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Diane Raab

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The Alaskan Caver



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JUNE 2003

Volume 23 Number 2

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The Alaskan Caver

Glacier Grotto
P.O. Box 9062
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Editor -- Diane Raab
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AlaskanCaver@hotmail.com

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

BY DAVE LOVE

Caving season is upon us! Having recently returned from some excellent caving experiences in southern and northern Arizona, I am primed. Eleven hours hiking, climbing, traversing through the formations upon formations in Onyx Cave south of Tucson and a visit to a 3,000 year-old pottery urn placed just right for collecting water from underground lava tube seeps on the Mogollon Rim conjure easily to mind. Several cavers from that part of the world have expressed interest in assisting with the USFS and Grotto expedition in 2004. The unexplored, underground wilderness of Southeast Alaska still beckons, promising new discovery.

Those interested in discovering a few areas of Southeast Alaska this summer can still become involved with the USFS-sponsored project. There were three projects considered: one on the north side of Mt. Francis on Kosciusko Island, one to the Mt. Calder area of Prince of Wales Island and one trip to the karst area on Revillagigado Island above Ketchikan.

For those who have not caved in Alaska, the caves are cold, often wet, and sometimes tight and muddy. Insulating clothing that is warm even when wet is a must: polypropylene, pile, wool, coveralls and lightweight drysuits are recommended. Ground-pounding, vertical work and survey can be wet but not necessarily cold, if you are properly prepared. Heavy-duty raingear and rubber boots are a must in this wet climate. Vertical caving gear and competence in its proper use is required. Survey standards will be provided and discussed as will a refresher on vertical work if anyone needs it. Interested participants are encouraged to contact **Kevin Casey** at kccasey@fs.fed.us or by phone at (907)828-3248 as soon as possible. *CONTINUED ON PAGE 3*

NSS features TCP expedition

In the April 2003 edition of *NSS News*, published by the National Speleological Society, **Christine Krejca** and **Jean Krejca** wrote several comprehensive articles about caves and caving in the Tongass National Forest during the spring of 2002.

Members of the Tongass Cave Project expedition to Coronation Island from April 22 to May 4, 2002 included "longtime Alaskan caver **Pete Smith**," and "especially pert early riser **Kevin Allred**" as well as **Kevin "K2" Casey**, who apparently is very good at "Hillbilly Golf" which involves throwing rocks into distant tide pools.

Four of the maps created from that expedition were published in the *NSS News*: Miner Diversion Cave, Passion Pit, Colander Cave and Flag Cave.

The expedition members were: **Kevin Allred, Terri Brown, Steve Carley, Kevin Casey, Deb Dudick, Steve Lewis, Vivian Loftin, Chris Krejca, Jean Krejca, Jed Smith, Kina Smith and Pete Smith.**

Sierra mag highlights Tongass caves

A feature article about the caves of the Tongass National Forest was published in the March/April 2003 edition of *Sierra* magazine, published by the Sierra Club. The article and photos feature K-109, a highly decorated cave found during the Kosciusko Island summer 2002 expedition.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER CONTINUED

In other local caving news, **Dr. Timothy Heaton** will be coordinating excavation of caves near Wrangell and on Coronation Island this summer along with **Fred Grady** from the Smithsonian Institute, **Julie Heaton** and four of Tim's students. Excavations will occur starting mid-June near Wrangell and continue on Coronation approximately June 24th to mid July. **Jan Smith**, Archeologist with the USFS in Petersburg and her crew of archeologists will be assisting with excavations in Phalanges Phreatic (Lawyer's Cave) near Wrangell. A few errant caver types, feeling vertically deprived (or is it depraved...?), myself and **Diane Raab**, will join **Dr. Heaton** for some additional collections in Hole 52 in June. Exciting and interesting discoveries are likely.

