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Lowell Burkhead

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Published Semi-spasmodically By

THE IOWA GROTTO

National Speleological Society

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May - June

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The INTERCOM is published semi-spasmodically by the Iowa Grotto, P.O. Box 228, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. The Iowa Grotto is affiliated with the National Speleological Society, Cave Avenue, Huntsville, AL 35810, and is dedicated to the exploration and study of caves. We will exchange publications with other organizations with the same dedication. Subscription rate is \$10.00 per year. Reproduction of material appearing in the INTERCOM must be authorized in writing by the editor. Material for the next issue of the INTERCOM is due by September 14, 1989. Send articles and trip reports to be published in the INTERCOM to:

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The Iowa Grotto meets at 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Wednesday of each month in room 226 of Trowbridge Hall on the campus of the University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa. The Iowa Grotto was founded in 1949 and is celebrating our 40th anniversary this year and is the third oldest grotto west of the Mississippi.

Air Force Rescue Coordination Center
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24 hour number
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This number calls out Iowa Grotto rescue personnel.

Cover Photo: Mike Nelson packs the survey gear into the dive torpedos in preparation to return from beyond the Three Dive Sump.
Last Right-Hand Side Passage, Coldwater Cave.
Photo by Mike Lace.



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

Chairman - - - - - Mike Lace
Vice-Chairman - - Lowell Burkhead
Secretary-Treasurer - Larry Welch

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IOWA GROTTO MEETING MINUTES

Regular meeting May 24, 1989

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Mike Lace at 7:46 p.m. with 6 members present. The minutes of the previous two meetings were read and approved with the following correction. The date of the 40th anniversary picnic was changed to the first weekend in August. No treasurer's report was given due to the absence of the Secretary-Treasurer. TRIP REPORTS: Jay Wells reported on cave diving with Doug Schmucker in Missouri. A Waterfall trip in Coldwater Cave by Larry Welch, Dave Ecklund and Mike Nelson was aborted after a boot self destructed. The party went to Holy Cow Crawl instead. Mike Lace, Jay Wells, Scott Dankoff, and Stacey Cyphert made progress digging on Wimp Hole in Coldwater. Matt Kramar and two friends did a tour of the upstream loop and visited the Big Room beyond the Spong Siphon. Mike Bounk took a 35 minute trip into Coldwater to fix the stream level recorder. The rainfall gauge is currently not working. Mike Lace and Larry Welch visited Wiedenman's Pit on Sunday. Heavy rains had blocked the entrance but they got it open again. FUTURE TRIPS: There will be a trip to April Cave on Memorial Day Weekend. The N.S.S. Convention in Tennessee and Preconvention featuring Ellison's Cave are near. June 2-4 is the cave safety seminar. Doug Schmucker will be teaching a verticle rescue class at the Civil Defense shop in Marengo May 31 at 7:00 p.m. The Iowa Grotto 40th anniversary picnic will be August 5 at Dutton's Cave county park near West Union. OLD BUSINESS: The picnic was discussed and a flyer will be in the Hotline. There will be verticle practice in the morning and caving in the afternoon and the picnic and socializing in the evening. Sunday will be the survey of the back of Wet Cave and other cave trips. NEW BUSINESS: Prints are no longer required for INTERCOM cover photos; negatives are preferred. New members will receive all current issues of the INTERCOM that come out after they join. The Dubuque reporter that did the feature on Coldwater Cave is submitting a picture to the N.S.S. Photo Salon. Mike Bounk will be out of town for a couple of months so if you need grotto equipment from him, contact him soon. The meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m. After the meeting, Mike Bounk presented a slide show on Missouri's Powdermill and Crevice Caves.

As of the July 14 deadline for material for this issue, the meeting minutes for June had not arrived. The last two issues required long distance phone calls to the secretary to get the minutes. Those of you who can't make it to meetings and would like to know what happened may want to call Mr. Welch and remind him before the September 14 deadline.

DUTY CALLS

Bill Wilson's Caves, Floyd County, Iowa
May 6, 1989

by Mike Nelson
Mike Nelson, Delores Nelson, Aaron Nelson, Julie Whitfield, Wes Whitfield, Jack Decker, Gary Flugum, Chad Gentz and Eleanor Dog Biscuit Nelson.

I've been caving since April 20, 1985, and though I'd led a number of people on their first cave trips, I had yet to lead an actual "novice trip". A while back, a sign I had left in our local YMCA had drawn a minimum of response, but contact was maintained between myself and the interested parties as we tried to set up times to get together.

