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## Intercom, Volume 28, No. 3, May-June 1992

Lowell Burkhead

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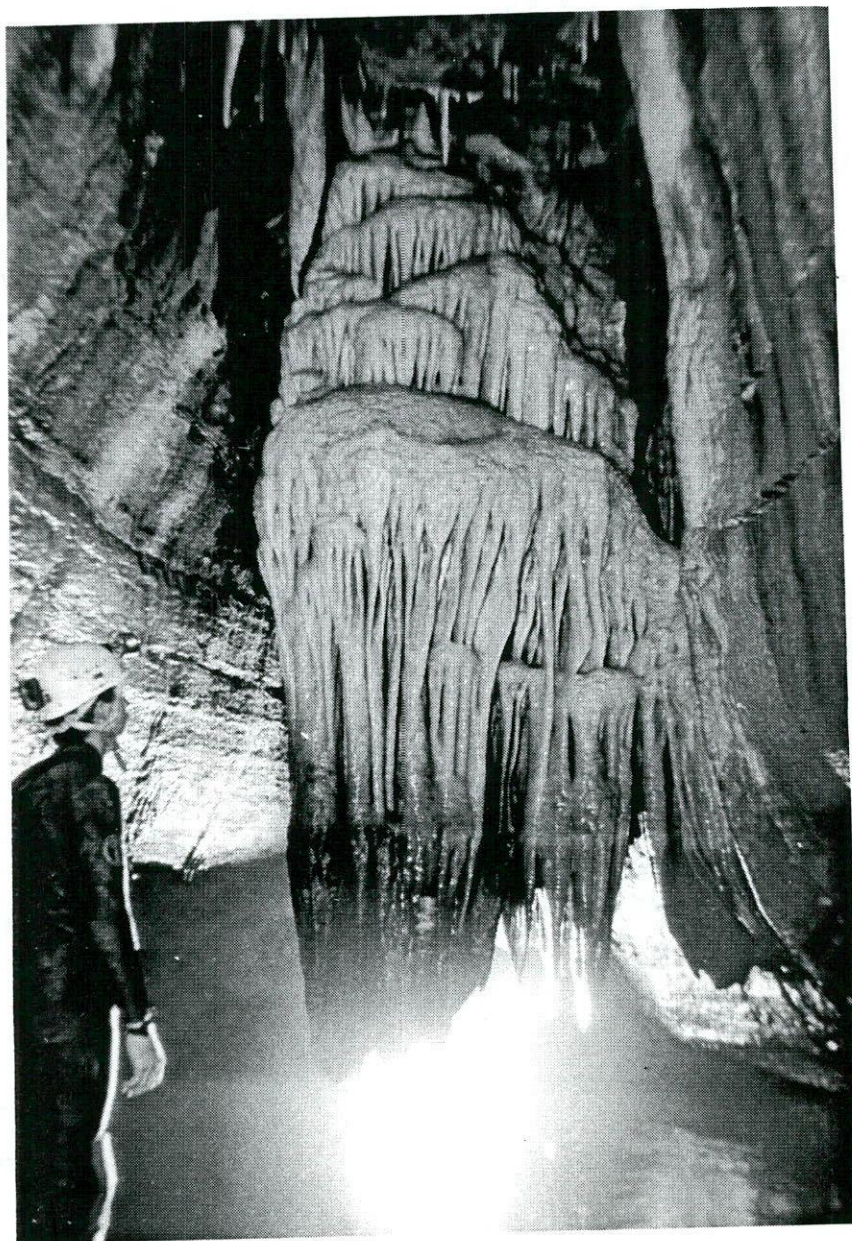
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# **I N T E R C O M**

Published Semi-spasmodically By

THE IOWA GROTTO

*National Speleological Society*



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May - June, 1992



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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. Membership to the Iowa Grotto is \$12.00 per year and INTERCOM subscriptions only, are \$10.00 per year. Reproduction of material appearing in the INTERCOM by other caving organizations is encouraged as long as credit is given the author and the INTERCOM and a copy of the publication is sent to the Iowa Grotto.

