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Richard A. Hall

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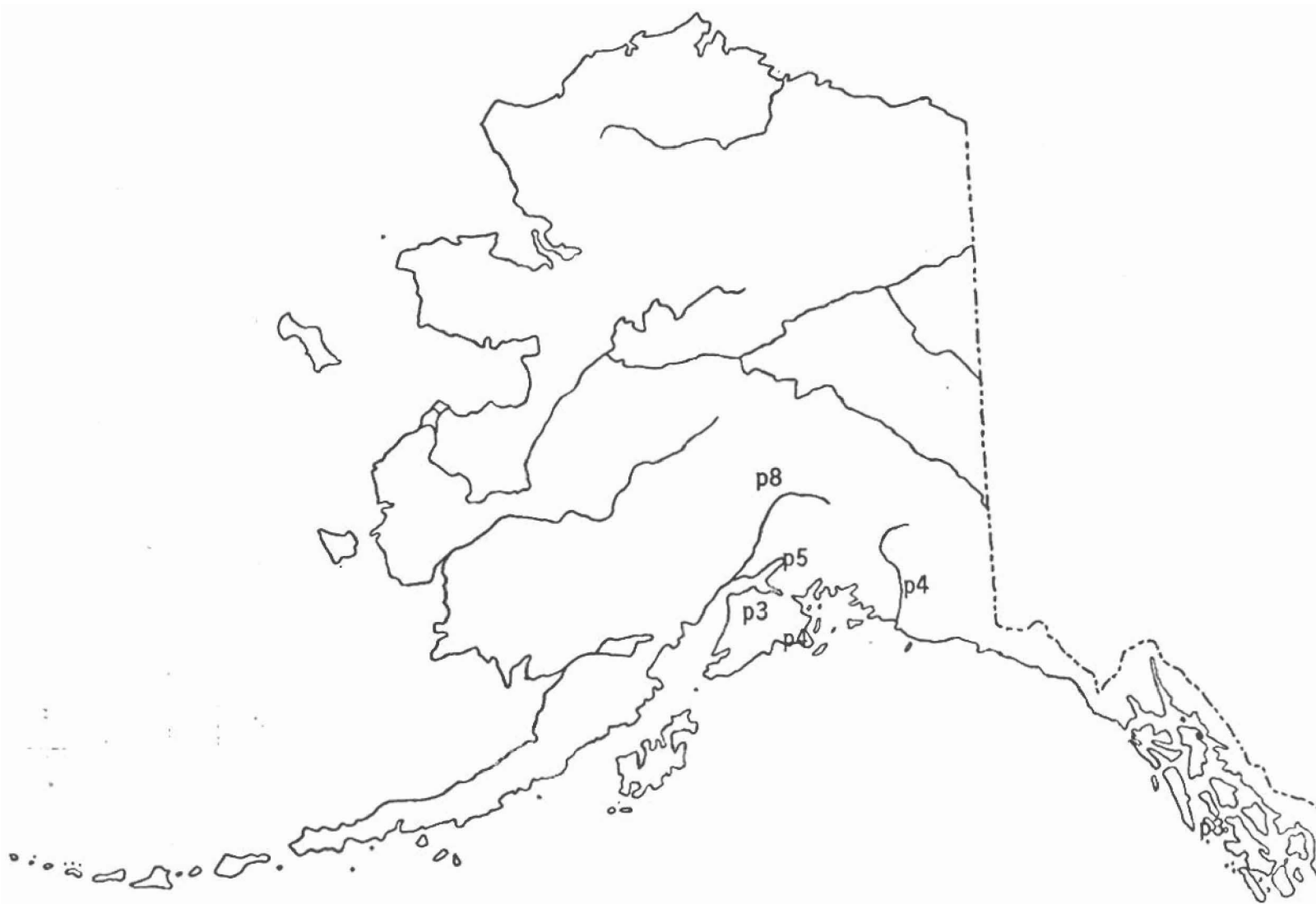
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THE ALASKAN CAVER