An early spring trip that was planned drew on out to a late spring trip as commitments and such, hamstrung good intentions. This turned out to be a boon, as it separated those who considered it just something to do from those who were truly excited about the prospect. Julie, her son Wes, and friend Jack were the gold left in the pan after this inadvertant sorting out process.

Julie's determination was evident in her yen to get out and look for cave and not just wait to be shown. A tourist trip in Coldwater Cave sans wetsuits, left me impressed, also. Remembering my frustration at finding enough cave to sate my desires and build my experience, I dropped a day of work on the dome house and we all went caving.

And cave we did. I have never seen a group have so much fun, try so many newly learned skills and truly utilize the variety of opportunities Bill Wilson's caves have to offer. We spent well over two hours inspecting every inch of Jessie James' 640 some odd feet. On the average, when you get a youth that is nearly fearless, he is also somewhat senseless. But none of this was observed among Aaron, Chad, Wes or Gary. They were gung-ho, but not crazy.

Over to Wilson Cave was the hard part for me. I had told this group how I loved to hate the squeeze through the boulders to reach the actual cave entrance. Now, I was the role model and couldn't display my normal whimpering and whining and had to squeeze right on in like a man. Jack and Delores got in after several tries, after the rest of us had had a good look around. This was advantageous as it broke up the usual bottleneck of entering and exiting. Julie and I got untold minutes of entertainment watching Delores trying to squeeze back out through the boulders. She finally had to go back inside and remove her coveralls to do it. Funny, the exceedingly decayed animal carcass that one could not keep ones face more than 6 inches away from had made pros of everyone else.

We walked on over and looked at Hemp Hole and Two Days Digging Caves, but I was not going to take such a fresh group into Two Days Digging. I wanted them to have more experienced guides along. As I have said before, Jesse James Cave is schooling, Wilson is going to college, but Two Days Digging is grad school.

We talked to Bill on our way out and he's sorely tempted to fill Hemp Hole, so take note, cavers who have shown an interest in digging through that rotten rock to that washing machine sounding lead. He wasn't surprized to hear that there was no audible drainage taking place. Things are still that dry around here. This was the first time no sound of running water could be heard in JJC in all my trips there.

Their exuberance had already won these newbies a place in my caving heart, but when we got back to the car, Jack broke out the Kentucky Fried Chicken and sodas. That place was forever sealed.

After a snack, we decided to take advantage of daylight savings time, and run up to look at the Feldt Property Caves. These caves, along the Cedar River, are nothing to write home about, but being as they may be unique in being on the very northwestern edge of Iowa's karst (and the only other handy caves in the area) made the trip there a must. These caves, by the way, are in Mitchell County. Getting to them and back was half the fun, setting on the bluff above them, resting in the failing light, was idyllic.

MOTHER'S DAY CAVING

Gouldsberg Cave, Fayette County, Iowa

May 14, 1989

by Mike Nelson

Mike Nelson, Delores Nelson (a mother), Aaron Nelson (a kid), Julie Whitfield (another mother), Wes Whitfield (another kid), Eleanor Biscuit (a dog) and Matt Wickwire (a grandkid)

The enthusiasm of Julie and her son, Wes, and our own spring fever made it easy to brake my self-imposed limits on caving trips. So for the second weekend in a row, we took a day and headed for "God's Country", northeast Iowa karst. The Gouldsberg Cave is another well used, locally well known fun place and considerably different than anything the Whitfields had seen yet. It was also another opportunity that made me glad to be leading novice trips. Julie spotted a passage I had not seen on any previous trips in here. It was a verticle slot in the wall at the top of a 12 to 14 foot chimney. A slot that I couldn't fit into. I found a comfortable spot to perch on, while Julie gave it a go. She poked through to find a large crevice about 20 feet long, that sadly had initials carved in the rock. No virgin cave, but she got a star next to her name for the effort. Popping back out, it took both of us to get her on the ground again because of some unexplainable malady that caused her knees to shake. Aaron and Wes had chacked over most of the cave twice by the time we got her down, and wanted to see that lead, but we dissuaded them.

We took turns cramming everyone into every little crack we could find, and pulled a rinky-dink on the newbies in one spot.

Falling Spring, Fayette County, Iowa

This was just a sight-seeing stop, though most everyone took advantage of the opportunity to climb around some.

Soward's Cave, Fayette County, Iowa

This is where Julie and Wes discovered how much they truly enjoy flat-out crawls and close horizontal passage. Imagine, if you can, traversing those upper levels with two greenhorns doing the "Coo-coo for Cocoa Puffs" routine and you have an idea of the sense of humor shared by these remarkably deranged recruits.

