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Tom Hruska

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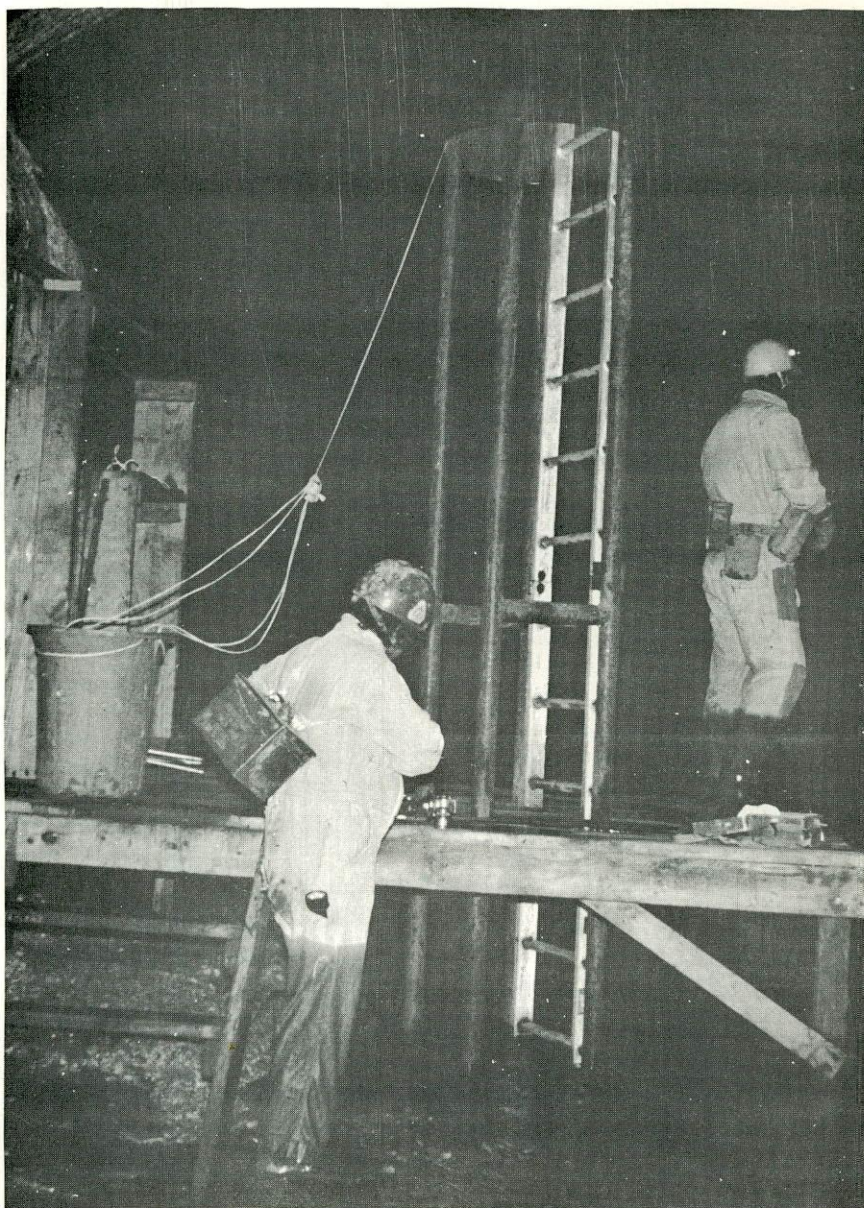
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THE IOWA GROTTO
National Speleological Society

I N T E R C O M



Volume XI

Issue 2

March — April

1975

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IOWA GROTTO INTERCOM
P. O. Box 228
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

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COVER PICTURE: Looking at the bottom of the entrance shaft and ladder in Coldwater Cave. Ed Smith and Greg McCarty preparing to explore sections of the cave.