Finally, on the cave issues front: **Chad Van Ormer** and **Terry Fifield** inform me that the USFS editor/writer, ranger **Dale Kanen** and the Interdisciplinary Team are still working on the draft Environmental Assessment for the proposed Baker Island trail and dock. The first public draft for comment should be out around July 1. Currently a 28" gravel path is planned, mooring buoy on the Port San Antonio side, but no cabin and no tent platforms. Use is expected to be light and if impacts become evident, tent platforms may be built at a later date. This project may still be a few years down the road given the fact that Alaska Power and Telephone is currently in Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

No more to report. Hope you all have a safe and enjoyable summer season. Stay safe, stay warm, step carefully and may all your caving be in booming, walking passage!

Off Rope, David Love

CURRENT STATUS OF KARSTLANDS ON THE TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST

By James F. Baichtal
Forest Geologist
Tongass National Forest

From the roadless SEIS analysis of current TLMP Land Use Designations (LUDs) ... I ran these numbers which show the current status of the karstlands on the Tongass: About 467,600 acres (731 square miles) of carbonate underlie the lands currently administered by the Tongass National Forest. Of those acres, 88,763 acres are in the Wilderness Group LUDs and 158,926 acres are in Natural Setting LUDs. These total to 247,689 acres or 53 percent of the karst lands. The remaining 219,991 acres of carbonate are in Development LUDs. Of these acres, 41,333 have been mapped as high vulnerability karst lands. Of the remaining 178,579 acres of karst lands within the development LUDs, 108,770 acres are mapped as suitable lands for timber production. It is estimated that through inventory and karst vulnerability assessments, that a minimum of 30% or 32,631 acres of additional high vulnerability karst lands would be characterized from those suitable lands. Considering all these

LUDs, the suitable land base, and projected inventory results, 391,462 acres or 84% of the karst lands are protected or are modeled to be. Therefore, the remaining 16% of the karst lands may be available for some level of management pending the results of a thorough inventory and karst vulnerability assessment.

Due out soon will be the Results of the 2002 Karst Review Panel, this should be published within the month of March. Panel members included:

- **Thomas Aley**, Ozark Underground Laboratory, Protom, Missouri, USA
- **Paul A. Griffiths**, KarstCare, Campbell River, British Columbia, Canada (principal author)
- **William K. Jones**, Karst Waters Institute, Charles Town, West Virginia, USA
- **Dr. Stephen R. H. Worthington**, Worthington Groundwater, Dundas, Ontario, Canada

The reviewers are asked to combine their observations and professional opinions into the final report mentioned above. This report should:

1. Characterize the SE Alaskan karst development and processes as per the review team's experience.
2. Summarize the effectiveness of the implementation of the current Karst Management Standards and Guidelines as per the examples reviewed.
3. Analyze the appropriateness of the proposed changes.

WHAT IS KARST? Karst is a terrain with distinctive hydrology and landforms. It is set on water soluble rocks (usually limestone) with structure that allows high secondary porosity. It is characterized by sinkholes, pits, underground water drainage and caves.

LIMESTONE CAVES are formed by the dissolution of the bedrock by water. Slightly acid water dissolves the CaCO_3 and, over time and with proper structure, forms passages negotiable by humans. Well-developed karst is usually characterized by underground water flow. Water quickly flows into the bedrock and frequently forms underground streams and rivers which emerge again as springs.

GLACIER GROTTO MEMBER ANDI HUNTER SURVIVES MEXICO'S CUEVA CHEVE CAVE

By Andrea "Andi" Hunter
Fairbanks, Alaska

I just returned from a month caving expedition down in Cueva Cheve in Mexico with Bill Stone. Pretty trip...hardest mental and physical thing I've EVER done! 35 lb packs filled with scuba gear, 13-hour days, and underground tested my limits. But the cave was incredible.

Big turbine areas and waterfalls where the water was so loud you couldn't hear yourself scream with jun ropework including everything from Tyrolleans to double rope rappels to hundreds of re-belays and many 90 m large whirlpools where the water would disappear under the rock to huge boreholes where the rock was so black up every photon of your LED. The camp 2 biv-wac site was really stellar with nice sandy ground and little cubt hide yourself. Camp 3 (the most remote cave biv-wac site on earth) was a little more sketchy because you were these ledges on the side of a hill. The sump area was amazing with these really smooth marbled fissures that we down. I never thought of myself as claustrophobic but 2 1/2 hours of gnarly passage (tight fissures) carrying car packs...didn't strike my fancy to say the least (Cueva Palomitas...an infeeder to Cheve...we think).

