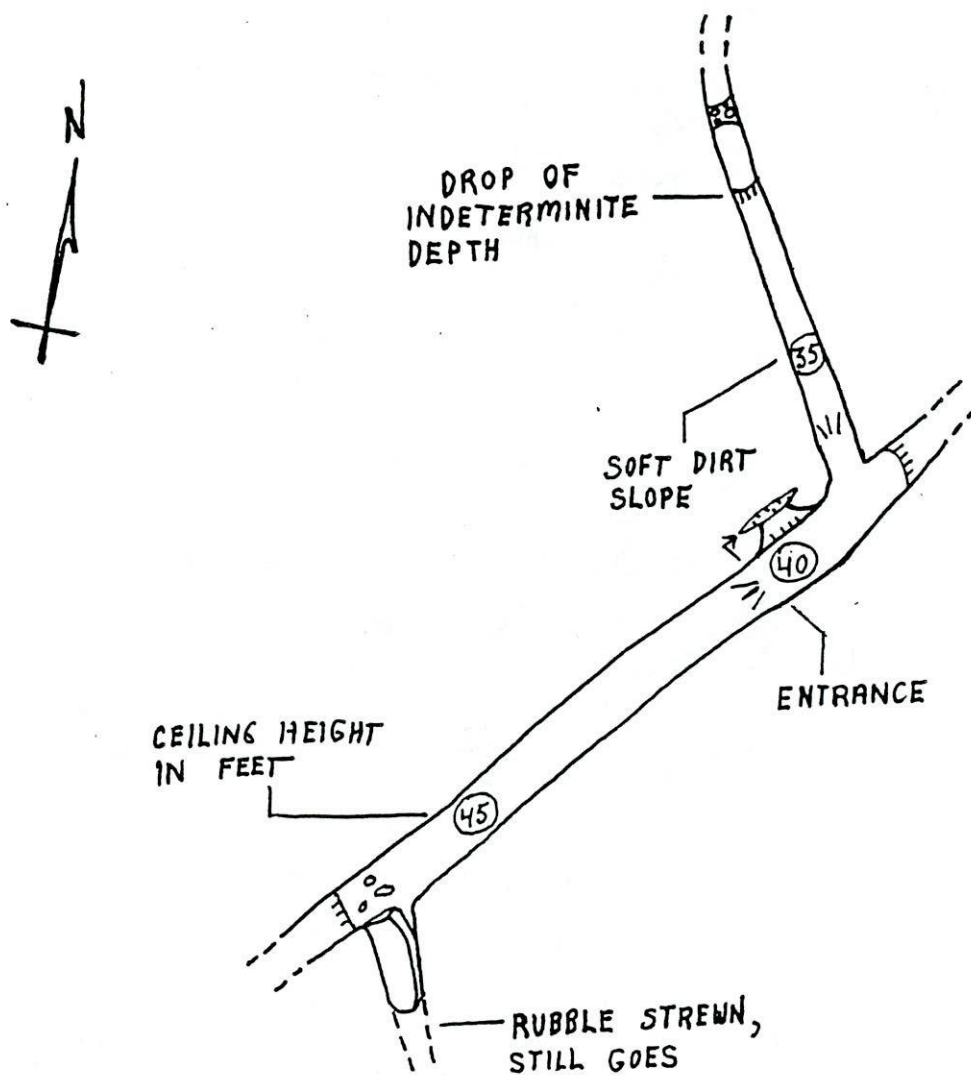
by Mike Lace

Despite foreboding weather forecasts for the weekend, Saturday turned out to be a clear warm day. Even though the turnout for the seasonal grotto trip was not as great as the previous one, we did manage to draw eight members to this vertical training/caving session. We set out in the morning to do a little chimneying and belayed climbing on the Backbone. After a bit of scouting around, we rigged a belay line over a 70 ft cliff for Mike Eviston to try some climbing. The cliff face proved to be a difficult climb and after two attempts, and some impromptu belay practice, Mike decided to save the climb for another day.

We then rigged the same cliff with 200 feet of Bluewater II for rappelling and ascending practice. The overhanging lip of this drop allows a climber to scale down only 5 feet of the face; beyond that it is a free drop to the stream bank below. Mike Eviston, Larry, myself, and Beth (her first rappel) took turns on this scenic drop.