Photo by Steve Hurley



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GROTTO MINUTES AT A GLANCE

Thomas Hruska, Secretary

Regular Meeting March 12, 1975

The meeting was not called to order because of a small attendance. Several items were discussed, but no action was taken.

Regular Meeting March 26, 1975

Room 3407

Called to order: 7:45 PM

Adjourned: 8:20 PM

Attendance: 8 members and 4 guests

Treasury: \$122.50

Michael Bounk reported that the arrangements have been completed for vertical training sessions to be held in the university field house. Sessions will be held at the south end of the gym on the first meeting night of April, May, and June. A trip into Coldwater Cave will be conducted on the weekend of March 29 and 30 for four or five grotto members. John Johnson pointed out the need to get back to the Dubuque school project. The Spring MVOR will be held in southern Illinois on the weekend of April 18 - 20, 1975. People interested in the proposed trip to southeast Missouri should contact Mike Bounk. The grotto recieved a newspaper article reprint about the Decorah Ice Cave. Due reminders will be sent out with the Hot Line to all people that owe grotto dues. No trip reports were given. Greg McCarty may be going to the Monona area on the weekend of April 5 and 6, 1975. After the meeting, the NSS slide show, "The Trip" was shown.

Regular Meeting April 9, 1975

A vertical climbing demonstration and practice session was held in lieu of the regular grotto meeting. About fourteen interested people met at 6:30 PM at the south end of the university field house. Cable ladder and rope techniques were demonstrated. Some of the people then practiced the techniques. The session lasted until 10:00 PM.

Regular Meeting April 23, 1975

Room 3407

Called to order: 7:50 PM

Adjourned: 8:35 PM

Attendance: 9 members and 4 guests

Treasury: \$127.00

Tom Hruska reported that the dues reminders did not get sent out with the April issue of the Hot Line. Reminders will be sent in the May mailing but in the meantime, grotto members may pay at the meeting if they desire to do so. The grotto must get more work done on the Dubuque survey in Becker and Level Crevice. Jim Dockal is planning some weekday trips, then a major weekend trip will be organized. The Iowa Grotto spring picnic has been canceled for lack of interest. It will be rescheduled, probably in August, if any interest is shown by the members of the grotto. The Kentucky Speleofest will be held on the Memorial Day weekend, May 23 - 26, 1975, near Sonora, Kentucky. The 1975 NSS Convention will be June 21 - 28, 1975. The deadline is rapidly approaching for those people that plan to preregister for the convention at Angels Camp, California.

THE GROTTO RETURNS TO COLDWATER

Greg McCarty

March 29, 1975

Steve Hurley, Ed Smith, Greg McCarty

After nearly a four year layoff, courtesy of the Iowa Geological Survey, the Iowa Grotto was returning to Coldwater Cave in Winneshiek County. But everyone has heard enough about the bad effects that resulted from the I.G. bringing the various state agencies into the cave business, and I think it will turn out for the best anyway, so I'd like to point out a really big benefit from the Geological Survey's work. And that is the shaft they drilled into the cave. What a fantastically convenient and safe entrance compared to diving the spring. When there isn't any snow on the ground, which most assuredly wasn't the case on this day, you can drive down a nice gravel lane right up to the building housing the shaft. This large metal building is a good place to change into your wet suits in warm weather. It's about 96 feet from the surface to the cave floor at this point, further downstream the cave is 200 feet or more from the surface, and an aluminum ladder bolted into the shaft casing makes for quick and easy access. A large wooden platform at the base of the shaft provides a great place to organize your gear before you charge off down the passage. Of course it's offensive to the eye to be coming down the passage and come across this man made platform, but think what it will be like when the state commercializes the cave. That's not a certainty yet, but it looks like this will probably be the case. This will help to protect the cave, however, because the state will be careful in their operation and protect the cave environment as best they can. Also the area can only support so many commercial caves, so the commercialization of Coldwater Cave will help to prevent the commercialization of other large caves as they are found. While we are waiting for the state to start work on the commercialization, the Iowa Grotto is planning to make the best use of the time available and get a lot of work done in the cave. Most of the work will be exploratory, in the many unprobed side passages, but we are also planning a lot of photographic and surveying projects. Unfortunately, this first trip back into the cave turned up an additional project that we didn't expect. Cleaning big muddy handprints off the pure white flowstone in the gallery section of the cave. I supposed we should have expected it, because while the state had control of the cave too many people that didn't know anything about caves were taken into the area immediately around the shaft. It's disgusting to see how insensitive these people were, and how they actually went out of their way to put muddy handprints on even the largest and most beautiful cascade of flowstone. On a future trip we will be cleaning the mud off with squirt bottles and soft brushes. I can only hope that we will be completely successful.