We washed off the mold, mixed it all together and consumed it like a pack of wild dogs eating a fresh carcass.

Many breakdowns, and moments I thought I would never make it out of that cave, but I'm here and my learning curve has jumped exponentially. A couple leaps of faith across 5' crevasses and many exposed traverses with three inch toe holds and bomber hand holds...just enough to make your legs quiver like Elvis had been reincarnated.

Team dynamics were trying at times. You really learn what people are made of after spending such an intense amount of time with one another on such a demanding trip. I've learned that it's very important to be on a team with people you trust and feel supported with.

One night we ran out of food (6th day), so we went from Camp 3 to Camp 2 (13 hours) on one Powerbar each. We were famished after arriving at camp so we hunted around and found some old moldy food from an expedition 6 years ago. It was an old nasty can of tuna with some dehydrated soup and a plastic mold-infested container of honey. Well, we washed off the mold, mixed it all together and consumed it like a pack of wild dogs eating a fresh carcass. That and 6 hours of sleep at Camp 2 was enough to get us out of the cave the next day (another 10 hours).

Even though we came out at dark, the grass still looked vibrant green in our headlamps and the smell of the camp fire at the Yllano was very acute and could be distinguished from a good distance into the cave. I think our senses were happy to sense again (except for the 'touch' sensation which was pretty much immune (or just numb) to all the bumping and bruising.)

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, right?

Andi Hunter participated in the 2002 Kosciusko Island caving expedition. She lives in Fairbanks with her two big dogs Mango and Papaya.

ROPE CUTTER

Dear Rope Cutter,

I haven't been in a cave for so long that I'm starting to do weird things. Last night I put aluminum foil over my windows and crawled under my couch. Problem is my couch doesn't have the necessary clearance for me and I wound up wearing it like a giant conch. Other than discovering the root of the word couch, this experience frightened me. What am I to do?

Dear Conch Potato*

I am presuming that something drastic is preventing you from getting to a cave. I was glad to hear from your letter that you are willing to take some action. From your symptoms I hope you are not suffering from SARS. Speleologia Assenza Risurrezione Syndrome, that very serious cave disease that first appeared in Italy. It's symptoms are a propensity to go into closets for long periods of time, a tendency to avoid looking people in the eyes (headlamp courtesy), happiness at the sight of insects and occasionally emitting high pitched squeaks. This behavior can cause problem with your social life and if left untreated can be quite dangerous.

The most famous case being the Darwin Award guy who shut himself in his bedroom. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that he loved cabbage, so the gas emissions were the actual cause of death. But you can do what I do -- try to simulate caving, especially the fun parts. Put on your cave suit and have someone hold a garden hose at full bore to the neck opening. Next take off the suit and drag it through the mud until none of the original color is left. Sleep that night on a pile of rocks, get up and eat granola and yoghurt, then put on the cold crusty cave suit. Then belly crawl to the nearest bank. Open a safety deposit box and have them leave you in the vault for a long while. It helps to have some form of water drip in the vault or in lieu of that, perhaps you could get them to leave a fan on at full bore. If you are still wearing a stinky cave suit you can guarantee the fan. So if you haven't been arrested or hauled away in a straight jacket by this time, you will find that this is still a very poor substitute for caving. Perhaps it would be easier just to walk away from whatever hideous situation is preventing you from caving.

Phreada Phreatic

**Sounds like a new fast food restaurant.*

The September 2003 Edition of *The Alaskan Caver* will be the last one published by a foreigner in the hot desert country of Arizona. It just ain't right that *The Alaskan Caver*, like many other Alaskan institutions, has been taken over by Outsiders from the Lower 48.