Volume 7 Number 5

September - October 1982



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- November 18 Glacier Grotto Meeting. Meetings are held in room 312 of Grant Hall, Alaska Pacific University at 7:30 pm.
- December 16 Glacier Grotto Meeting. Meetings are held in room 312 of Grant Hall, Alaska Pacific University at 7:30 pm.
- January 20 Glacier Grotto Meeting. Meetings are held in room 312 of Grant Hall, Alaska Pacific University at 7:30 pm. The program will be an NSS slide show.
- February 17 Glacier Grotto Meeting. Meetings are held in room 312 of Grant Hall, Alaska Pacific University at 7:30 pm.
- March 17 Glacier Grotto Meeting. Meetings are held in room 312 of Grant Hall, Alaska Pacific University at 7:30 pm. The program will be an NSS slide show.

The ALASKAN CAVER is a periodic publication of the Glacier Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Subscriptions are free to members. Membership dues are \$5 per annum (add \$3 for overseas members wishing airmail instead of surface mail). Dues can be sent to Elisabeth Hall at 4607 Klondike Crt., Anchorage, AK 99504. Copyright 1982 by Glacier Grotto. Material not copyrighted by individuals or other groups may be copied by other NSS publications provided credit is given to the ALASKAN CAVER and a copy of such publication is sent to the editor.

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ALASKAN CAVING IN THE NEWS

[This will not be a regular feature as caving is not all that common a topic in Alaskan Newspapers. But there does seem to have been a rash of it lately.]

- o A September 29 article in the Anchorage Times detailed the 20 year fight by a Cooper Landing resident to secure claim to 14 1/2 acres of land he had been using for a sawmill in the Chugach National Forest. This land is of no consequence to caving except for the note in the article that he is now fighting with the government over his attempts to haul limestone from his mining claim in the Russian River recreation area. He says that claim is worth more than seven million dollars. Limestone on the Kenai Peninsula???

footnote: Construction of a winter mining road following an existing fire road along the Russian River was approved in October. The road will begin in the Russian River campground and end near Lower Russian Lake, a distance of about 10 miles. Maybe someone should check it out before the Limestone is all gone.

- o Earlier this summer there was an article in the Anchorage Times about US Steel putting 200 acres of Limestone on Wadleigh Island (near Prince of Wales Island in Southeast Alaska) up for sale. Their 33 claims contain an estimated 250 million tons of limestone with "high bulk and low unit value". There are known caves in the area - Here is your chance to invest in the future! The company spokesman also said that "Reserves of limestone in Alaska elsewhere are astronomical; its more where you need it and what you use it for than how much you've got."

- o Finally, the biggest cave story going is the following article:

Kenai flood warning issued

Residents and campers along the Kenai River were warned this morning to keep an eye out for flooding.

The National Weather Service said flooding of the river between Cooper Landing and the Kenai Keys is expected as a result of a glacier-dammed lake above the Snow River. The lake is spilling

into Kenai Lake and swelling the Kenai River, leaving a danger of flooding, said hydrologist David

"It's a self-sumping process that happens every three or four years," Chapman said. "The snow melts and builds the little lake up, and when it gets full enough it begins to leak out under the glacier.

As this continues, the tunnel it's leaking through gets bigger and releases water faster and faster."

The quickly dumping water builds up Kenai Lake, and swells the Kenai River at a rate of about a foot a day, according to Chapman.

"When the waters do build, they
See Kenai, page A-4

Kenai

(Continued from page A-1)

do it slowly enough that nearby residents have time to take the necessary precautions," he added.

If the river does flood, he said, it would take five days to a week for the river to recede. Kenai Keys, a popular weekend retreat area below Skilak Lake, would be hardest hit, Chapman said.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough

disaster office had no plans this morning to respond to the flood watch.

"The river rises every year, and we don't think there's much danger," said a disaster office spokesman. "We're keeping our eyes on it."