At about 2:00 p.m. we derigged the rope and set out for Willard Cave to do some in-cave vertical work. After a little fallen barbed

NAMELESS PIT, DELAWARE Co.
(SKETCH FROM MEMORY - MIKE LACE 5/15/88)



wire around the pit had been removed, Willard Cave, a 30 ft deep linear crevice, was rigged. Mike Eviston and his son, Mike Bounk, Loren Schutt, and Gary Engh each entered the pit either by a climbing rig or by chimneying.

A small hole near Willard Cave, which had been spotted on a previous survey trip, was targeted to be dug open that day. Gary, Larry, and Loren began working on this virgin pit and thanks to Loren's mining pick, progress was quickly made. The entrance led to a 1-2 ft wide crevice that dropped 8 feet to a mud slope, with the cave continuing underneath a ledge. After a bit of digging on belay, Larry managed to squeeze under the ledge. The slope led immediately to a 40 ft free drop. Larry retreated while a 150 ft rappel line was rigged and he was able to don his vertical costume for a virgin pit push.

Larry again squeezed under the ledge on belay and then rigged onto the Bluewater II for the rappel. I soon followed him down and we found ourselves in a 40 ft high crevice with smooth, damp walls separated by a uniform 2-3 feet. At each end of the entrance section, a roughly perpendicular crevice continues.

The southwest end "side passage" seems to continue beyond some rubble but was not pushed. The northeast end passage had a soft dirt slope that dropped about 15 feet to a second vertical drop of indeterminate depth. We dropped the remainder of the rope and the attached rope bag down the pit but it dangled in mid-air. The crevice curved downward to the right - with the sound of pooled water at the bottom - and it continues northward from the drop. A second rope would have to be rigged in order to push this pit due to the slick walls and unknown nature of the drop beyond.

We found no bats in the cave but numerous calcite "scales" (or thin plates hanging off the wall) as well as plenty of popcorn. Ascending the 40 ft free drop was a piece of cake but climbing up the mud slope and squeezing into the pit entrance was a real challenge. We couldn't squeeze through it with ascenders on so we left them clipped to the fixed line after rigging onto the belay rope. After we had exited, the rope bag became snagged on a ledge while pulling up the rope. Larry generously volunteered to climb part way down to extricate the bag. I was in no shape to stop him. He finally managed to pull it free and get himself out. We had spent approximately two hours in this unnamed pit. While working on this pit a size "D" flashlight and a brand new carabiner were dropped into the cave and not recovered so that gives us an additional incentive to return. All-in-all, it was a very successful day in vertical training, new discoveries, and fun!

"If I Had a Hammer..."

May 21, 1988

Coldwater Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa
 Larry Welch, Scott Dankof, Mike Lace

water level: 9.7 inches
 water temperature: 48 F

by Mike Lace

Scott, Larry, and I suited up and entered the cave at 11:30 a.m.; intent on opening a new dome off of Dead Coon Passage and to survey the new passage. Larry carried a hammer down to Dead Coon even though the tool insisted on leaping out of its harness several times, making Larry do everything short of free diving to retrieve it.

We entered Dead Coon Passage from the upstream end along the dry upper crawlway. Upon reaching the fork, and the passage stream, we turned left into the stoopway that ended a few hundred feet later in a low muddy crawl that contained our digging lead. We each took a turn hammering away on a piece of rock which prevented us from reaching the crawlway beyond and the tantalizing sound of dripping water (as if from a dome).

After smoothing down a few protrusions, Larry managed to slide over the "minor nuisance" into virgin passage that ended in a short ceiling fracture barely large enough to stand up in with a persistent shower of water. It looked as if a slim caver could chimney up a few feet but it drastically narrowed at that point. At the very least it needs to be surveyed. Unfortunately, after squeezing back over the rock obstruction, we found a pool of muddy soup that left us far too slimey to attempt any surveying.

We collected ourselves and crawled out to the mainstream where we rinsed off as much of the Dead Coon soup as possible. We located the chip marking Dead Coon and began the mainstream resurvey but due to difficulty in getting compass agreement we only netted a few hundred feet. We ran the survey up to Orange-and-Black Dome but we couldn't find the chip for the Orange-and-Black passage so we set a chip on the opposite wall. We headed out at a good clip and exited at 4:30 p.m.