The current editor has not received a Permanent Fund Dividend, sipped an Alaskan Amber or eaten a red salmon within two hours of its last swim for two years in a row, thus no longer qualifying as a true Alaskan. It's only fair that a true Alaskan whojigger take over this fine publication. If you would like to volunteer your time and skills, please contact **Diane Raab** or **Connie LaPerriere**.

Let's keep *The Alaskan Caver* arriving quarterly!



Diane Raab looking for a new editor

Caving in Arizona*

By Dave Love

Memories of caving, hot tubs and freaks
Chai-induced synapses, late-night Tucson geeks!
Up climbs and down climbs, traverses, rappels
stalactities, stalagmites, columns so swell

Pictures of cave pearls still dance in my head
Selenite crystals, flowstone stained red
Formations so massive, too many to see
free climbs exciting, good memories to me

Time it stood still, immortal we seemed
Sight, sound and feeling as if in a dream
a tactile experience, rock smoothed by time
softened by water, re-sculpted, refined

Verbal expression, musical glee
Harmony, resonance, fun times for free
Cave air, exhaustion, and good folks to
share

Tired and punch drunk but happy down
there



**There are no caves in Arizona*

CAVING HYDRATION RECOMMENDATIONS:

Drinking enough fluids while caving is important to maintain strength and endurance. Here are some ideas to consider, even in the wet caves of Alaska!

1. Drink before, during and after caving. (Water, that is!)
2. Think about fluids two days before a long cave trip or hike/cave trip. Drink 8-12 glasses of water on the first day, and 10-14 glasses on the second day. You need one ounce of fluid for every pound you weigh.
3. Drink two cups (16 oz.) of non-alcoholic fluids 2.5 hours before caving.
4. Drink one cup of water or sports drink 15 minutes before starting.
5. Drink 1 cup of water every 15 minutes during the trip.
6. After caving, drink 2 cups of water or a high carbohydrate drink such as juice for every pound lost while crawling down a hell hole.
7. Don't forget to bring a pee bottle for dry caves! Perhaps also a burrito bag ...

Q: What kind of music do cavers enjoy?

A: Rock and chamber music

Whojigger Gone Missing

Part One

THE GREATEST ABOVEGROUND MISADVENTURE OF ALL TIME

By Bruce "Whojigger" White
Ketchikan, Alaska

(During the Kosciusko Island caving expedition of 1999, Bruce White got lost among the muskeg and spent a long night alone. At long last, we finally find out "What could he possibly have been thinking?" Here is Mr. White's own version of the tale, in his own words. This is a TRUE STORY, and all the cavers in the story are real people. No attempt was made to change or alter names, and no harm was meant by using real names. The author is totally responsible for the story and in no way is the Glacier Grotto, the NSS or members or officers responsible for Whojigger's misadventure.)

Boy, that sauna sure worked some magic on my mind as I dug through the bolder-strewn sump at the bottom of Golga Bunk Cave on Kosciusko Island, Alaska. I was caving with two great cavers from the Outside, trying to push Golga beyond the magical 100 meter depth. It wasn't going to happen even though we shed our cave suits to try and wiggle down just a few extra meters.

We gave up when the cold and hungeries started to take over. Kris, our fearless leader, had warned us to get above ground by 7:30 PM. He wanted us all back at the van on time to buzz down to the Morgan's for a long overdue steam bath and home-cooked dinner. That was eating on my soul as I directed my teammates to ascend and take off for the van, leaving me to climb out on my own. We were late as it was, but I figured I could send the others on ahead and take my time getting out. I had my own vehicle parked right next to the van and besides, I was a local, I was an Alaskan caver. I took my time coming out of good old "Golga," being careful not to bugger myself up because I knew there was not going to be anyone waiting for me at the top to retrieve my carcass if I were to mess up. When I surfaced, I lounged in the warmth of the overcast flat light of the muggy summer evening found here in Alaska. I was a bit overheated as I was determined to get my money's worth by wearing my new dry suit under my Wunderalls. It sure kept me dry and warm down in the sump, but now as I rolled about in the moss at the lip, I was sweating like a stuck pig. Since I had my own truck, what did it matter if I took an extra 10 minutes to cool off. I ate a Powerbar and rehydrated with the last half of my water bottle before I struck out for the Bronco.