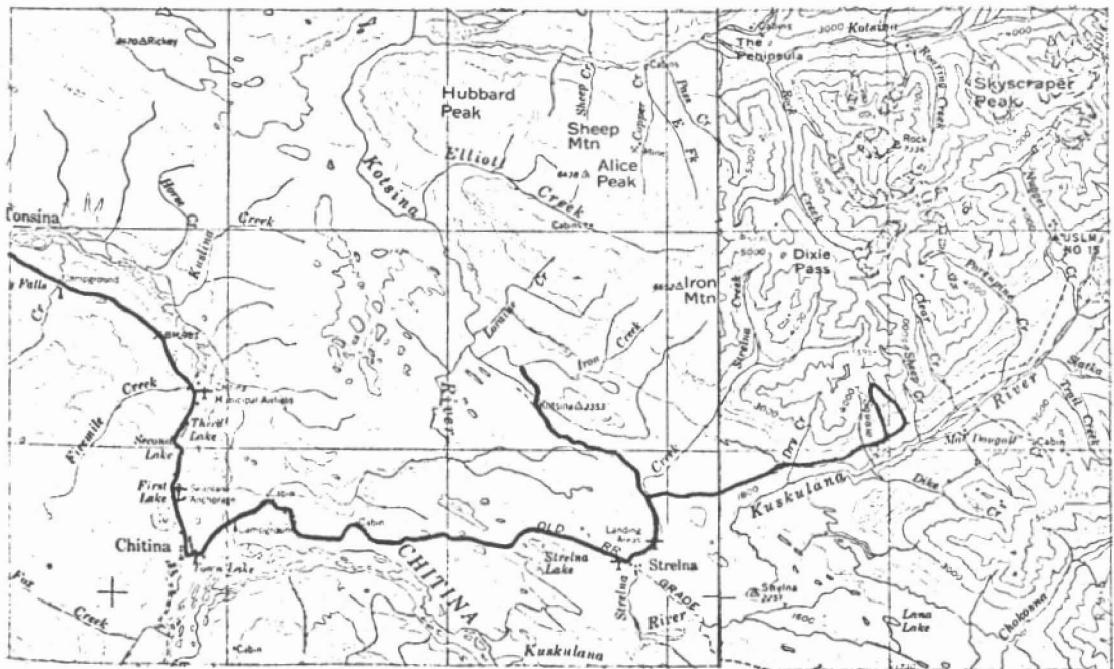
Previous flooding from the glacier-dammed lake, which last occurred in October 1970, caused no property damage. Floods from the same glacier dam in 1977 and 1974 caused "a little damage," Chapman said.

This winter, after the ice is frozen solid and while the cave is still open, would be a great cave trip. The distance from the dumping lake to the end of the glacier is SEVEN MILES! Access would have to be by plane from Seward as it is too far to hike or ski in from the road. Anyone interested in the trip should contact Jay Rockwell at 277-7150.

CHITNA CAVING

On Friday evening June 18, 1982 Rich Hall, Jay Rockwell, my two brothers Frank and Bill, and myself left Anchorage in Rich's van to look for caves in limestone areas northeast of Chitna. After refueling in Glennallen around midnight we camped on the road to Chitna.

Saturday morning we ate breakfast in Chitna then looked up an old Norwegian miner who came to Alaska in 1904. He gave us directions to a cave but we were unable to drive closer than six miles to the site with a 2-wheel drive vehicle. A park ranger in a 4-wheel pickup had apparently preceeded us past the recent landslides which had blocked enough of the road to make us chicken out. Rather than walk the rest of the way we decided to backtrack and try another road which went right by limestone outcrops.



Route Taken by Car and Foot

Unfortunately, immediately after starting out on the road we found it impassable to all but a Cat, because a Cat had preceeded us making a number of trips to stockpile fuel along the road. Again we were faced with a six mile hike. After some discussion we decided to cook supper for lunch and make an all-nighter of it if necessary carrying only essential gear and eating lunch for dinner along the way. After several hours of muck, mosquitoes and a little rain we all, except Jay, had arrived at the base of the mountains with the limestone outcrops. We could see many dark areas which could be caves but one 1500 feet up near the summit of the spur between Squaw Creek and Sheep Creek looked the most promising.