^ ^

The Discovery of Nemo Dome

April Cave, Winneshiek County
 Larry Welch, Mike Lace, Stacey Cyphert

September 4, 1987

by Stacey Cyphert

I hadn't been in an Iowa cave since returning from a week of exploring large Kentucky caves and the thought of crawling 1000 feet in a stream passage to reach small walking passage was not extremely appealing. Still, I had never been in April Cave but Mike and Larry's excitement about a lead in the Black Slime Sewer

Passage was the turning point that convinced me to give April a try. We arrived at April Cave Friday night so that we could enter the cave early the next morning, September 5th. Lowell Burkhead, Gary Engh, Mike Nelson, and Warren Netherton were also there.

Saturday morning was grey and cloudy. A brief shower splashed in the pond while we ate our breakfast, which we shared with the fish and the swan in the pond. By the time we finished eating, the sky had cleared enough to convince us that a safe exploration of the cave was possible.

Two parties were organized. Lowell, Gary, Mike Nelson, and Warren were to survey the Lake Passage while Mike Lace, Larry and I were to survey and push the Black Slime Sewer Passage. We all traveled together to Lester Falls where we split to go our separate ways (Lowell didn't quite make it this far as he had to exit the cave to get Babe, his dog, to quit following him).

Larry led the way to the Black Slime Sewer where we decided to push first then survey immediately afterward. This passage starts out as a stoop walk and quickly becomes a belly crawl through water. We all had our wetsuit hoods on while our helmets were on a gravel bank in the main passage. Air space is at a minimum in this section. When we got to a point where we had to remove a couple of soda straws so we could continue, we knew we were in virgin passage.

After passing through a near-sump, we reached a point where we needed to dig to continue. It appeared that the passage opened up a little beyond this point. Our trowel was back on the gravel bank with our helmets so we temporarily retreated. Larry decided to exit the cave at this time since his feet, sans wetsuit booties, were starting to go numb. Mike and I proceeded back through the near-sump and began to dig.

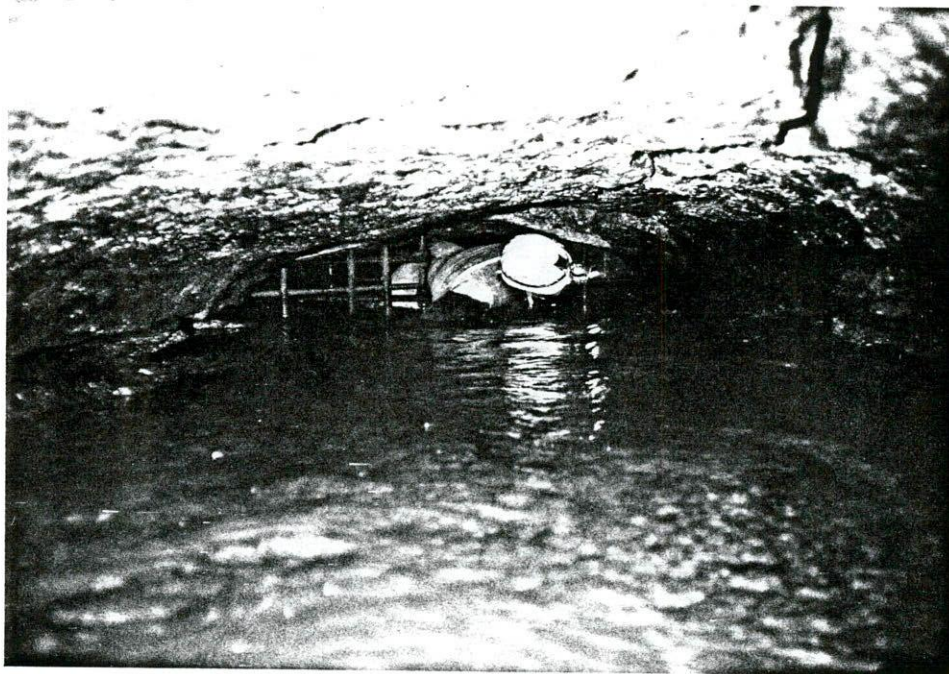
Mike took the first shift and removed most of the mud bank that obstructed our progress. I then took my turn and was soon able to squeeze past the mud bank. The passage was a couple of inches higher here and the floor was covered with gravel. The main portion of the stream ran along the far left wall. Twenty-five feet ahead of me was a pile of breakdown.