This is also where Ellie, our aspiring cave puppy, earned her lights. We placed a self-contained headlamp around her neck as we ascended to the upper level. She whimpered (sounding a lot like Larry Welch) for a few moments, until she discovered the possibilities of this new thing. She remained on the lower level, always within earshot, and was waiting at the climbdown when we got there. We'll need to be careful of the caves we give her this freedom in, but in the right ones, new worlds will be opened to her, too.

We finished off the day with another sight-seeing trip to Dutton's Cave.

THE FLAPPING BOOT

Coldwater Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa
May 20, 1989
Larry Welch, Mike Nelson, and Dave Ecklund

by Larry Welch

Plans were in order to journey to upstream Mud Canyon, laden with a torpedo full of climbing gear and other assorted niceties. Everyone was feeling chipper in spite of the general chaos that reigned throughout the weekend.

The torpedo was fairly heavy, but "macho man" Nelson looked upon the duty as a minor challenge at best. Progress was swift early on in the Mainstream and in Cascade. Unfortunately, following a rest stop, Mike noticed that his boot was flapping, partially severed. The decision was made to limit further walking, figuring that walking on dive socks could lead to corns, bunions, and treachfoot.

Rather than heading back, we decided to extend the Holy Cow Crawl survey, which would not involve any walking. Mike had been in the passage before during the famous "Big Kahuna" trip, so he led the way. As advertised, the passage was all crawling. It reminded me a bit of the Sinus Passage, always fairly roomy but always lacking the proper geometry for comfortable crawling. We were looking for the chip*marking the end of the survey without knowledge of its location or number. We each had a few vague ideas, and crawled ahead, looking.

The first chip was clearly too early, so we continued into a section that involved crawling through breakdown. Passing a deep spot, the Holy Cow Puddle, the passage got smaller and we found another chip. We weren't sure if this was where to start surveying. Mike took a look ahead and decided that the passage hadn't been surveyed. Once we found the place to start, we were too cold to start surveying. I took a look ahead, finding a very low cobble crawl that was very difficult going.

I turned around once the passage got large enough to do so, in a deep pool in front of a rimstone dam that came within an inch of the ceiling. A small side passage entered nearby, as well as a promising dig site. I rejoined the others, who were quite chilled by this point. We exited the crawl to the strains of Dr. Hook.

Mike's boot flapped the whole way back, reminding us what might have been.

..."JUST ANOTHER WIMP TRIP"

Coldwater Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa
May 20, 1989
Mike Lace, Scott Dankof, Stacey Cyphert, and Jay Wells

by Mike Lace

There are few ongoing projects in Coldwater Cave that are located a mere twenty minutes walk from the shaft entrance and even fewer that have such a tantalizing "booming" echo beyond the mud obstruction. There were more difficult trips scheduled for the day but the four of us were content to leisurely waltz up to the Wimp Hole, a small squeeze next to the entrance to Pete's Pipe, and try to dig beyond the mud choke that barred us from the dome that surely must be the source of the echo.

*Numbered plastic poker chip used for survey station marker. Ed.

Stacey and I were able to barely squeeze around the corner of the passage to resume the dig while Scott and Jay worked on the sides of the passage with a hammer to make it safer to negotiate. At the moment, the passage is only large enough to accommodate one caver at a time so the progress was slow. The rock walls proved to be especially stubborn as Scott and Jay took turns pounding away, hoping to peel off a half inch or so at a key tight spot.

The mud fill was soft enough to peel away easily but it carried a nauseating stench while a small stream of cold water dribbles past a digger while he flails away with the only free arm at the mound of fill. We gained about three feet worth of crawlway before chilling out but, unfortunately, could not see over the top of the obstruction. Sounds of water dripping into a pool could be heard beyond and perhaps the removal of another two feet of fill will put us at the base of the dome.

We eventually packed it up and headed for the shaft, finally exiting after three hours of digging. We climbed out of the shaft to find a clear warm day and we almost felt guilty about not staying in the cave for several more hours of wallowing in the comfy mud and 47 degree bath water.

BEYOND NEMO DOME

April Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa

May 27, 1989

Larry Welch and Stacey Cyphert

by Larry Welch

The area surrounding April Cave is certainly one of the most beautiful and peaceful spots in the state. It was not so peaceful on this particular weekend, but rather a bit on the chaotic side. While putting teams together, the numbers didn't work out and Stacey and I ended up as a survey crew of two. Sue Ecklund was leading the tourist trip and was to join us if possible, but I knew that this was unlikely.