Steve and I met Ed in a cafe in Decorah a little after 8:30. Steve and I drove up that morning, and Ed drove up the night before and stayed in a motel. After taking on some food, we took off for the Kenneth Flatland farm. Mr. Flatland owns the land above a portion of Coldwater Cave, and his farm is where the Geological Survey drilled the shaft. They used the map drawn up by former Grotto members Dave Jagnow and Steve Barnett to locate the shaft site. The shaft is about three quarters of a mile from the sump that is the limit of exploration upstream, and about two and one half miles from the first sump downstream which marks the start of the one quarter mile long underwater section leading to the entrance. It's just upstream from the

Gallery section. Because it's so far into the cave, it provides easy access to the least explored parts of the cave. This is great from the exploration standpoint, as virgin passage is only minutes away, but it's also great from a photographic standpoint because this is the least photographed portion of the cave. Or, at least it was before the Geo. Survey and all the newspaper reporters got in there. After signing the legal releases, we changed into our wet suits in Mr. Flatlands basement. Then followed him in our cars to the lane that leads to the shaft. The snow was too deep to follow the lane, so Mr. Flatland gave us a ride in the back of his pickup on a round about route. Getting inside the building over the shaft was a welcome relief from the freezing wind. It was cold outside, an understatement, and a very strong wind made any exposed flesh very miserable. After taking some pictures in the building above the shaft, the three of us made the long ladder descent into the cave. You would think that you'd need a belay for a ladder climb of over 90 feet, but because the shaft is so narrow a belay is completely unnecessary. If you lean back just a little, you're back rests against the casing, making it almost impossible to fall. If a person was afraid of heights, however, stepping over the lip of the casing (which is four feet off the floor) can be a thrill. We told Mr. Flatland that we would be back out of the cave by 9:30, then we started off. Our goal for this trip was to follow the main passage to the upstream sump, then follow the side passage there to the waterfall dome and see if there is an upper level that can be entered. Steve Barnett was the only one who had been very far down this passage. He entered it on the trip when he and Jagnow surveyed the main passage (June 6-8, 1968), and at the farthest point he got was a dome that had a large waterfall coming down it. His light was about to go out, and in all the spray he couldn't see if there was a passage at the top. After glancing downstream, and knowing that just around the corner was the Gallery, we charged off upstream. I immediately noticed some handprints on some flowstone, and attempted to wash them off, but Steve and I found out later that it takes more than just splashing water on the flowstone to really clean it. Going further upstream, we immediately encountered the first breakdown section upstream from the shaft. We marveled at the high wide passage and the fantastic ribbon and drapery formations. These were followed by rows of white stalactites and bacon rind. The Snake Passage isn't far from the shaft, and Ed and I entered it for a few feet to see what it was like. This passage hadn't been entered until Steve Barnett and Loren McVey crawled down it for a ways on the first press trip into the cave. Later the Geo. Survey dug up the vertebrate remains of a snake from a mud bank near the entrance to this passage. As we proceeded up the main passage, we had to take several stops to lay down in the water to cool off. It's important to go at a slow enough pace to prevent excessive water loss from perspiration. We finally left the breakdown section, with its high ceilings, and started through the long section that features mostly stooping. With knee crawl and a little walking thrown in for variety. There are lots of ceiling crevices in this section, and a few rooms formed by breakdown. Most of these have some really nice stalactites, long white soda straws, and some neat helectites. After two trips into the cave, the second was on May 11, 1975, I've seen a fair amount of the cave. I've found that I like the formations upstream from the shaft better than the massive flowstone formations in the Gallery section. Others on these trips have expressed similar feelings. Even in the side passages, the array of stalactites and soda straws continues to dazzle you. Most of these formations are nearly pure white. In my opinion, a white stalactite beats out at least ten brown ones any day of the week. But that's enough chatter about the speleothems, everyone already knows that Coldwater Cave is prettier than your average Iowa cave. The only way you'll get to see speleothems in the average Iowa cave is if your caving buddies bring along some

