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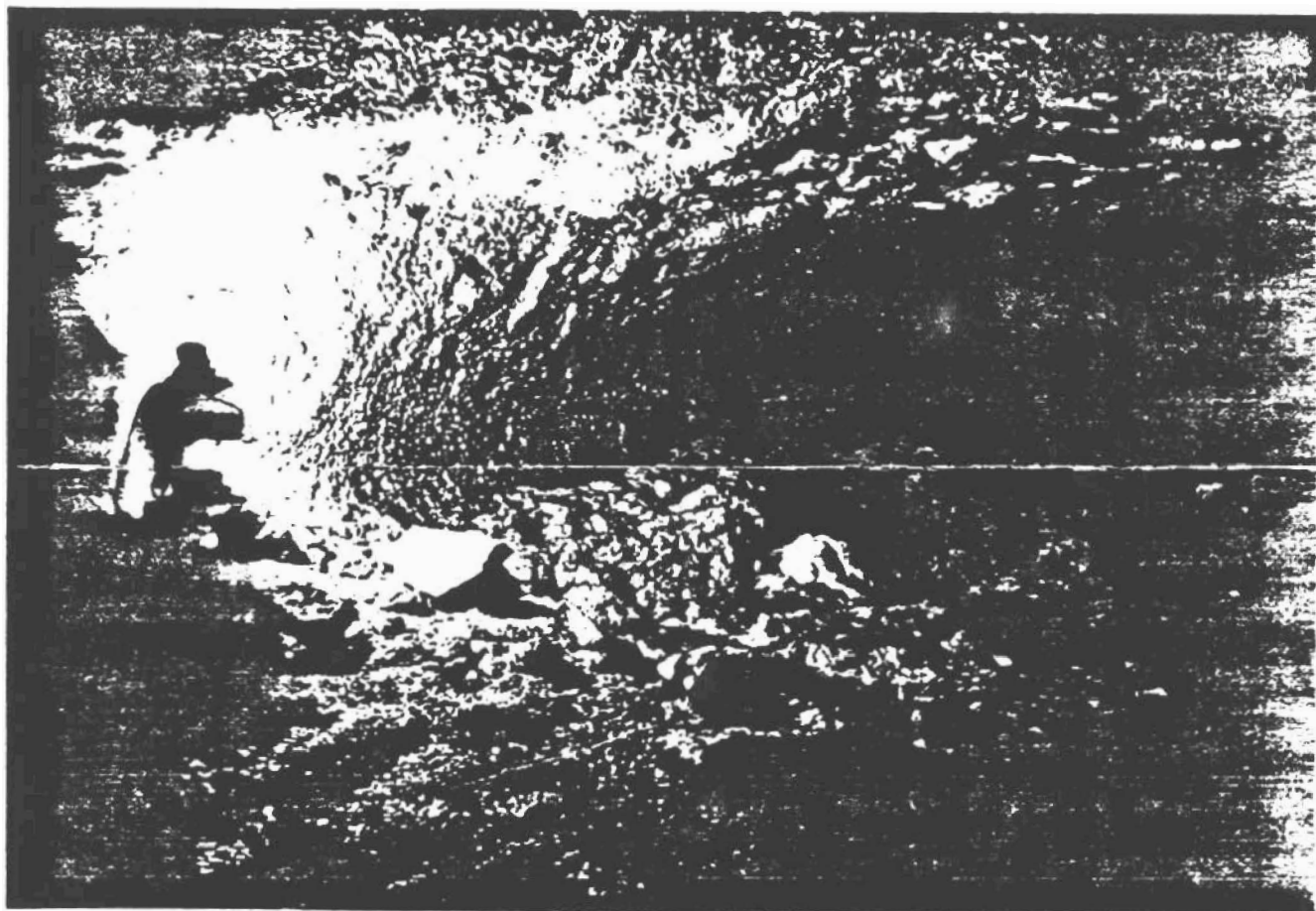
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The Alaskan Caver

Volume 8 Number 3

October 1985

ORIGINAL, NUMBERED 9(1)



BOGUSLUF CAVE

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November 21 Glacier Grotto meeting. Meetings are held in room 312 of Grant Hall, Alaska Pacific University at 7:30 pm.
December 19 Glacier Grotto meeting. Meetings are held in room 312 of Grant Hall, Alaska Pacific University at 7:30 pm.
January 16 Glacier Grotto meeting. Meetings are held in room 312 of Grant Hall, Alaska Pacific University at 7:30 pm.
February 20 Glacier Grotto meeting. Meetings are held in room 312 of Grant Hall, Alaska Pacific University at 7:30 pm.