Stacey and I made good time to the Boom Room, then waited for quite a while to see if Sue's group was close. When it became obvious that they were well behind, we decided to survey on our own. After exchanging pleasantries with the dive team, we headed to the sand bar by the entrance to the Black Slime Sewer. Once the hoods were on, we slithered our way toward Nemo Dome. The crawl was just as pleasant as usual, although drier than before. We were both able to squeeze into Nemo Dome on the left side rather than through the flowstone as on earlier trips.

We dumped our packs on the far side of the dome and went down the stoopway to start the survey. I kept the book and did forward compass sightings while Stacey did back sightings and lead tape. The passage started as a stoopway and turned into a belly-crawl before we finished. I had remembered the passage to be very windey, but my memory wasn't too good and we were able to get ten meter shots for the most part.

Progress was slow, but steady. We eventually started chilling and decided to tie off the survey after 116 meters, the longest survey day since the main passage was completed a number of years ago. We took a quick look ahead and found we were less than 100 feet from the previous point of furthest penetration. Stacey led on into virgin cave that was a meatgrinding crawl. We went onward for 70-80 feet of difficult crawlway, with Stacey pushing through a tight spot to

find the passage continuing. We decided to save it for another day, and scraped our way back to the survey gear.

Stacey took the first photos of Nemo Dome on the trip, namely because he was the first person crazy enough to drag a camera through the crawlway. We squeezed back out to the main passage, where we met up with the dive group. We assisted in dragging the torpedoes out of cave from the Black Slime Sewer, and made it out in time for pizza.

TOO MUCH FUN

April Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa
May 27, 1989
Mike Nelson, Mike Lace, and Jay Wells

by Mike Nelson

This was one very well rounded day of caving. Lowell Burkhead and Gary Engh dug on an overflow spring up the valley from the cave entrance. Lowell is convinced that with a little help, some luck and some big water, walking passage will be cleared to the Mud Room. We sure hope it works as the 1100' (800', Ed.) entrance crawlway is one of the most distinctive features of the cave, but not the most popular.

Sue Ecklund led a novice trip, consisting of Charlie Winterwood, Julie Whitfield and Scott Wickwire. The only comments particularly noted was the speed and ease which that crawlway was not done in.

Mike Lace, Jay Wells (Har, the fools) and I toted two torpedoes, containing two 40 cubic foot air tanks and other assorted diving gear back over a mile in the cave to the sump.

Let me give you a brief rundown on the sump for those of you with short memories or new to my published ravings. On 6-26-87, I free dived about 18 feet into the shallow sump on a base fed line. No surface encountered, this one wasn't going to be cake. On 10-10-87, we toted back scuba gear and I dived about 30 feet on a base fed line. The sump was a horizontal "S" shape, with an upper and lower passable passage with a squeeze between them. There was a very solid, peaked bank of silt that blocked the way, progress was not possible from either level. Down the back side of the silt slope was passage that curved gently to the left, the floor dropping down to stoop walking height, 20 to 30 feet of passage was visible beyond it. The passage up to this point is so close that one is forced to ceiling walk (crawl?). Going in belly down exposed the backup regulators to so much mud that they could not be used. The visibility was great, in front of me, but dropped off to zero at my shoulders. I tried to dig my way through the silt, but working over my head, on my back, didn't work too well. I was too slow to figure out that I should have gone in again, feet first, and just kicked my way through. It is the peaked shape of the silt bank and all of the room behind it that makes me feel that the water is dropping rapidly somewhere close ahead, otherwise the silt should have continued on the level.

This time the water was lower, due to some digging on one of the earlier trips and the drought. I let myself in on the reel this time and searched all the irregularities in the ceiling for air. I did not realize it at the time, but in so doing, I veered from my intended course and stuck my head into the zero vis that was following me in.

From my perspective at the time, though, it just seemed as though I was rapidly overtaken by it. I felt around over my head and off to the sides for the silt bank, which I should have been very close to. All I felt was cobbles and the floor pinched to the ceiling. Starting to reel in the line, it was 90 degrees away from the direction I envisioned it to go. I assumed I had simply gotten turned, but instead of reeling in, I hauled up the line in my hands, in case I had actually gotten around some unseen obstacle. That way I could feel it first instead of reeling into it. I pulled out of the sump turned 180 degrees around, glad to have discovered there was enough room for that maneuver but mad for having fouled up after the long hard effort of getting the gear in. Oh well, I'll have to dwell on it some more and try again another day. Familiarity with the cave makes it seem like it's not all that far to the sump, breaking a psychological barrier to diving there.