We ate "lunch", left a note for Jay, before striking out from the road (which lead to a mine several miles upstream). We checked several pocket caves on the way up but these were weathered out and not formed by solution. So we were prepared for the dissapointment when our promising lead turned out to be unworthy even of designation as a shelter although mountain sheep had put it to that use.

However, the effort expended was paid back with interest when we climbed to the top of the spur and could look down into Sheep Creek Canyon. While my brothers and I took in the vista and looked with longing at the higher peaks Rich, the only true caver in the bunch, had eyes only for "caves" on the sheer rock walls in the canyon. We reluctantly headed down by another route after deciding it was too late to climb the nearby peaks (and too much effort).

Near the bottom Rich spotted another cave and we set out in pursuit but after getting another look it was apparent to us that it was too far away. Had we walked down the road further before climbing we would have seen it and undoubtedly headed for it rather than the one we did since the entrance was much larger and it was only one third of the way up the mountain. We believe we passed right below it on our way up but couldn't see it due to the angle. (Someone we met later said they had climbed to it and it was very shallow.)

We got back to the road around midnight. Then a quarter mile further on we found a note from Jay saying he had turned back. He apparently had not reached our takeoff point. We had good light all the way back to camp but it did get cold; ice was forming on the puddles in the road. When we got back to the van around two AM Sunday we found Jay. We slept there and left around 10 AM. The drive back to Anchorage was uneventful aside from some great views permitted due to the nice weather.

Mike Mauser

A LABOR DAY TRIP TO WISHBONE HILL

Date: September 6, 1982

Location: Wishbone Hill, Sutton, Alaska

Party: Jay Rockwell, Bob and Kathy Bastasz, Rich, Lis, and Matt Hall

After meeting in Sutton at the Alpine Country Store, we drove to Jonesville, past Seventeen Mile Lake and stopped along the road that goes around Wishbone Hill to Buffalo Mine before being swallowed by mud. Forsaking vehicles and proceeding via shank's mare, five hikers and one rider picked their way along an unnamed creek up to a ridge. The chosen ridge lay before us, another to the right, another to the left, one up the valley, another... Well this isn't Kansas you know! But our chosen ridge lay before us.

The trip had been inspired by a geologist friend of Jay's who had mentioned caves in the area without much detailed explanation. He and Jay had tried to get to the area last winter but were turned back.

We went up a mossy canyon with high conglomerate sides laced with sandstone layers. We crossed the creek several times until the valley opened up. The question arose as to which route to take; as the trail split again it began to look more like an animal path. It was obvious from the broken weeds that someone had been there recently, probably some hunters or the four-wheelers that sprayed mud as they passed us coming in. We chose the trail to the top of the ridge rather than below it. The grade up was steep but once on top the walking was easy.

Suddenly, the cry went up, "Moose!", across the valley, on the opposite slope, sauntering through an opening in the trees was a noble animal. Although our own trail was littered with moose nuggets we never did come face to face with one of the beasts. We had to contend ourselves with a distant, fleeting view.

Proceeding along the ridge with a slight but persistent incline we came upon some cranberries, stopped to pick them and ate a few; Matt ate all he could get. Memories of cranberry mush eaten while waiting for our overdue airplane in Chitistone two years before filled the air.