Material for the next issue of the INTERCOM is due in the hands of the editor by September 1, 1992 with a few days grace for those later trips. This should include material covering July and August, 1992. Send articles, trip reports, photographic negatives, prints, or slides, artwork, cartoons, etc. for publication to:

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The Iowa Grotto meets at 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Wednesday of each month (third Wed. in Dec.) in room 125 of Trowbridge Hall on the campus of the University of Iowa.

Air Force Rescue Coordination Center  
NCRC  
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Iowa County Emergency Management  
1-319-642-3151

This number calls out Iowa Grotto rescue personnel

Cover Photo: Chris Beck at the Rock River formation, Coldwater Cave, Winneshiek Co., IA.  
Photo by Scott Dankof



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

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Volume Twenty-Eight	C O N T E N T S	Issue 3
Iowa Grotto Meeting Minutes - - - - -		56
Letters - - - - -		57
Trip Reports:		
Spring MVOR - - - - -		58
Exchange - - - - -		59
Intrepid, Not- - - - -		59
Odessa Mama Cave - - - - -		61
Delaware County Park Hopping - - - - -		61
Around and Around Guttenburg - - - - -		62
Humboldt County - - - - -		63
Indiana Caving - - - - -		65
In a Slump - - - - -		65
Fitton to be Tied - - - - -		67
Caving Alone in Jackson County - - - - -		68
???????? Cave - - - - -		68
Downer Sink - - - - -		68
The Cave Map II - - - - -		70
Cave Map Symbols - - - - -		71
Photo Album - - - - -		73
Cave Maps:		
Surprise Cave - - - - -		75
Nettle Cave - - - - -		76
Fossil Rock Cave - - - - -		77



## IOWA GROTTO MEETING MINUTES

Regular Meeting May 27, 1992

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Mike Lace at 8:00 p.m. after slide presentations from Jim Hannon, Greg McCarty, and Mike Lace. The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved as read. There were eleven members present. TRIP REPORTS: Liz Robinson reported on the spring MVOR. She also wants to take the grotto flag and display it at the fall MVOR. Greg McCarty reported on some lead checking. Mike Lace reported on a photo trip at Coldwater Cave to the Spong area. Mike also reported on a trip to Mammoth Cave. They stopped on the way at Marengo and Langford's Cave in Indiana. Lowell Burkhead reported on his trip to the Guttenburg area. They visited an old lead mine, some crevices, and Schwendinger Cave. Mike Lace reported on some lead checking and on Hard Scrabble Cave. They also surveyed Odessa Mama Cave. FUTURE TRIPS: A Maze Cave surveying trip is planned for the beginning of June. Marc Ohms will lead a beginner's trip at the end of June. The Des Moines County trip is still on for whenever there is enough interest. The MSS Cornfeed will be August 14-16. There will be a vertical training class August 30-31. The Iowa Grotto Picnic will be August 22-23. The NCRC cave rescue seminar will be July 25 through August 1. A rescue training session will be held in Dubuque on October 4. The fall MVOR will be September 25. The OTR will be Labor Day weekend. OLD BUSINESS: INTERCOM back issues will only be available at the picnic if they are previously ordered. Those orders can be placed with Lowell Burkhead. Greg McCarty is contacting landowners for permission in advance for his tour of Iowa springs planned for the picnic. A copy of the Iowa Cave Map Book was circulated for advanced orders. The new membership list will be in the July HOT-LINE. There was a caving accident in the news at Devil's Kitchen Cave at Palasades Park. An article in the Iowa Conservationist on Maquoketa Caves was discussed. PBS TV will have a program on bats on May 29 at 7:00 p.m. Due to the late hour, a motion was passed to skip new business. The meeting adjourned at 9:33 p.m.