pictures from their last trip to another state.

One long stretch, just before the room at the start of the waterfall passage, is all knee crawl at best. We were reminded very much of Glenwood Cave, as all three of us had gone in that cave last January. We finally reached the room just before the sump. It's fairly good sized when compared with the low passage we had just come through, and at the upstream end is a very large flowstone formation. When we first got here, we weren't positive that this was the area where the main passage sumped. Ed wasn't feeling too well at this point, and wasn't too excited about going any farther up the main passage. So he lay down on the mud bank while I crawled up the side passage real fast to see what I could find. While I was doing that, Steve went on up the main passage a little ways to see for sure that this was the place where the passage sumped. Crawling up the side passage, which puts out a considerable amount of water, I soon came to a little side branch that led 15 feet to a nice dome about 35 feet high. Just outside the entrance to this dome is a survey marker on the ceiling of the waterfall passage. I found out later that this mark is the end of Jagnow's and Barnett's map. I crawled back to Steve and Ed and told them I hadn't found much, and Steve told me that the passage does indeed sump up ahead a little ways. I wasn't sure that Steve was right, because I was under the mistaken impression that you could hear the waterfall after you went just a little ways. So I charged on up ahead with the idea of proving Steve wrong. But after the ceiling got so low that both ears were full of water, and only my nose and carbide lamp were out of the water, I had to concede that Steve was right. The bouyancy of my wet suit made it very difficult to get that far in. My legs and body kept trying to float to the surface, and this motion would tip my face down into the water. Fortunately the passage was high enough that I could get my legs partially underneath me, and then push on the ceiling to keep them down.

After a brief rest, we all crawled up the Waterfall Passage. Steve stopped off to see the dome, where I had stopped earlier, then we continued to crawl up the passage. We soon reached a short breakdown area where the passage was high enough that you could walk. Other areas were just high enough to barely stoop. Especially if you have short legs like Ed and Steve. After another rest stop in a medium sized room off to the side of the stream, we crawled on up to a ceiling pocket above a mud bank to change carbide. By this time Ed wasn't feeling well at all, so we took a lengthy break and ate most of our food. Ed decided that he shouldn't go any farther, and that he should leave the cave as soon as possible. So Steve and I decided to make a quick reconnaissance upstream to see what the dripping noises were that we could hear. Steve and I charged on ahead at a blazing pace, and soon reached a side branch that had some roaring sounds coming out of it. So while Steve continued on up the main stream, I checked out this side branch. I followed it for about 120 feet, and from there I could see that the passage got narrower and that the noise was coming from some cascades. By the time I got back to the main stream, Steve was way ahead of me. So I really turned on the steam and moved as fast as I could to catch up. This proved to be a bad mistake, because I hurt my leg with the strain I was putting on it. I damaged some tendons (or something) on the inside of my right thigh, where it connects to the hip. It gave me a lot of trouble on this trip, and in everything else I did for the next one and a half months. When I caught up with Steve he was waiting at a wide place in the passage. The water was deeper here, and you could walk for a short ways. White stalactites were