Now "Fearless Leader" knew I was a good navigator on water with a reputation for finding my passage to unfamiliar harbors just on the smell of a town's garbage dump. I was good with a compass and chart, deadly with a sextant or GPS, but put three trees in front of me and I'm as lost as my dear old mother in a cave. Fearless Leader had warned me, "Follow the bog down to the lower edge, shoot over to the low rise right beyond the clearing and turn to Port (left) 90 degrees as you enter the dwarf spruce. Look for the vehicles about 60 meters away and you are back. HOW COULD I GET LOST???"

"Nothing in this world is Foolproof, because.... fools are so damn creative!" OK, it was time to slog my tired, sweaty, body back to that wonderful meal and sauna at the Morgan's.

"Follow the directions and no shortcuts this time" I said to myself as I trudged out across the bog. "I'm at the far end, just up the rise and time to turn left, now look for the truck and..... where's the truck?"

I stopped in my tracks and scanned the tree line for the tell-tail flash of Ford white in a sea of green. Nothing. "Well" I said to myself, "Maybe I didn't traverse the rise far enough, those dwarf trees aren't the best boundary" (they tend to gradually go from sparse cover to solid forest over a fifty foot wide zone). "OK, go a bit further and still no sign of the truck.

"Boy, I must be dragging!" "I'll just pick up the pace and hey there's the end, it goes right into a clear-cut draining down into Van Sant's creek where the "Hot Spot" road takes you back to the Morgans!" I debated between bush swimming back across the 10 year old second growth but remembered the time I tried to save a mile circumnavigation of a similar clear-cut by swimming 50 yards across. It took me twice as long to get to the pickup point than the more prudent members that didn't follow me. I guess they knew I was no land traveler way back then. "No, I'll just follow the edge around doubling back and smack into the road, and that would take me to the truck." The plan couldn't fail, it was ... foolproof.

My best thinking got the better of me then. OK, I thought, if I skirt the edge of the second growth while I double back, I can't overshoot the truck and road. I would have to run into either one as I close the triangle I was walking just as long as I kept hugging the edge of the second growth. I started moving with all due deliberation. I pushed on for a bit, more than long enough to walk way past my initial point and stopped. This wasn't making sense!

OK, get out the GPS I had in my cave pack and..... dead. The Forest Service bulk batteries had once again given out. I knew that my 4-pack of spare batteries were fresh but like I said, nothing is foolproof. I opened the back of the GPS and was hit with the sudden realization that it took 6 batteries. I only carried a spare 4-pack because my Petzl Duo took 4 and the GPS was only used rarely to mark the entrance of a new cave for posterity. My headlamp batteries were very weak so it was no good changing out the batteries as the best you will get out of a battery pack is determined by the strength of the weakest battery. OK, I can fall back on my survey compass and think this one out. I found North, made mental notes and came up with a plan. I was going to head South until I hit the road.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

WHOJIGGER CONTINUED

The place we were caving in was surrounded byroads and I knew I might have a bit of a walk, but if I headed South I would find the road sooner or later, in an hour, tops.

I started hustling, humping my way on an azimuth that would surely get me to something I could recognize. As I headed South, I walked right past two very interesting pits which I made a mental note to try and relocate on another day.

The evening was getting on so I picked up the pace, thinking of that wonderful meal and steam bath. I traveled in a general down slope then up a small rise and "Wow," I found the edge of the bog where the truck was! OK, turn left and look for the..... No truck! and No road!!! I sat down for another Powerbar instead of roast bear, spuds and gravy.

Now my mother raised no fool, so it was time to take stock of the situation. I pondered how far I could be away from the cave, drew mental maps in my head of the surrounding area, calculated where I could be and what I could do to get it back together. I decided I would have to abandon my North/South treks, and strike off in the only foolproof way to hit a road, travel East. By now the light was losing its warmth and the sky was turning green in the last phase of our extended sunsets here in Alaska. Color was draining and contrast was slipping away from my vision. It was getting dark.