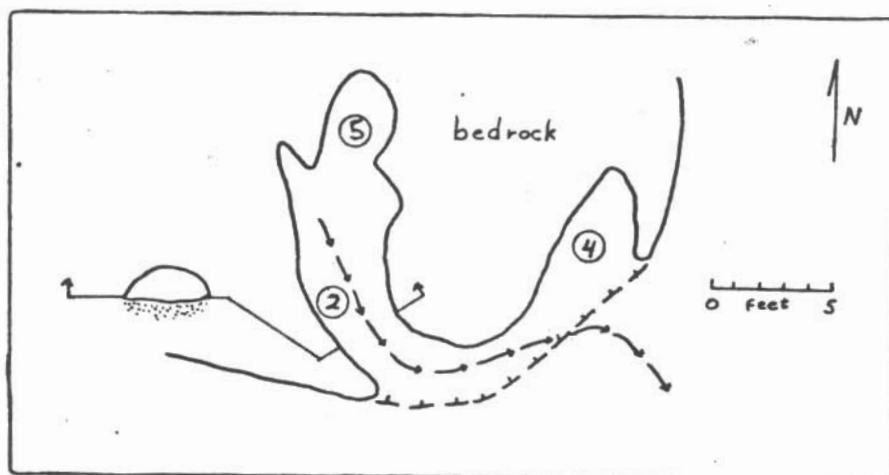
After bushwacking down the trail on the ridge it finally occurred to us that we would have some difficulty in spotting a cave on the cliffsides below us. We decided to wait for the leaves to fall to get a better view, an estimated two to three weeks, and rather than wait there, subsisting on berries, we ate lunch and then turned back.

This area had been heavily mined up until the 1950's and the map (vintage 1951) showed several roads. But, what had then been roads were now long skinny willow thickets. We made our way back along the ridge following one of these roads; sometimes the willows provided a canopied walkway but often the easiest walking was off the road, outside the willows. The road took us down the north side of the ridge while we had approached the ridge originally from the south and had hiked along its crest. This gave us a view of a different valley than we had seen before. A beautiful flat valley with lots of deep grass.

Across the glade, on the north side near its west end, a 30 foot cliff attracted our attention. We crossed the glade at its west end via a conveniently located old dam and checked out several dark looking places. Rich found an opening at the base of the cliff as well as what appeared to be several smaller solution pockets.

The entrance to Dam Cave (see map on next page) is a wet gravel slope leading upward to a low crawlway. Past the crawlway, the passageway leads further upward to the right and opens slightly to a small alcove. Left of this alcove is a triangular crevice below which appeared to be the source of a small (about one gallon per minute) stream that seeps into the gravel. At the uppermost end of the alcove a small fracture dome continues upward, but an unstable looking chockstone about one foot in diameter prevented further exploration.

Several harvestmen and a spider were seen on the walls of the alcove and the dank smell in the gravel entrance slide along with numerous animal droppings indicated mammal occupancy. A sketch map was made of the cave after exiting.



Dam Cave $61^{\circ} 43' 16''$ N, $148^{\circ} 59' 44''$, elevation 1010'

Wishbone hill is a large syncline; the Wishbone Formation outcrops in the shape of a mile and a half wide wishbone. Edged by steep sandstone cliffs, the formation consists of conglomerate, siltstone and sandstone and overlies the Chickaloon Formation which contains the local coal deposits. It is this conglomerate in which the cave is formed. Strange? Yes, but the cobbles are all held together with lime mud and there is enough lime in it to be dissolved out which loosens the cobbles so they can be washed out.

By the time we left the cave it was threatening to rain so we wasted no time in leaving, except to spend half an hour picking the prolific cranberries on a bluff above a waterfall.

It was only sprinkling lightly as we drove away so we decided to go around the mountain to some of the strip mines where the talus pile, ignited many years ago, continues to burn underground. The fumerols sputtered and steamed with each raindrop; the smell of sulfur was everywhere.

Is there caving potential on Wishbone Hill? Not really, but it is a beautiful place for hiking. There may even be more small unstable caves like Dam Cave in the area. Plus there is also a chance of sandstone caves. And if you want to take a hoe along with you, you may be able to extend Dam Cave to who knows how long.

Richard Hall et al [Portions of this trip report were written by each of the members of the party except Matt]

CHULITNA RIVER CAVES

While Bob and Kathy Bastasz were in Alaska this past summer, they stopped at Pass Creek off the Chulitna River to check out a cave reported by some river rafters. They were unable to find the location and never got over the top of the cliff on which it is located.

For anyone else who wants to try it sometime, its only half a mile off the Parks Highway just North of Pass Creek in the Talkeetna Mountains D-6 Quadrangle. I have pictures of the entrance and its location on the map.

Rich Hall

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