plentiful and very pretty. Off to one side was a little 15 foot dome that had a stream of water coming out of it. This was the noise we had been following. All the way down the wall where the stream came out was a cascade of flowstone that was being re-eroded. You could see the lines marking the different layers as they were laid down, and it even had holes dissolved clear through it. There was an enterable crawlway visible at the top, but we didn't try to climb up to it because we had to get back to Ed. When we or someone else decides to push it, they should be very careful when they climb up to keep from damaging the fragile flowstone. I think the best way might be to stand on someones shoulders. After resting for a minute, and speculating about what was up ahead, we crawled on back to Ed. We had gotten about 1,000 feet from the main passage. We found out later that the waterfall dome was about one half mile from the main passage, estimate courtesy of Steve Barnett. For more information on this dome, see the report on the trip of May 11, 1975.

After picking up Ed we trudged on back to the main passage where Ed and Steve took some more pictures. They had taken some earlier in some of the ceiling crevices and rooms on our way up the main passage. On the way back down the main passage they grabbed a few more choice scenes. One of our rest stops was right beside the only other major side passage between the Snake Passage and the Waterfall Passage. So I entered it for about 100 feet, and it was stoopway for as far as I could see. Loren McVey and Larry Fattig explored this passage for quite a ways, back in 1969 when they mistook this for the Waterfall Passage.

When we finally reached the shaft and got Ed and his gear out of the cave, it was 5:05pm. Steve and I were now going to run downstream for a ways and take a lot of pictures. We were impressed with the large white flowstone in the Gallery section, and the numerous flowstone cascades that followed, but I think we both still liked the stalactites and draperies in the upstream section best. Steve started taking pictures at Pothole Country, but we took most of them on the way back. Toward the end of Pothole Country, there is a 45 foot high dome above the center of the main passage. This dome is nearly circular, and about 15 feet across. Water is running down all of the walls, so when you are walking down the passage and come to this dome you're looking at a circle of rain. It would be impossible to miss this dome. Yet after this trip I was shocked to find that the Geological Survey didn't mark this dome on there map. They mapped almost a mile of the main passage, including this section, and all the other domes in the part of the cave that I've seen are marked on the map. I was equally surprised when I saw a copy of Steve Barnett's and Dave Jagnow's map of the main passage, as the dome wasn't marked on their map either. So on the May 11, 1975, trip I located the dome in relation to the other features of the cave and marked it on my traced copy of the map.

Estimating how much time we had, Steve and I went about one half mile downstream. As far as the Orange and Black Dome, which was named for it's dominant orange and black coloration. On the opposite side of the passage from this dome is a tiny passage, high up on the wall, that has a nice little stream of water coming out of it. It's unenterable however. More importantly, there is a large side passage at the ceiling level just upstream from the dome. While Steve was taking some pictures of the area, I climbed up the wall to have a quick look at this passage. A very small stream of water comes out of the passage and over a cascade of flowstone, so I had to climb up as far to the left as I could to avoid the flowstone. The passage is a stoopway for 150 feet or so, then it splits in two. All the water comes from the right fork, which

is a rugged crawlway over breakdown. The left fork is a wide knee crawl over dirt fill. It appears that water comes out of this fork only rarely. I didn't go beyond the wye. The stoopway portion was all mud on the floor, and I could see only one set of tracks. I talked to Don Koch, who was in charge of the Geological Survey's work in the cave, and it turns out that the tracks were his. He saw no other tracks when he entered the passage.

After Steve took a couple of pictures of me up on the ledge, we started back to the shaft, taking pictures as we went. We tried a couple remote flash shots, but the button on Steve's flash unit is so small that I had a lot of trouble setting it off with my rubber gloves on. I'd left most of my gear back at the platform below the shaft, because I was tired of lugging it around. So I knew that I would run out of carbide before we got back from our little jaunt. When it happened I just switched over to my waterproof six volt flashlight. However, the flashlight only lasted for 15 to 20 minutes before the bulb burned out. So I had to borrow Steve's Justrite electric for the rest of the trip back out.