I got up abandoning my hopes of getting back in time for the steam bath, but at least I could still get some remains of the meal if I didn't take too long. East. Walk East and hit the road, forget the truck and walk the 4 miles back to the Morgans. Maybe they will get worried and come look for me and I won't have to walk the whole way, besides, my Xtra-tuffs were wet and the seal socks were poor protection from heel blisters on a long forced march. Up over a rise, cross a few bogs, ford a couple streams and..... now it WAS getting dark. This wasn't going to work. Its time to go to an "If all else fails" plan. If I head North and get on top of that ridge, I should be able to see some lights maybe, see the ocean and get my bearings maybe, or bump into that damn road that keeps moving away, playing hide and seek. Now I know I'm lost and I better start being real care-full. I can't afford to break a leg or get serious hurt as no one will find me without an all-out Search and Rescue mission. God I hate this, I can see everyone back at the Morgans lazing about, clean and well fed, slowly coming to the conclusion I was in trouble. I knew they would head back for Golga Bunk and drop her in the middle of the night to look for my body. After not finding me on the road or at the bottom of the cave, they would extend the search to the caves real close nearby and come up empty. They would honk the horn and flash lights in the sky and head back to the Morgan's to alert the Forest Service. I knew that with the morning light the planes and choppers would be flying and the cost of my rescue would sky rocket. Worse yet, someone might get hurt bouncing down a cave as fast as they could to find me. I had to get back on my own and soon!

No more time to play this game and the idea of hitting a ridge was just plain dumb. The trees up there were too tall to look over and too skinny to climb. OK, bailout plan is in place. HEAD SOUTH ALONG A CREEK AND END UP AT THE OCEAN. I fired up the acetylene lamp and walked in the glow of the beautiful golden light following the creek down slope. At least it was going South and that was the closest path to the ocean. I knew it was getting way late at night and the shadows were playing tricks on me. The ground just doesn't get illuminated enough to see the sneaky little ankle breaker holes in the forest litter. OK, enough is enough. The rain drizzled down my suit filling my boots and at long last, the outside was wetter than the inside of my dry suit. I decided to keep the suit on and conserve my heat, find a place to get a few winks and wait for dawn which couldn't be more than a couple hours away. I found a hollow under a massive root wad at the base of an old growth cedar that was dry and fairly snug. I crawled in and waited for dawn. I tried putting the lamp out but the smell of the gas made me ill. I wanted to keep my helmet on and it jammed in the entrance to my lair -- just in case.

Just in case showed up right on time. Noises, Stinky, stinky sour odor worse than any teenage boy's sneaker. I had bears nosing about.

I thought to myself, "Bears use smell more than anything. Put out the lamp and let the smell of acetylene gas waft through the air to alert the bears that the sweet aroma of a tired and slightly gamey caver was mixed with the horrible artificial smell of gas." They would nose about, trying to figure out what the deal was and find my hole under the tree. When one got close, I would re-light the lamp, shake the hell out of the generator and flame-throw the marauding bear as I jammed the helmet in the entrance, letting him get a hot paw and Petzl plastic instead of my meager flesh. Good plan if the bears were more aggressive, but all I heard for the next hour or so was sniffing, a bit of root digging, and a few crashes through the berry bushes as they made a fast exit after deciding I was not food.

My dry little patch of home started sucking the heat out of my legs and hip as I lay in the damp punk of rotten wood litter that made the floor of my home. I was miserable. As light returned to my world of sounds in the night, I came to the conclusion I was better off walking carefully, down the creek and back to the ocean. I crawled out, said good-bye to my midnight manger, then set off down the creek.

Walking the creek was easy except for the numerous fallen logs that spanned the creek just high enough to force me to clamber over them, and not low enough to scoot under. It was at this point in my sojourn that I saw God, smiling, laughing to himself like a vision of Jerry Garcia, white robed, sunbeams emanating from behind him in a Monty Python movie. Well, not really, I just sort of felt him there. I started talking out loud to him and he became as real as I am to myself. I I talked to Him and I answered for Him. "OK God, it's just you and me. I guess you want my undivided attention, so I'll just walk a while, talk a while, and see what it is you need me to hear ...