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N E W S

GLACIERS! At the October meeting Dan Flood reported that he had already been down to Byron Glacier this fall and found a previously unreported cave in Byron Glacier itself. With the coldest October on record it may turn out to be a great year for glacier caving. Contact Jay Rockwell to inquire about upcoming glacier trips this winter.

CHITISTONE! Also at the October meeting, Kent Hudson showed slides of Forty Foot Cave, obviously misnamed because it is really 70' above the ground. He reported that they checked 800' of passage including a 30' wide room with several side passages. Other features of the cave included ice crystals and a sump at the end. But there are lots of unchecked side leads. At the September meeting Harvey Bowers showed some slides from his 1984 Chitistone trip.

LIN CITY! At the September meeting Harvey Bowers showed some slides and talked about limestone at Lin City near the western end of the Seward Peninsula. He reported sink holes and other karst features.

Cover: Ann Baltzo's multiple flash photo of Bogoslof lava tube. (See story on page 4.)

MATANUSKA GLACIER ICE-CAVE TRIP
March 30th, 1985

I had just come back from a vacation to tropical Tahiti, when an excursion to the Matanuska Glacier seemed to be a good way to shift back into Alaskan ways and temperatures. Altogether eight very pleasant "grotto explorers" and glorious sunshine that day made the effort worthwhile.

We left the Glenn Highway at about Mile 105, at around 11:30 a.m., to follow a trail down the bluff into the river valley. The descent proved to be the hardest part of the trip, as most of us had trouble maneuvering the deep snow skiing downhill. Tom Hamilton said, "Just follow me," and made it look like there was nothing to the narrow path. Ha! Of course, my latest exercise had been suntanning on the beaches.

The flat river bottom covered with easy snow over ice made traveling fun. We watched moose and mouse tracks, the latter disappearing into thin air. Bird wing impressions told the story.

About one o'clock we reached the north side of the glacier at the end of a small gully. The sun warmed up a protected picnic spot right next to the entrance of our trip's goal, the Glacier Grottos.

Crampons were definitely a plus when crawling into the caves. Fortunately, the caves did not contain much water. We enjoyed the ice formations and the adventure of it all. Then there are those who are scientific. Under the supervision of Jay, they spent quite some time measuring the main cave. I hope they'll let us know how the cave will have changed by next year.

Tom, Mike, Ray, Yana, and Dan climbed up the closest glacier ridge to check out the scenery beyond. The rest of us took it easy. The afternoon was comfortable enough.

The sun moved below the ice ridge and left our little hollow to cool off. 4 p.m. seemed to be a good time to break camp and head on out.

Three of us, and then Tom, started. As usual, skiing back seemed to cover a shorter distance. Besides, a gentle downhill grade away from the glacier speeded things up.

We carried the skis up the bluff to the road. We were looking forward to a Mexican dinner in Palmer, where we agreed to meet. It was 6 p.m. when the first vehicle left down the highway.

Mike, Mervin, and I enjoyed our dinner at the only Mexican restaurant in town but we remained unmet. We haven't found out yet where the rest of the gang had their chow.

Much appreciation and thanks to Tom and Jay for organizing and leading a great outing!

rosemarie knecht

BUGUSLOF CAVE "UPDATE"

by J. Rockwell

While at a fisheries convention in Washington State several years ago I happened to meet Howard Baltzo and his wife Ann and the result was an exciting review of a significant Alaskan cave. Howard was in charge of the Fish and Wildlife Fur Seal Operations for many years. Being an avid outdoorsman he came to know St. Paul Island very well. I knew about the caves (Robinson, Kikk, 1982) from a number of rumors and tales about "Bogoslof Cave".

Howard told me about an article Ann wrote about their two trips to the cave. (Baltzo, Ann 1976). Her account is quite vivid. Thanks to her and to Alaska, The Magazine of Life on the Last Frontier (Alaska Northwest Publishing Company, Box 4-EEE, Anchorage, AK 99509) both of whom granted us specific permission to reproduce her article, it is quoted verbatim as follows:

"Curiosity spurred my husband, our daughter, and me on our first exploration of the lava tubes on Saint Paul Island in the Bering Sea in the early 1960s.

"We'd heard others speak of the tubes, and the tantalizing openings in the earth's surface on the slope of 590-foot Bogoslof Hill have provided a favorite recreational activity for summer crews assigned to the Pribilof Islands on research and sealing projects.



Ann Baltzo at entrance of Bogoslof Lava tube. (Howard Baltzo photo)

"Lava tubes are commonly associated with volcanic cones. They radiate horizontally outward from the central core, being a secondary and lower eruption breakthrough of the molten magma to the cooler world outside. When internal pressures subside, magma, still soft enough to flow, tends to return to its point of origin--this retreat leaves a lava tube in its wake. All the tubes have similar characteristics, yet vary fascinatingly in detail. Intricate interconnecting networks occur in some areas of the Lower 48.