I reached the breakdown and could hear my voice echo. Ahead of me was what we called Nemo Dome. I first entered this dome through an upper hole (the stream flowed toward me out of a hole to the left). Before me was a dome of white flowstone approximately 60 ft high. Water was dripping from the ceiling. A reddish-brown protrusion hung on the wall opposite where I entered and a walking-size passage continued over pile of breakdown. Discoveries like this are why I cave. I quickly yelled back to Mike to catch up with me so we could go exploring.

Beyond the pile of breakdown on the left is a smaller dome approximately 30 feet high with a small 8 ft waterfall from a possible upper level passage that empties into this dome. We did not climb this waterfall as the major portion of the stream we had followed to this point was coming from a stoopwalk-sized passage on the right. Mike led the way back into this passage for approximately 200 feet. Since we did not have our helmets and only one light source apiece with us here, we decided to turn around. The passage continued with no end in sight.

The Follow-up

The crawlway leading from the dome was subsequently pushed by Kris Licursi, Larry Welch, and Mike Lace to yield an approximate length of 500 feet on October 10, 1987. A hanging survey was begun just beyond the entrance to the dome and run into the stoopwalking lead. The stoopway turned into a hands-and-knees crawl 200ft from its entrance and grows smaller as one reaches the furthest explored point. The sound of water running over rocks can be heard beyond this point and it can still be pushed.



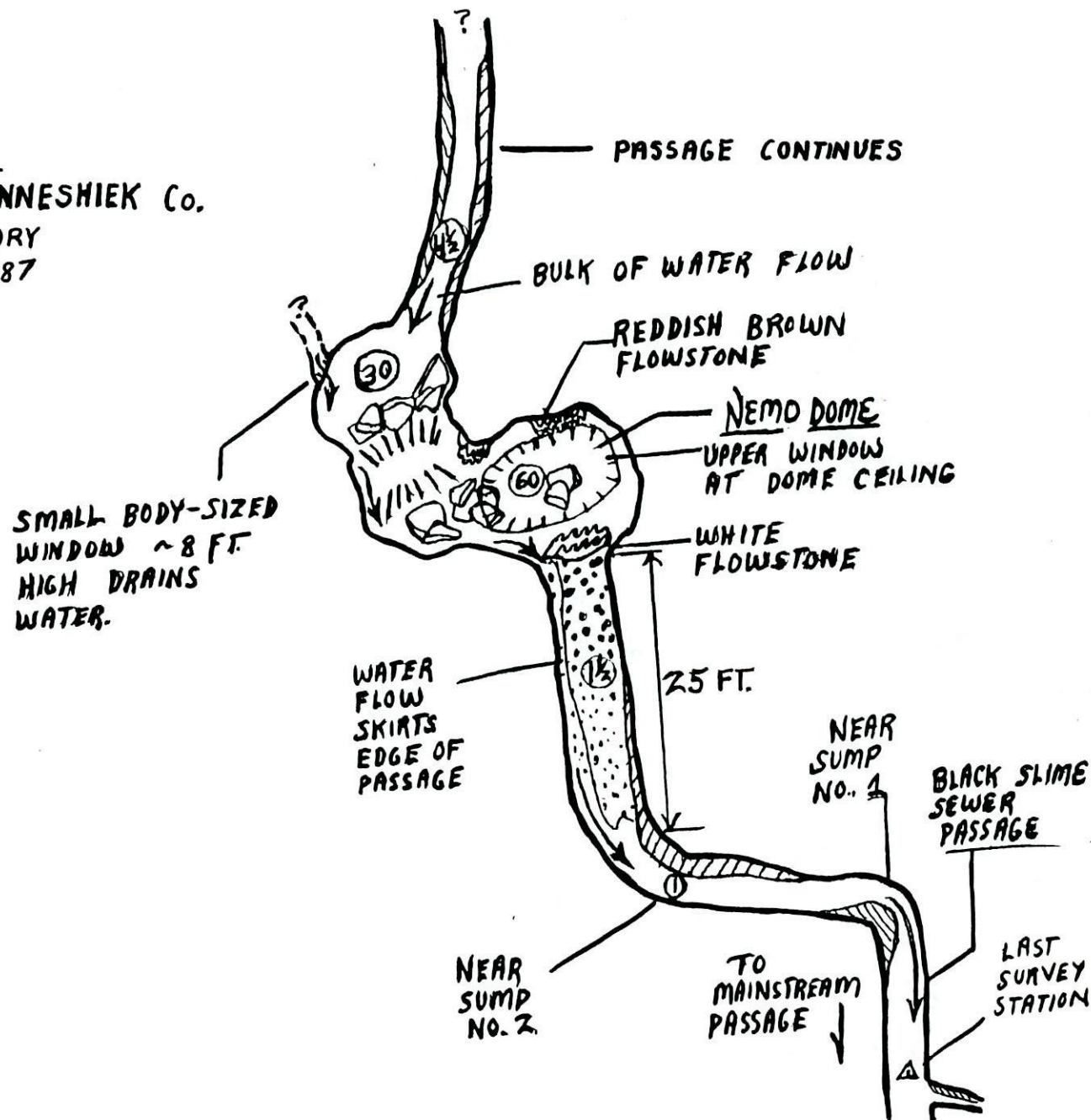
Gary Engh passing through the gate to April Cave.