**STAY TUNED FOR PART TWO OF "WHOJIGGER GONE MISSING"
IN THE SEPTEMBER 2003 EDITION OF THE ALASKAN CAVER**

There Are No Caves in Arizona: A Memorable Trip Through Onyx Cave

**By Dave Love
Petersburg, Alaska**

Twisted and curled helictites growing like unruly hairdo from four-foot stalactites. Medusa's hair, frozen mid-writhe or maybe a worm's-eye view of some forest of tap-rooted trees. Entire passages covered with flowstone, draperies, stalactites and soda straws. Enough formations in one chamber for entire cave systems in other parts of the world, the walls of deeply scalloped ancient phreatic tubes completely obscured by redeposition. Person-sized chambers like giant geodes of aragonite and selenite crystals. Sculpted flowstone columns the size of giant sequoia, pure white sparkle of paper-thin crystalline draperies, water droplets crowning tips of stalactites like so many diamonds. Shields tilting outward from walls or ceiling, whose crescent-shaped upper edges can only be formed by hydraulic pressure. The porous inner microstructure of this formation allowing calcium carbonate deposition up and away from the crack or crevice water source. The shield an attached flowstone and stalactites below sometimes stretching ceiling to floor, a forest stand of columns, shields, reminiscent of molten white chocolate or caramel dripping and running from some giant spoon.

Yet these descriptions cannot begin to describe the profusion of fantastic inner sculpting of Onyx Cave. Nestled in the foothills of the basin and range country of Southern Arizona, this natural wonder has oozed into existence from the Mississippian Escabrosa limestones and marbles of the Santa Rita mountains. The extreme extent of speleogenesis boggle the mind, defying one's ability to describe the experience, exhausting one's choice of superlatives. Jaw dropping, awe inspired grins soon creep onto one's face, frozen there and cannot be removed. Long hours of hiking through mostly immense walking passage, traversing great decorated chambers on ropes tied to formations as no other tie-offs exist. Unreal scenes, cave madness and mental mayhem. The timeless quality of cave exploration bending time -- an intended six-hour trip stretching to 11 hours. Four o'clock becoming 8 o'clock. The experience melding six cavers who mostly didn't know one another into a careful, safe and well-oiled team.