"Lichen-covered rubble alternating with moist areas necessitated good footgear for the rough hike of about 2 miles to the slope of Bogoslof Hill. Wild flowers like Alaska spring beauty and lousewort were unavoidably trampled in their surprising profusion. There was nary a tree standing in sight -- willows lay prostrate from the wind, their root holds tenuous. The main trunks, with their outstretched branches, were recognizable only at toe-tripping level. Fractured basalt columns and weird lava upthrusts provided subjects for contemplation during rest stops en route.

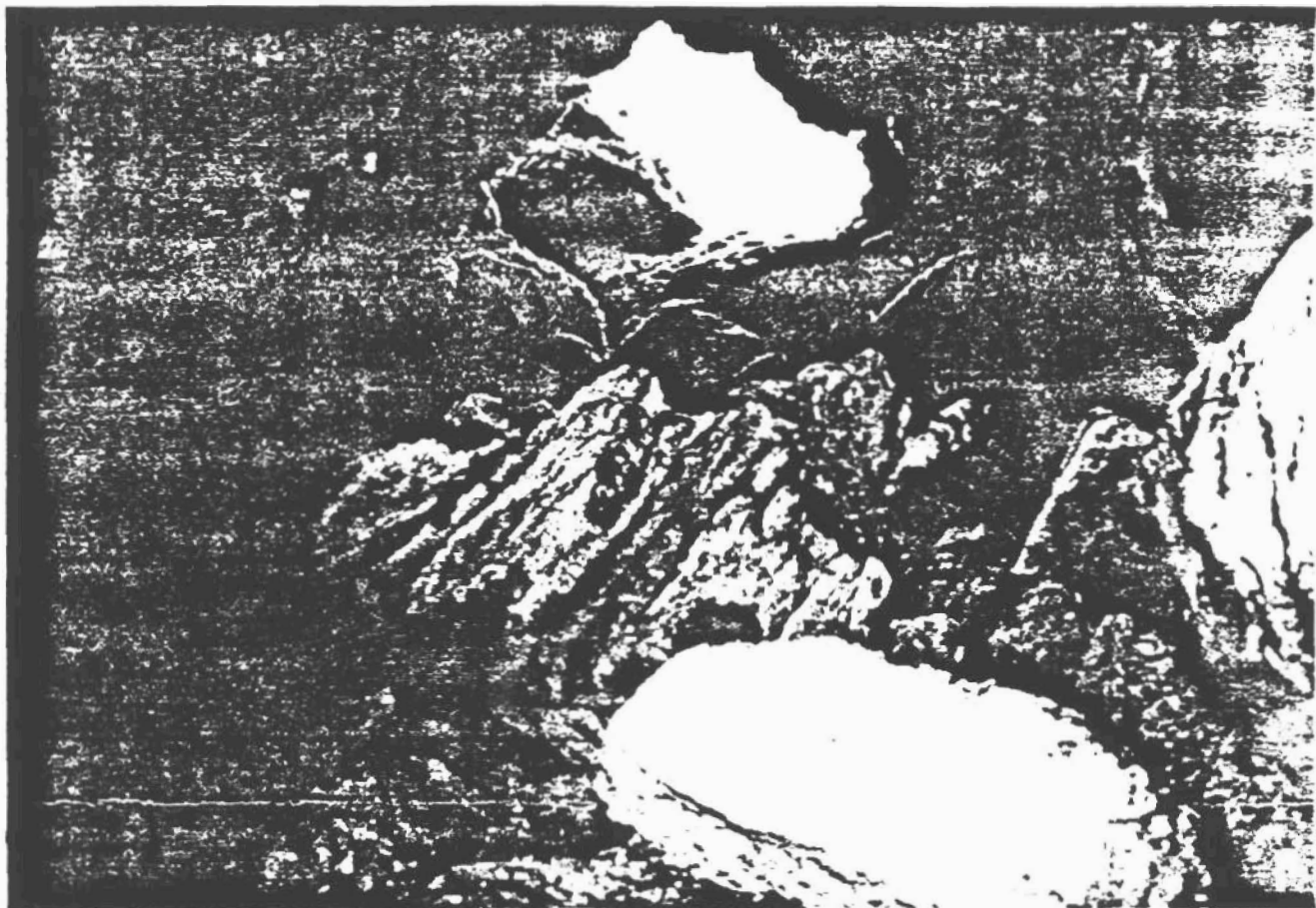
"Lava tubes, scoria mounds, eroded crater outlines and bits of augite catching the light are present-day indicators of volcanic activity that occurred a million years ago when St. Paul Island was formed. Its older sister, St. George Island, 40 miles to the Southwest, dates back about two million years. Core samples of once-molten rock were taken and analysed in 1962, and mappings were done in 1965 by David Hopkins of the U.S. Geological Survey, in company with Thor Einarrson of Reykjavik, Iceland. It's mind-boggling for a nongeologist to be told that the earth's polarity underwent three reversals during Saint George's lifetime.