APRIL CAVE

(NEW SECTION), WINNESHIEK Co.

SKETCH FROM MEMORY

M. LACE 9/5/87



LEGEND

- ③① CEILING HEIGHT IN FEET
- BREAKDOWN
- COBBLES
- LARGE COBBLES
- ▨ MUD BANK
- //// SLOPE
- ⊙ DOME
- ⋈ UPPER LEVEL PASSAGE

Lucky Strike

April Cave, Winneshiek County
Larry Welch, Mike Lace, Gary Engh, Bill Nelson.
time in: 10:30 a.m.
time out: 4:15 p.m.

May 29, 1988

by Mike Lace

Gary and I met Larry and Bill (along with his family) at April Cave on Friday night. The Nelson's chose to camp on top of the hill while the rest of us opted to sleep down by the pond. We did manage to catch a few hours of sleep even though the owner's dog, "Lucky", insisted on letting us know we weren't welcome by barking all night. The following morning, Larry decided to warm up with a tense game of "Lucky Strike" with the dog, and nearly walked away with a set of frothing canine incisors mounted in his back pockets. With all this morning fun behind us we suited up and headed for the cave.

Since this was Bill's first trip into April Cave, Larry insisted that we round off his initiation by giving him the privilege of opening the gate - an honor that Bill continued to thank Larry for throughout the trip. The water was inviting since the surface temperature had risen to about 80 degrees, but even with the recent drought, the water level did not seem to be below normal.

We arrived at the gravel bank outside of the entrance to the Black Slime Sewer, dumped our packs, and headed into the Sewer to check a couple of leads. The dome just inside of the Sewer entrance had not been completely climbed so Gary and Bill set out to chimney it while Larry and I began digging on a side lead at the end of the present survey. We reattached the survey chip that had fallen off of a small stalagmite and managed to dig a body's length into the side lead before the uncomfortable water temperature forced us back out to the mainstream. Bill succeeded in climbing up the dome only to find that the walls belled out slightly but did not contain any going leads.

We continued up the main stream into the other half of the cave that Larry, Bill, and I had never seen. We were all impressed by the ornate decoration in Cathedral Dome, and hopefully the pictures that Larry took will turn out. We made our way down the very linear 300 ft section to a side lead at survey chip #19. Larry decided to examine this passage while Bill and I moved up to the breakdown room which marks the entrance to the Red River Passage.

The Red River Passage does indeed have a small red-colored stream meandering along the base of this upper level route. We returned to the chip #19 to find that Larry had emerged from the side passage, reporting that he had followed it for several hundred feet with about 200 feet of it being easily surveyable while the rest of it is a low crawl which still goes! We decided to exit the cave at this point and noted a grand total of one bat (near the Mud Room) and one frog.

After cleaning up and grabbing a quick bite to eat, Gary, Larry, and I went to a sinkhole located in the field above the cave to a partially open crevice. Due to the narrow crevice size I had been previously volunteered to attempt to squeeze into it.

I spent about twenty minutes (on belay) removing the dirt and rock choke that had accumulated, but a few rocks dropped into the passage beyond described a narrow drop of about 30 ft. I could see a crevice wall opposite the ledge that one would have to squeeze under, but while poking around with my feet it became clear that the "squeeze" would have to be opened a little more by digging on the mud (and rock?) shelf. The crevice and its inevitable mode of entry (i.e. feet first on one's stomach with everything below the waist bent backward) reminded me of the pit recently opened and dropped during the Spring Grotto trip. We packed up and headed our separate ways after a brief chat with the owner.