When the batteries in Steve's flashlight finally gave out, we deposited all our gear in the basket and I started up the shaft. We had been in the cave nearly nine and a half hours. When I neared the top, after a couple of rest stops, it started getting colder and colder. My gloves, sleeves, and cuffs all started freezing to the ladder. When I was almost to the top, my whole back froze to the casing. I had to rip myself loose. Even with me pulling on the rope and Steve pushing from underneath, it wasn't too easy getting the heavy basket of gear back up the shaft, mainly because we were a little tired. We put the lid on the shaft and locked everything back up, then plodded back through the snow to the car. The awful wind was still there and we were coated with an armor of ice. When we got back to Flatland's, he and his wife were out bowling. We changed out of our wet suits in the basement, then the Flatland's daughter started feeding us. We consumed a whole pile of baked ham sandwiches, pie, and other goodies. I hope we didn't clean out their cupboard! If there are padlocks on the cupboard doors the next time we come, then we'll know we over did it. It was all at the insistence of the daughters, however.

NEARPINICLE CAVE, A NEW CAVERN IN THE BIXBIE GROUP

James A. Dockal

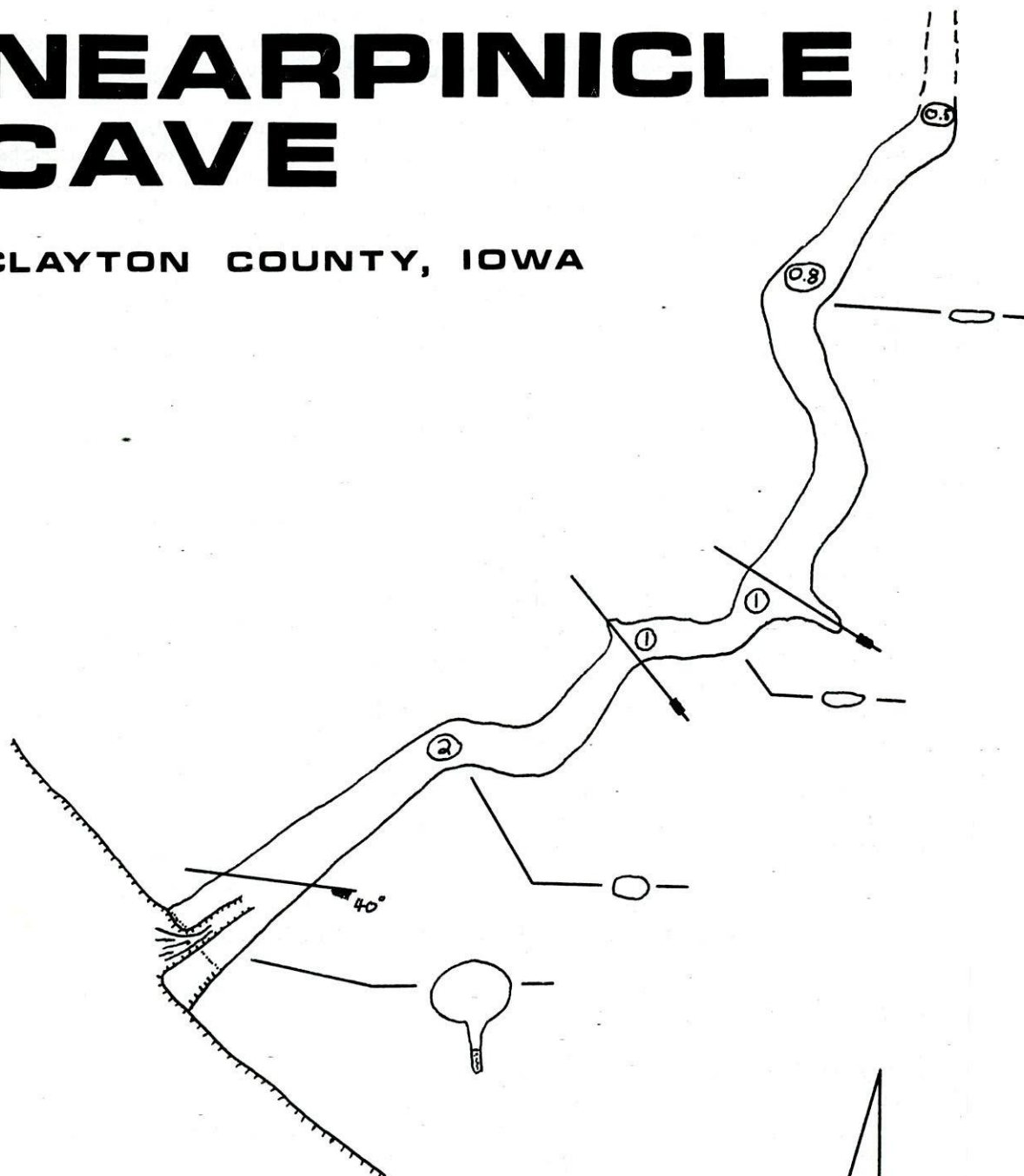
Greg McCarty, James Dockal

Nearpinicle Cave is a phreatic solution tube developed in the Silurian Hopkington formation. Development of the cave must have occurred prior to the Wisconsin glaciation. The dissection of the landscape and hence drop in base level below the level of the cave occurred during the development of the Iowan erosional surface (formerly the Iowanglaciation). This makes cave development early Wisconsin at the latest, however the cave may be much older than the Pleistocene. The cave may be related to a Devonian-Mississippian paleokarst located to the northwest in Fayette County.

The floor of the cave is covered with a black sediment that was washed in from the surface. The entry point of this sediment lies beyond the explored portion of the cave. Speleothems are for the most part not present. Coral speleogens, clay vermiculations, and troglodene deposits are common. The passage morphology is basically elliptical, however at the entrance a channel in

NEARPINICLE CAVE

CLAYTON COUNTY, IOWA



FEET

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SURVEY BY DOCKAL & McCARTY

1974