APRIL CAVE'S OLD RESURGENCE

April Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa
May 26&27, 1989

by Lowell Burkhead

Lowell Burkhead, Gary Engh, Aaron Nelson, Wes Whitfield and others

Once upon a time a few hundred thousand years ago, April Cave was about two thirds the size it is now. The valley where the spring is was about twenty feet shallower and the spring was almost a quarter mile up valley from where it is now. Even then, it was no doubt one of Iowa's most beautiful areas since there have been few other changes worth mention. Then without warning came an ice age. The earth froze and the beautiful little valley filled with ice. Water tables dropped as percolation stopped. The spring stopped flowing and the cave slept. The Boom Room filled with massive formations of only imagined beauty. The weight of the ice on the frost damaged Galena Limestone crushed the spring as the ice settled. Then again without warning, the ice age was over. The ice started melting and the rain returned. Established waterways were filled with ice and the fill from small glaciers that remain unnamed. The cave with its collapsed outlet filled with gravel, sand and dirt until even the sinkholes above were ponded. The cave was under water and the beautiful formations in the Boom Room began to re-solution and fell to the floor. The cave searched every crack in its local piece of the Galena Limestone formation for another outlet and finally found one. It was just a seep through cracks and took thousands of years to solution out large enough to start flowing freely and start to wash out some of the fill. But flood waters came and large sections of the fill was removed. Most of the cave upstream of the Boom Room was washed clean and the new outlet passage was from the Boom Room almost straight in the shortest distance to the valley cutting off the wide meanders of the old passage to the collapsed resurgence.

The old passage is still trying to rid itself of its fill and is starting to succeed. The dam of flowstone blocks in the Boom Room have mostly re-solutioned and water flows through the gravel under it and through the short remaining section of fill separating the back of the Boom Room from the upstream end of the Lake Passage. The Lake Passage is a section of the old passage that has washed open with the aid of the brand new Lester Falls passage connecting it to the new downstream passage. Then there is another filled section between the downstream end of the Lake Passage and the Mud Room where the two downstream passages, the old and the new, cross at right angles. This section seems to be completely blocked with little if any flow since the Lester Falls passage took its flow.

It always amazes me when people sit in the Mud Room and can't see an intersection. The old passage crosses at walking height with the ceiling higher and the floor lower than the new passage. In this solid rock cave, both walls of the Mud Room are made of dirt. These things tell me that this is an intersection with a dirt filled passage of greater size and age than the one I now travel through. The downstream side of the old passage at the Mud Room shows a hint of air space above the fill which no doubt takes the flow during floods to the old resurgence. It's my contention that if the collapse at the old resurgence could be removed, the fill would wash out opening up 1200 feet of walking passage that would bypass completely the 800 foot crawlway barrier that the cave now presents.

The other evidence that there are two outlet passages is the size of the passage. The passage upstream of the Boom Room is three times the size of the passage downstream of the Boom Room. If you add the sizes of the present downstream passage and the Lake Passage, they would add up to about the same size as the passage upstream of the Boom Room. Every time the spring floods, the old resurgence flows which I think connects it to the cave since some of these floods are not supplied by local rain. It's very unlikely that this type of intermittent spring would be supplied by anything but a local source if it stood alone and didn't connect to the cave.

I arrived around 4:30 p.m. Friday after taking four hours off work to get an early start. I talked with Lester for a while and got permission to dig at the old resurgence. I started moving rocks where the water comes out and worked my way down to almost walking height. I worked on it until dark and made good progress. The next morning, the youth took time out from driving cavers and land owners alike to losing their tempers to come and help dig for a couple of hours. Then when the others had gone in the cave, Gary took over for the kids who were loosing interest. Gary is relegated to surface work at April until he can afford to replace the wetsuit that he has grown out of. Several of us know how that feels.

We worked until we started to slow down due to fatigue and ran into some large slabs of rock in the floor that won't come out until the passage is dug wider. We opened up about 15 feet of passage that appears to be solution in origin. The water that comes out it comes up from below through a small hole in the rubble fill that is the floor. This spot appears to be thirty feet from the collapsed entrance which remains completely sealed but this dig could connect if we can dig that far.

When I stopped in to talk to Lester on Coldwater Saturday a week later about the kid problems of the day, we also talked about the dig. I started out talking about it would be a lot of work then he started talking bulldozer and I heard myself say something stupid like what about all the trees in the way? Oh well, with or without a bulldozer, some of these days, April Cave will have a walk-in entrance, if not here then where it decides and when.