The Survey to Nemo Dome

April Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa
Mike Lace, Lowell Burkhead, Stacey Cyphert
time in: 10:45 a.m.
time out: 7:00 p.m.

June 25, 1988
by Mike Lace

Stacey, Lowell, and I suited up and entered the cave with the goal of tying in the hanging Nemo Dome survey into the main stream. This was Lowell's first trip into April Cave in many years and his premiere view of Nemo Dome. Lowell, who had been instrumental in opening the cave entrance, noted many signs indicating that the cave might be washing out; for example, the loss of large amounts of gravel above the Boom Room's rimstone dams and in the stoopway upstream of the Boom Room.

We reached the Black Slime Sewer where Stacey and Lowell manned the survey instruments while I kept the book. The day's survey began at a right hand side lead off of the Sewer and all too soon led to the pair of near-sumps that mark the gateway to the new section. All three of us wallowed in the cold water until the survey was extended to the dome. Lowell and Stacey entered Nemo Dome while I retreated to the dry gravel bank in the main stream where a bit of pacing back and forth drove away the shivers I had picked up in the siphons. A total of 29.77 meters was logged for the day.

We regrouped at the entrance to the Sewer and exited at a relaxed pace. Since we had been having problems opening the lock to the gate, we repacked it with grease before replacing it.

Voices in the Distance

April Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa
Mike Lace, Stacey Cyphert,
and Lowell Burkhead

June 25, 1988
by Lowell Burkhead

The last time I was upstream of the Boom Room was several years ago and it was good to be back. The cave has changed since I last saw it. The gravel fill between the rimstone dams is gone.

It was ankle deep water when we surveyed in 1981 and now there are places that are waist deep. The removal of the breakdown that opened the cave has probably increased the flow rate in flood condition throughout the cave. Even the active side passages may be cleaned of fill within the next few years. That could open the way through the Black Slime Sewer to stoop walk. There's no way of knowing how deep the gravel is in this passage.

We were sitting on a mud bank across from the entrance to the Sewer getting ready to start surveying and I was telling Mike and Stacey about the changes that I had observed on the way in and we talked about the sounds that the water made that sounded like voices in the distance. They sound like they are just far enough away that they can't be understood. Several people have sworn that they could hear the other team when they were in far distant parts of the cave. We knew that we were just hearing water this time because on this trip there were only the three of us in the cave.

After refueling both myself and my lamp, we headed into the Sewer and found the chip at the end of the survey and the end of the hands and knees stuff and bellied out in the ice water. We started surveying and didn't stop until we were at the chip in Nemo Dome. This is definitely the worst piece of cave that I have ever been through until I started the trip out. That was definitely worse.

I had been feeling better than I ever had before in this cave but my muscletone wasn't quite up to it. On the way out the main passage, I slowed to where I was holding up the group. Halfway through the belly-crawl, I stopped to rest and sent Mike and Stacey on out. I have soloed out before from as far as the Mud Room so the 300 feet to the entrance should be easy. I slowed to a stop just as I reached the float section so I was able to continue.

I did the belly-float area in complete silence except for my breath that I was trying to catch and the voices in the distance. I was sure I was catching up with the others as the voices were getting louder. They must be in trouble or they would be out by now. The voices were so loud that I should be able to understand them but it didn't sound like English. It was certainly speech but it was also running water and it couldn't be over twenty feet away and suddenly it stopped. There was just the water and my breathing. I thought that the 47 degree water and the fatigue were starting to affect my mind.

Then as I reached the end of the float and crawled into that section of the main passage just in from the gate that is 90 degrees off and almost high enough to stand up in, my lamp suddenly went out and something grabbed me. For a moment, I thought Mike and Stacey were playing a trick on me. As I tried to relight my lamp, more and more hands grabbed me until I couldn't move. I was too tired and cold to be scared, almost to the point of not caring anymore and there were hands all over me and I knew there wasn't enough room for that many people in this little passage. There are many forms of trouble that cavers run into but this was one that I hadn't even imagined.

Then one of them spoke. In a strange little voice with a heavy accent toward the sound of running water, he said, "You took

something that's ours and we want it back". I was still trying to reach my lamp. "You took one of our (and there was a long pause) shiny rocks". I was trying to think of what I could have taken. "You were here before and didn't take anything and we heard you say, 'take nothing but pictures and leave nothing but footprints.' We saw you take it and we want it back".