the floor gives it a keyhole shape. This channel becomes filled with sediment a short distance from the entrance. It is not known how far this channel extends into the cave or how deep it is cut. A small chimney occurs in the ceiling a short distance in. This connects to the surface in a shallow doline.

The geomorphology of the immediate vicinity of the cave is typical of that of the Niagrian escarpment of Iowa. The valley slopes are littered with blocks of Silurian carbonate which are slowly making their way to the valley floor where they form a talus apron in which Bixbie Ice Cave is found. The valley walls are capped by a wall of carbonate ten to twenty feet high. The carbonate is dissected by a joint system forming large blocks in excess of fifty feet to a side. These blocks are sliding down the slightly inclined, lubricated surface of the Maquoketa shale resulting in the development of mechanically expanded joints. Nearpinicle Cave is located wholly within one of these large blocks. Two other blocks lie near the entrance of the cave. Across the valley several of these blocks form a group of small caves and mini-boxcanyons known collectively as the Bixbie Craggs. Several of the blocks in the area have solution tubes similar to Nearpinicle Cave cutting through them. All the solution tubes occur at approximately the same stratigraphic position. The location of the solution tubes and the mechanically expanded joints are totally independent of each other. The solution tubes are truncated by the mechanically expanded joints and hence predate them.

Exploration of the cave is not very difficult; the most strenuous part being the trail up to the mouth of the cave. Here the spelunker must ford a wild stream, come face to face with the fierce red squirrel and navigate across the extremely dangerous broken beer bottle, not to mention the gentle grade of the slope or the economy size boulders that frequent the path. Entry is gained by stooping down at the mouth, though assuming the crawl position initially may prolong the lifetime of your helmet. The cave is a very easy crawl for a few feet, then you must bellywomp the rest of the way. The end of the cave is simply where your back and the cave roof, and your stomach and the cave floor simultaneously meet. Equipment necessary: helmet, three independent light sources, first aid kit, whistle, shovel (for moving recently dropped obstacles), knee pads, stomach pad, and one copy of "Caves of Colorado". Exploration time required: about ten minutes.