THE ABYSS

"...out of the unimaginable blackness beyond the gangrenous glare
of that cold flame, out of the tartarean leagues through
which that oily river rolled uncanny, unheard, and unsuspected
...along the reaches of that unlighted river, into pits and
galleries of panic where poison springs feed frightful
and undiscoverable cataracts".

The Festival, H.P. Lovecraft

Wiedenman's Pit, Clayton County, Iowa

May 28, 1989

by Mike Lace

Mike Lace, Larry Welch, Dave and Sue Ecklund and Mike Nelson

After a successful but tiring trip to April Cave the day before, the thought of dropping into the deepest and, without a doubt, foulest smelling pit in Iowa didn't exactly thrill any of us. The owner had, however, described spring flood waters that had created a 16 foot wide stream that had been swallowed by the pit a few months earlier. The thought of that much water finding some sort of drainage path beyond the base of the pit left Larry and I with little choice but to try to find the drain again.

Dave Ecklund and Mike Nelson provided invaluable gear-hauling assistance after Larry and I reached the bottom. We found the pool of water beyond the base of the entrance to be just as disgusting as we remembered and the added surprise of the remains of a coon belly up on the rocks after taking the quick way down the pit several months earlier. What was left of his eyes seemed to be glued to the faint glow of daylight from the distant entrance.

We began the ritual of changing into the wetsuits at the edge of the pool as we debated whether or not the water really was deeper than last summer. Since the weather was windy and slightly overcast, we had decided to limit our time in the area beyond the cesspool as communication with those up top or at the base of the drop would be difficult at best.

Larry led the way through the putrid water, trying to stay as much out of it as he could while I tagged along behind. The smaller domes beyond the cesspool looked about the same with the exception of a few new logs jammed into the cracks here and there. We reached the bedrock crawlway where we had turned around the last time and, after a bit of debris removal, squeezed into the shallow passage. I squirmed beyond the point where we had retreated last summer but found only more crawlway with no echo and a ceiling that was doing its best to reach the bedrock floor in front of me. Just taking a normal breath pinned me between a snagging floor and ceiling. We returned to one of the domes and contemplated the frustrating and elusive nature of Weidenman's drainage route.

Larry began shifting a few logs and rocks on the floor of this dome and managed to open a small cavity that dropped about three feet below where we were standing. After a few minutes of tossing debris aside, he was able to slip down and into the cavity to find another pocket three feet further down that was too tight to enter. We spent about twenty minutes passing rocks out of the pocket and over to the opposite side of the dome.

I took my turn in the hole and was able to get a look at the choked cavity below but saw only more loose rock littering the floor with no apparent exit or echo. Larry is still convinced that it's the way to passage beyond but I guess it's my turn to be pessimistic and say that it looks more like the natural floor of the dome that's been buried beneath all that debris. In either case, it's definitely worth more digging.

We turned to leave the dome and as I was strapping on my pack, Larry said, "Hey, where's my pack?" We quickly realized that we had inadvertently buried it beneath the logs and rock we had just hauled out of Larry's lead. It took us several minutes to uncover the pack and a few more to unearth the pack straps that were anchored deeper yet.

The trip out the cesspool was a joy, as ever, and the change into dry clothes for the ascent was equally as pleasant. The sun had obviously come out up top because strong beams of light were now streaming across the pit walls, giving us a humbling perspective of the pit's shape and depth.

We found a crowd of fellow cavers in the sinkhole as each of us emerged from the long climb and after we had rigged off the rope, a few of them chimneyed down a short distance on belay to the ledge we had used to rig into the rope last summer. We eventually derigged and left the pit once again frustrated in our efforts to find the passage that must surely be there.

More Wiedenman's Pit trip report by Mike Nelson

We got Larry Welch and Mike Lace into the 111 foot pit first, as they are doing the real work of pushing into the silmy pancake room leads searching for passage into the Big Spring Basin System. They were excited to get started because of an unuauual spring thaw. Generally, most of the water heading toward Wiedenman's goes down a smaller sink upstream. Because of a glaze of ice on the ground this year, melt water ran off so fast that a 16 foot wide stream, four feet deep in the middle, ran directly into the big pit cave. They were hoping to find an indication of where it went after that.

Once they were down and on their way, Dave and Sue Ecklund and I "yo-yoed" the pit, perfecting our verticle rigs. After Larry and Mike came back out (proclaiming that the water had gone "everywhere") we belayed our novices, Scott and Val Wickwire, Julie and Wes Whitfield and Delores and Aaron Nelson and Chad Gentz, for a look into Iowa's deepest pit cave.