On the way into the cave, I had picked up a rock from a gravel bar that had a shiney gold colored reflection to it. I showed it to Stacey and put it in my pocket. Now there were little hands in my pockets rattling around. One of the little what-ever-they-weres gurgled something and they all stopped. They had found my rock and I felt the grip on my right arm relax somewhat and I yanked it free and pushed the button on my "original engineering model Burkhead Lamp Igniter" and the lamp lit long enough to get a picture in my head of what was around me. One of them went for the lamp the instant it ignited and put it out and they had my arm again and the same little voice spoke again. "We got our rock and we don't think you meant any harm so we're going to let you loose. We usually drop a big rock on people who take our things or hold them under water. You go and tell them that so they won't take our stuff".

With a splash, they were gone. They had knocked the electrodes on the igniter so I had to use my flashlight to get it going again. By then there was not a one of them in sight. I collected my wits and the contents of my pack and did the hundred feet to daylight in record time.

I caught up with Mike and Stacey on the shelter over the pond and knew they wouldn't believe a word of this so I said nothing. I was overdue enough that they were starting to worry. I got the grease gun out of my trunk and they went to work lubricating the lock to the gate and relocking the gate. I started changing out of my wetsuit and the reality of what had happened came to me and I really got shook. I was so out of it that I accidentally knocked my glasses off the railing into the pond and watched them sink into the green muck and out of sight. Stacey went into the pond and tried to find them with a net with no luck. The water was about seven feet deep with no visibility. He gave up and I taped an old dip net onto a pole and went netting for them from the shelter over the railing that they had left from. I hauled up net after net of pond scum and mud but no glasses. Suddenly through the green water I saw my glasses. They weren't in the net but in a scaley little grey hand on a little grey arm with a mushroom shaped elbow pad built into it. The rest of that arm disappeared into the deep green of the water and that hand dropped my glasses into the last dipnet of pond scum and was gone. I reeled in the pole and pulled out my glasses. Mike and Stacey couldn't believe that I had found them and commented on the odds. I made up some stupid thing that made it sound likely that I would find my glasses in that pond. They believed it so nothing more was said.

As for what I saw in the cave when my lamp momentarily lit, you really don't want to know. Take my word for it. Don't ever try to take anything from a cave, any cave. You may get by with it once or twice or you may not. They are there and you can hear their voices in the distance. They'll get you or if don't take their stuff, they may help you when you get into trouble like that little hand with my glasses. If you think this report is a bunch of crap that I made up,

just ask Mike and Stacey. They'll tell you that's the way it happened, exactly the way it happened, at least the part they saw.

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Status of the April Cave Project

Now that Nemo Dome, and the new section, has been connected to the main stream survey, yielding a total of 2455 meters, a future survey crew should be able to pick up several hundred feet of survey in the crawlway leading off of the dome. A second team could also make substantial progress by surveying the side passage at chip #19, upstream from the Black Slime Sewer. The goal of 3 km in the mapping and exploration of this beautiful and challenging cave may be within reach.

As for exploration, the upstream sump needs to be dove again with the potential of extensive passage beyond. Side passages remain to be pushed and past experience indicates that this is a worthwhile endeavor no matter how cold the water or minimal the air space. Future work in April Cave holds the promise of great rewards but, as with most Iowa caves, she's not going to just give them away.

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A Trip to Grappling Falls

Coldwater Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa June 18, 1988
Bryan Bain, Larry Welch, Mike Nelson, Warren Netherton, Mike Lace
Stacey Cyphert.

by Mike Lace

water temperature: 48 degrees
water level (at platform): 7.4 inches

It was party month at Coldwater Cave and a modest sized crowd had assembled for the yearly gathering. Bryan Bain had arrived on his way to the NSS convention and there was little as to what kind of trip he had in mind for Saturday.

We assembled a strong party of six for this demanding trip and had every intention of exploring and surveying the passage above Grappling Falls. Shortly after entering the cave, however, the obviously elevated Carbon Dioxide level began to take its toll on everyone. A leisurely pace down the main stream became an arduous task that left most of us overheating in our wetsuits. Bryan traveled as far as the Pig Trough before returning to the main stream while Stacey and Larry agreed to lead us as far as they could.