HIGHLANDVILLE CAVES, COLDWATER SPRING, and SKUNK CAVE

Greg McCarty

April 13, 1975

Loren Schutt, Mike Bounk, Jerry Bybee, Greg McCarty

It's a long drive from Iowa City to Highlandville, and that's where I have an advantage living in Anamosa. It cuts 90 miles off every cave trip. Also there's the problem of being stranded in Iowa City without a car, because almost no one goes caving from Iowa City. This is what has been plaguing Mike and Jerry ever since they joined the Grotto. But I finally got Loren to go out on another cave trip. So we were off for Winnishiek County, home of Iowa's greatest caves. We took the most direct route to Highlandville, up through Clayton and Allamakee Counties. This also gave me a chance to explain the various cave areas we were passing through, and the different types of caves that are found there. Normally this would be a very scenic route, but this is the worst time of the year to see pretty scenery. It's the best time of the

year to sinkholes, however, so we saw quite a few around Rossville. After securing permission from the owner, we toured all but three of the caves in the little valley near Highlandville. One had a small flow of water coming out that we would've had to belly crawl through, one short cave was blocked by pretty ice speleothems that we didn't want to break, and one little cave we didn't bother with. Mike and Loren took some pictures both in and out of the caves, and I destroyed my coveralls squeezing through a tight connection between two of the caves.

Having seen enough of the Highlandville caves, we shucked our muddy trog suits and took off cross country for Coldwater Spring, natural entrance to Coldwater Cave. The lane leading down to the trout fishing access was still closed for the winter, so that made for a slightly longer walk back to the spring. The output of the spring was about double the normal flow, which the State Geological Survey lists in its "Report on Coldwater Cave" as being about 8,700 gallons per minute, and was a little cloudy. While we were taking pictures of the spring, some plates of rock (weighing at least 10 pounds) split off from the east face and fell into the water. Bluffs in the Galena limestone are never very stable. By the time we started back, my right leg was giving me a lot of trouble. It bothers me most when I'm standing erect, so it doesn't effect my caving in Iowa caves very much.

When we arrived at Skunk Cave, we were surprised to find that we weren't the only ones there. This is very unusual in Iowa, except when you're in a state park. After getting our gear ready, and checking out a weird stream that suddenly started flowing in the ditch. We climbed up the snow bank to the entrance just in time to meet the other people coming out. It turned out to be a small party of people from Cresco being led by a guy who had been in the cave at least a couple of times before. I got the impression that he's seen a map of the cave, because he knew the names of some of the features in the cave. We stood in a side passage while they filed on out, then proceeded into the cave. Jerry and I looked at a couple more side passages while we waited for Mike to chimney down the ice coated walls. Ice is always a problem here in the winter, but it wasn't real bad this time. Loren wasn't having any luck getting Mike down, so I came back and convinced him that he could make it. We reached another hangup when Loren couldn't figure out how to get through the keyhole. So we backed up to where I could pass him, and I quickly zipped through the keyhole. But it was a long time before I finally got Mike and Loren through. We toured all of the major passages to their ends, and several of the side passages before Loren decided it was getting to be time to head back home. Mike took a few pictures in the back part of the maze section. After taking the shortcut back to the main passage, I asked the others to lead the way out. We went so slowly through the cave on the way in that they managed to do it after some hesitation. Two things that also helped them; the fact that Jerry sat at a key intersection for 20 minutes waiting for Loren and Mike to make it through the keyhole, and also a few out arrows have appeared on the walls. The source of these is unknown, but is probably a local who frequents the cave. After finally getting Mike back up the icy chimney, we stopped off in Decorah for a bite to eat and then headed back home.