A. J. SPRING CAVE

Allamakee County, Iowa
May 29, 1989

by Mike Nelson

Dave and Sue and I were supposed to start laying out line for our mapping project here, but their little girl, Cathi, came down ill. They went back to Omaha and I went on over and hauled in 15 "anchored placements". Due to the particularly clean nature of A.J., in places without natrual tie-offs, we will be using these lead weights with clips cast into them. They can be set on shelves or the sandy floor to create stations and hold the line away from projections. Having these back at the beginning of the second sump will save a lot of dinking around when we finally get down to business there.

Although no new headway was made in any cave, this was still a very successful weekend of caving, with nearly every diverse aspect of caving in Iowa being touched upon. We are especially looking forward to the return the grotto will be receiving from the time and effort invested in our eager and able neophytes, who's continued training was probably the most significant accomplishment of the weekend. Thanks to you who planned it, and provided the gear and experience that made things possible. A special thanks to Gary Engh for surprisingly showing up at Wiedenman's and then sharing his abilities in the verticle session over to Duttons Cave County Park.

A. J. SPRING CAVE

Allamakee County, Iowa
June 4, 1989

by Mike Nelson

Carrying one "anchored placement" on the gear ring of each of my side mount tanks (71.2 cf, "Y" valved dual first staged primary, 40 cf independent reserve), I started laying 1/8" line into the second sump. This line will first be used to survey the cave, then facilitate rapid access to attempt a push into the air-filled ceiling joint at the known extent of it. After setting the placements and running the line through them, I would return for two more and continue. Seven anchored and three natural tie-offs got me 90 feet back into the shallow sump. I could have refigured my 1/3rds (air allotments) each time the sump was reentered, but ended the day's activities when I hit the initial 1/3rd. As a matter of fact, I was 50 lbs away from my 1/3rd when exiting the sump for more placements. It would have been within accepted safety guidelines to have refigured each dive from the remaining air, but this seemed like an unhealthy practice, figuring 1/3rd of less air for progressively longer dives. After 40 minutes in the cave, 30 of it in the second sump, I dived out the entrance sump.

Besides my wife and surface support, Delores, there were two more cavers awaiting when I reemerged. Doug Schmuecker and Jay Wells had been lead checking in the area and came over to see how I was doing. They were a little too shot, after beating a whole lot of bush, to further assist me in the line laying. They had plenty of air, but no "Y" valve setups, so I couldn't continue alone. We took a pause to look over some gear Doug was adapting for various cave diving uses, then decided to pop through the short initial sump to get some photos in airfilled rooms with Jay's waterproof camera. Doug did a short dive into the second sump to "stage" some action shots for Jay. He used dual sidemount 25 cf tanks with a single regulator on each.

In laying the line, I believe that this job could better be done by two, as opposed to a solo effort. I jostled the previously laid anchored placement while securing the ensuing one. The second diver could remain holding one while the next was being set, then the lead diver would return and fetch him up to the next and repeat until the four weights they carried between them were used. I'm not sure at this point if I'll start over or finish this survey then redo it if I'm not happy with it. Being as I'll probably learn a lot more doing an entire botched survey in less time than starting over every time I make a new mistake or discovery, I'll probably end up doing an entire survey more than once in A. J. Spring Cave.

CASS COUNTY, IOWA

June 10, 1989

by Mike Nelson

Cass County isn't particularly famous for its caves, as it has none, but we needed a spot to gather to practice our verticle skills before a trip to New Mexico the following week. It was only fair that we meet somewhere where the Ecklunds, Dave, Sue and Cathi, wouldn't have to make their obligatory 16 hour round trip drive. Atlantic, Iowa is only an hour from home for them and the new home of fellow grotto member and brother, Bill Nelson. So Julie Whitfield secured the use of a Winnebago, they being her employers. And with her son, Wes, us Nelsons, Mike, Delores and Aaron and another friend, Scott Johnson, we all made the 4½ hour joy ride down to those parts.

We were also joined by Mike "Honey Bunny" Lace, who made the drive from Iowa City in about 3½ hours. (Were I to edit this, I would have changed it to Mike "Kissy Face" Lace but I promised Julie that I wouldn't. Ed.)

We all met at a little county park and, Saturday morning, after getting permission from the proper authorities, set up a couple of ropes in a big pine tree. One was just a standing line over a branch, the other was rigged through a pulley and back down through a rapel rack secured to a tree. This allowed rope to be fed through the setup to simulate climbing greater distances. Those of us heading south got to perfect our rigs and the others got more initial training. Julie, Delores and maybe Aaron are probably as ready as they'll ever be to do their first drop into a cave. Wes needs to get some rapelling to finish up his training. Bill and his son, Chris, got their first exposure to this aspect of caving, as did Scott, and for that matter, a bunch of campers who had to stop and stare.