Tube entrances that we found varied in size and position. One, a pit, contained the skeleton of a reindeer; we paused to consider the creature's demise in confinement. Other openings were small, little more than echo chambers for our yoo-hoos. We were looking for an entryway with some semblance of stability underfoot and a sure way out.

"When we did find such an opening and cautiously dropped into it, timidity and -- we like to think -- a flash of common sense, kept us within sight of the entryway. We'd come ill equipped with just a packet of matches, a candle stub, a camera -- and naivete. Our lack of ropes and lanterns would have made an experienced cave explorer gasp.

"Anyone with claustrophobia would be reticent about entering such a cave. It was not until weeks later, when viewing the one flash shot we'd taken, did we realize the shades of color that had surrounded us.

"Discussions with friends who were similarly tantalized about delving deeper into the underground blowholes resulted in a second adventure several years after our first expedition. But this time we came equipped with food, several battery lanterns, premeasured rope, camera and a tripod--as well as safety in numbers and a morale boost of camaraderie.



Ann Baltzo's photo of the cave entrance from the inside. The vivid colors can be seen in her original article (Baltzo, 1976)

"We found the cave we'd entered on our first excursion. Our initial excitement subsided as we cautiously proceeded along the most obvious corridor. There were piles of rubble from the ceiling, dripping water, side shafts that ended abruptly, room-size areas, low crawl spaces, more corridors. Occasionally a question like, 'Is there really light at the end of this tunnel?' would be asked.

"The unrelieved blackness was so intense we could feel it, especially when the lanterns were turned off. Excitement was followed by a sort of weariness from seeing so many nonreflective surfaces. Our tolerance of confinement and length of retracement rope ran out at the same time and brought our adventure to a climax just as we reached a large 'ballroom' with a glass-slick floor. My husband recalls that that was one spot I didn't belly-crawl into - I encouraged the others but I stayed behind and held the rope!

"Speculation ran rampant as to geologic explanations for the multicolored rubble. We obtained our multiple-exposure photo by mounting a camera on a tripod with the shutter locked open and then firing flashbulbs from several positions.

"We marveled at the seething, bubbling, venting activity that took place eons ago when the pregnant volcanoes gave birth. The passage of time and erosive weather have left their imprints-but Bicentennial year visitors to the same area will probably find little change there since our 1965 course in neophyte spelunking."

Ann Baltzo

After reading the article there were questions. I wrote Howard and a post card included the following:

"My brief diary note for 5/30/67 estimates we penetrated about 200 yards by measured lifeline. And I could see about 150' more across a slick-floored 'ballroom', but was chicken about wriggling thru an unstable rockfall to enter it."

His followup letter is quoted in entirety:

"Here's an entire pictorial record of our intrepid penetration of the Bogoslov Cave. The multiple flashes one (see cover) took an amazing amount of care and time and planning in that lightless world; we had no stomach for further effort in that direction because claustrophobia was setting in, and helplessness in case of accident or mistake was all too evident. Why in hell did we ever take such a chance with such total lack of experience?

"I guess you got my postcard about being some 200 yards inside from the entrance according to the measured length of the heavy twine used to mark the escape route. The 'ballroom' at the end of our penetration was sensational. Judged by flashlight, the ceiling was about 25' high and the width somewhat more. The floor was flat and slick as polished glass.

"There are two caves in the vicinity, both hard to locate in the jumbled lava flow. You can walk down into the big one over the tumbled rockpile, but the opening to the lesser cave is in the top of the ceiling and must be dropped into by rope. We weren't prepared to do that. It seems to be a simple, roomlike cavity about 20' deep and maybe twice that in diameter (all judged by flashlight and recorded only in memory - remember, we are not professionals)! A caribou skeleton lay on the floor right under the opening. I guess 'reindeer' is more exact because they came from Nome herded stock.

"The date of this exploration was 5/30/67. Memorial day was a holiday even out there.

"We would be pleased to learn of any more developments that may occur as a result of your interest."

Halliday (1970) mentions this cave on page 7. He derived his information from

Baltzo. Since the Baltzos appear to be the first to report this cave in writing we recommend their name "Bogoslof Cave" be used.

Of course we now need a report on further exploration, a survey, and more photos. This could be our longest known cave.

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