At Frog Junction, in the upstream section of Wanda's Walk, Stacey and Larry decided that Mike, Warren, and I (the three of us had never been to the waterfall) could navigate our way out and back. Stacey and Larry returned to the shaft and we later heard that they exited the cave ten hours after the start of our trip. We continued through the three low-to-moderate air space sections into the stoopwalking and eventual roomy walking passage

characteristic of upstream Wanda's Walk. I was impressed with the elaborate decoration in this section and even the presence of some smaller formations that I had not seen anywhere else in the cave. The walking passage seemed to stretch on endlessly but abruptly the passage opened into a large chamber that the sound of running water quickly identified as the Communication Breakdown Room.

Grappling Falls is approximately 12 feet high but it is nonetheless a spectacular and beautiful sight. One immediately feels the drop in temperature by at least a few degrees in this room and I began to feel a chill creeping in as we looked for the survey chip left by the last survey party.

We ran the survey to the center of the room and Mike Nelson began to climb the waterfall while Warren and I anxiously watched his progress. As soon as Mike was in position, we extended the survey to the top of the waterfall. At this point, I knew that I was becoming too cold to make the climb and survey so Mike was signaled to come back down. As soon as he reached the bottom of the waterfall I started down Wanda's Walk to warm up for the long slog back.

When we reached the outlet of Cascade we told Nelson that we would meet him up top since he obviously had more energy to burn than we did and Mike used it well, making it out almost a half hour before us. The trip back had been reasonable until we hit the main stream; at that point the fatigue began to set in as I managed to trip over every piece of breakdown in Pothole Country.

Warren and I exited the cave at about 2:00 a.m. to find a warm campfire and a few welcome leftovers from the picnic. We had been in the cave for 13 hours.

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Caving in Shorts and Tennies

Allamakee County, Iowa
Mike, Delores and Aaron Nelson

June 26, 1988
by Mike Nelson

We were playing our favorite game for when we still had free time after a day's intended project, we picked out a gravel road and drove it 'til we found enough evidence of karst activity to make us stop and find someone to talk to. That was how we found out about Penny Spring. There was no one home at the landowner's, so we drove around some more and noticed the place where two small surface streams joined. In the middle of the driest weather on record, these were real attention getters. The landowner here told me that one just rose from a small hole in the ground, and the other from under a bluff. He said that there was a spring flowing from a cave in a nearby location. He verified that it wasn't Penny Spring and gave us permission and directions to get there.

We had come to the area to dive a spring and hadn't brought any dry gear to speak of, but a little up the steep rocky embankment begged me to crawl in, so I had to. A short squeeze under three pieces of wedged breakdown paralleled the stream and allowed me to stay dry. Once in, there was a rise pool, the water coming out of a joint in the opposite wall. Above it was more dry passage, so I straddled the pool in stoop height cave and crawled into the hole on

the other side. In a bit, it made a 90 degree right turn, ran down a ways and split up into three directions. I paced things on my way out and not being as cautious as on the way in, I came up with the cave's name, "Wet Reebok Cave".

Ellie, our Golden Retriever puppy, had been whining the whole time I was in the cave and as I reappeared, flat on my belly, Delores told her to "help daddy". Which she did. Licking and pawing about the face are now recommended ways of adding speed to bellycrawls, in my book.

A crude sketch map of the cave is at the end of this report. The spring that rises from under the bluff that first got our attention is still gnawing at me to inspect it.

We wandered back over to the landowner's at Penny Spring and caught them at home. He told us of the past attention it had received from cavers, geologists and photographers. But the cavers had never reported back to him as to the extent of the cave. We found our way down to it and relished the isolated beauty of the cave opening and the waterfall. It is one of those rare sights in Iowa that is on par with Falling Spring and Suttle Creek's tributary that runs up to "The Devil's Cave". There was a stoopway in for about 40 feet, where the cave "Y"ed. There was a small dry section to the left and a very low wide stream passage to the right. It would require gear we didn't have with us today.


I told the landowner that I would dig into it to see if I could find any of the cavers who had made the earlier trip before coming back to check things further. This I managed to do and I was told that the right hand passage soon dropped to a seven inch, but very wide slot - impenetrable.

That was it for another day's fine caving, but before I say we headed on home, I should add that the owner of Wet Reebok Cave stated that it was virgin.

Wet Reebok Cave

Joint oriented, approximately 40'-45' long.

Breakdown 

Water flow 



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In the next INTERCOM: New discoveries in April Cave!!!