It's hard to believe how fast a day can go by and how much fun can be had with two ropes and a little costly hardware, but we soon exhausted the day and ourselves. We ended the derigging, feasting and B.S.ing.

Sunday morning we had breakfast, did a scuba dive into a local quarry and skedaddled back home, getting the Winnebago unpacked, washed and back to Julie's house before dark.

WIMP HOLE / WIMP DOME

Coldwater Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa
June 17, 1989
Stacey Cyphert and Jay Wells

by Stacey Cyphert

To the best of my recollection, the Wimp Hole lead was first noticed in April of 1987 by Mike Lace, Beth Patel (now Welch), and Larry Welch. The lead, not more than a few feet from the mouth of Pete's Pipe, was a small source of water flowing through a narrow, mud-choked passage bounded by solid rock walls. While visually not very promising, the passage offered an enticing echo to the curious explorer.

Excited by the echo, the next month Mike Lace shared this lead with me. We spent several hours digging there but did more damage to our coveralls than to the mud fill. It would be over a year before efforts to push this lead would be renewed.

Mike Lace and Scott Dankof took up the charge again in March of 1989. Their decision to take the easy journey to this lead instead of a more difficult trip resulted in the naming of the lead Wimp Hole. The enticing echo was still there and generated renewed enthusiasm for the dig.

Two months later, Scott Dankof, Mike Lace, Jay Wells and I attempted an all-out assault. Unfortunately, only Mike and I were able to squeeze through a narrow section to dig around a sharp right-hand turn in the passage. Plans were made to return with a chisel to widen the passage and enable more people to work on the dig.

The next month, June of 1989, Jay Wells and I returned to find the source of the echo. Mike Lace and Larry Welch promised to join us later. Jay expertly removed pieces of the rock that had stopped him before and the dig was on. Taking turns, we had removed ten to twelve feet of mud by the time we heard Mike and

Larry returning from their survey work. They arrived just as I was able to squeeze up into Wimp Dome.

Wimp Dome is approximately 40 feet high with a small waterfall draining down over the entrance we created. The passage from which the water was falling appears to extend back over the main stream passage. Reaching this high lead will be difficult without climbing equipment.

Old flowstone can be seen high on the wall on the end of the dome opposite the waterfall. This waterfall had created a shallow pool of water on the floor. The exploration, unfortunately, transformed the pool into sucking mud. Jay and I, however, did not get any dirtier as we were already covered in mud from the hours of digging. Larry crawled back to see the dome and helped Jay and me survey it on our way out. While we can't say WIMP stands for Way Into Massive Passage, we had found the source of the echo.

INDIAN BLUFFS STATE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Chimney Rock Caves, Jones County, Iowa

June 24, 1989

Lowell Burkhead, Loren Schutt, and Greg McCarty

by Lowell Burkhead

Loren showed up a half hour late at my house so along with the fifteen minutes that I had already thrown into the meeting times, that made up for the "Greg factor" exactly and Greg pulled in right behind us 45 minutes late. All of us had had more problems getting ready for this trip than we had anticipated since it had been so long since we had been out on a trip of this sort.

We hiked full pack down the road from the barrier at the parking area to the start of the bluff line and then started checking holes. We walked along the base of the bluffs through the underbrush for about a half mile checking every hole that could be an entrance. The temperature was in the high 90s with high humidity and not a breath of a breeze. We found four with enough passage to be considered small caves. We spent enough time at each to get cooled off. All of them were near the end of the bluff line and in sight of the Chimney Rock. The last cave had a very large entrance and pinched down to crawlway after 25 feet. It ended in a diggable coon hole that continues. It was the only one that it looked possible to extend

On the way back to the cars, Greg found an arrowhead in a corn field and Loren and I stopped to eat some ripe wild mulberries. Greg and Loren had run out of water but I still had a swig left when we got back to the cars. I had been chewing on the tender young jewelweed that's just loaded with water all through the woods. There was also the added benefit of being able to spit green and it provided the water needed for plenty of practice

This is a beautiful area and well worth the visit even without the caves. It has hiking trails throughout and beautiful high limestone bluffs. There is Jordan Creek with bluffs along each side and we only have checked the east one. We found caves worth seeing and the other side is there for the checking. To find it, check your county or topo map. It is downstream from Monticello and Picture Rock Park on the north side of the river. The north entrance from the unmaintained county road is closer to the Chimney Rock and the caves than the southeast entrance that we used.