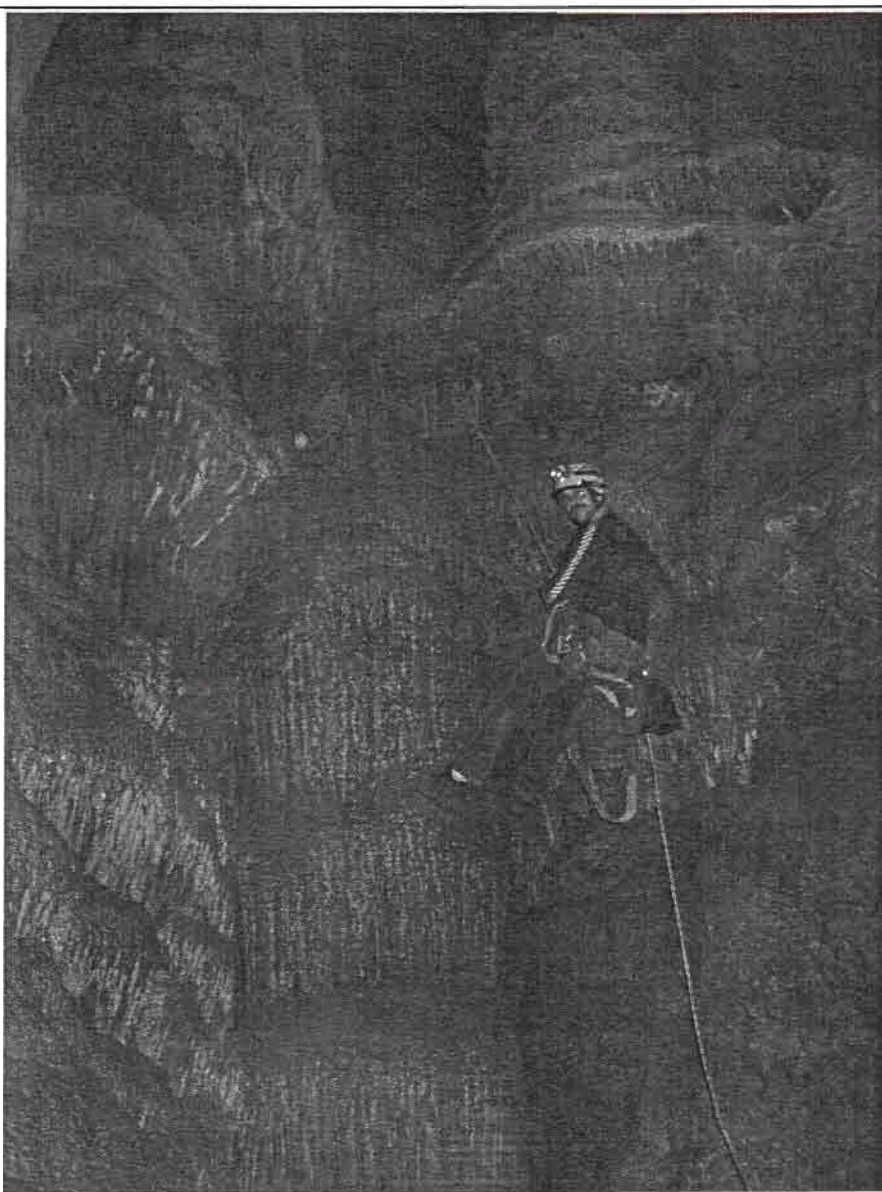
Patient, understated Joe Gallardo, our Escabrosa Grotto trip leader; baritone and human foot-and-handhold, biotechnologist Chris Phoenix, raucous, ex-Britainer and chemist Stuart Lindsay; his daughter, musically gifted Sarah Lindsay, prankster and purveyor of "groaner" cave jokes Diane "Cave Goddess" Raab, and myself, mild-mannered cave dude from Southeast Alaska. Our time together of a timeless quality, filled with laughter, singing and camaraderie. Pushing the limits of free-climbing comfort on some unprotected downclimbs, learning new techniques of descending, Tyrollean traversing while regaining a greater respect for ourselves and the others in our group. Controlled slide sometimes a metaphor for our experience.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

The crowning moment: a spontaneous six-part harmony of the National Anthem in the Cathedral Room, all of us just a bit weary but high-spirited and joyous.

Although some routes are heavily trafficked with evident damage to formations, especially closer to the entrance, a section of ceiling replete with graffiti and some formations muddled by climbing, Onyx Cave was still an awe-inspiring place. Days later and many miles away, I can still see in my mind's eye the massive flowstone columns, 50 foot tall glittering flowstone covered wall of one chamber, and the delicate rosettes of aragonite. Twisted gargoyle-like helictites, forests of totem-pole stalagmites and columns. With these visions in my head, tired but satisfied that we had all made the trip safely, we hiked back to the truck through the cool evening air, a star-filled sky overhead. With a renewed sense of wonder, at peace again with the good fortune of our existence.

THE AUTHOR,
GLACIER
GROTTO
PRESIDENT
DAVID C. LOVE,
RAPPELS AN
AWESOME
FORMATION IN
ONYX CAVE
IN ARIZONA
(THERE ARE NO CAVES
IN ARIZONA)
DURING A
SPRING 2003
CAVE TRIP.





Glacier Grotto members Diane Raab (L) and Dave Love (R) join Sarah Lindsay, Chris Phoenix and Joe Gallardo in a cave in Arizona. (There are no caves in Arizona)
Photo by Stuart Lindsay

The Alaskan Caver

**P.O. Box 9062
Ketchikan, AK 99901**

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