Regular Meeting June 24, 1992

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Mike Lace at 8:00 p.m. after a slide program. There were 13 members present. The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved as corrected. TRIP REPORTS: Lowell Burkhead reported on a trip with Dave Schwendinger and Bob Wahlstrom to attempt to dig open a new sinkhole near Monticello. The owner plans to fill it with rock. Greg McCarty reported on a dig in a road cut near Fayette. The cave is completely dirt filled. Marc Ohms reported on a trip to Jackson County. Three caves were surveyed. He also reported on a trip to Billboard #3 Cave in Dubuque. Marc also reported on a tourist trip in Coldwater Cave. They stopped at Dunn-ing Spring and surveyed the caves there. They also visited Decorah Ice Cave and Cave Man Cave. It was reported that Spiral Cave in Dubuque County was dug open. There may be 1000 feet of passage. Mike Lace reported on a trip to an as yet unnamed cave near Monona. FUTURE TRIPS: The Des Moines County trip will be announced. The NCRC cave rescue will be July 25 through August 1. The NSS Convention will be the first week of August. The MSS Cornfeed will be August 14-16. The Iowa Grotto Picnic will be August 22-23. There will be a vertical training class August 30-31. There will be a rescue training session in Dubuque October 4. The OTR will be Labor Day. A trip to Spiral Cave will be announced. OLD BUSINESS: Trips are being arranged for the Picnic. Auction items are needed for the picnic. Look through your stuff for anything that might sell. The grotto needs the auction income to keep from raising dues. Bring your donations and your money. There will be a lot of good stuff that you no doubt need to replace your good stuff you are donating. The picnic this year will be held at the Kendallville County Park at Kendallville, Iowa. The potluck dinner for the picnic was discussed. There was no new business and the meeting adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Editors key: MSS, Minnesota Speleological Survey	NCRC, National Cave Rescue
NSS, National Speleological Society	Commission
MVOR, Mississippi Valley-Ozark Region	NCR, North Country Region
OTR, Old Timer's Reunion	IG, Iowa Grotto



I enjoyed the 3-D Cave "Puzzle", and after ½ hour, was able to see the entire cavern. You should produce replicas of all the caves in Iowa and publish an Iowa 3-D Cave Book and then no one would have to leave the campus to explore Iowa's Caves!

Duane Miller, Iowa City

The following letter is from James B. Gulliford, Director, Division of Soil Conservation, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. 515-281-6146

Kenneth Christiansen sent me the attached letter, expressing concern that the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship planned to "fill" sinkholes, following the removal of trash. His information came from the attached Des Moines Register article by Don Muhm.

The article was accurate in all aspects of the project except that part. Our plans are to remove and properly landfill all trash, reshape the sinkhole to stable slopes (if necessary), seed any disturbed area, and fence the area to prevent any future dumping. We will not fill any sinkhole that we work on. Our goal is for agriculture to fit into the landscape, rather than to change the landscape to suit agricultural needs.

Unfortunately, my staff did not retain the envelope that Mr. Christiansen's letter arrived in, and his letter did not contain a return address. Please see to it that he receives a copy of my response, and that other concerned members of your organization are made aware of this information. If I can answer additional questions about the program, contact me.

I share Mr. Christiansen's concern for the impact that well intended projects can have on the environment, and appreciate the fact that he recognized what could have been a potential problem and called it to our attention.

Sincerely, James B. Gulliford

The following is the article from the Friday, May 22, 1992, Des Moines Register. The error may have been added by editing since it is contained in a little added on heavy type addendum before the article and after the headline.

#### ROUTE FOR CONTAMINATION

#### PROJECT TARGETS DIRTY SINKHOLES

*The cavities will be cleaned of debris and wastes, filled in and planted over.*

by Don Muhm, Register Farm Editor

Up to \$350,000 in state money is destined for a pilot program aimed at cleaning out 34 sinkholes in seven northeast counties.

Sinkholes, most commonly found in areas with shallow soil and limestone bedrock, form when earth sinks into a cavity where the bedrock has been undermined and dissolved. The holes provide a direct route for drainage that may contaminate the area's ground water.

Some sinkholes have become dump sites for junk of all sorts, including old tires, wire, and chemical containers, state officials said. An estimated 200 sinkholes eventually may qualify for state-financed cleaning. It costs an average of about \$6,500 to clean up a single sinkhole, said James Gulliford, director of the Soil Conservation Division of the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. He said the initial sites are on private land in the following counties: four in Allamakee, eight in Clayton, four in Fayette, six in Floyd, one in Howard, four in Mitchell and seven in Winneshiek.

The cleanup work begins in June, Agriculture Secretary Dale Cochran said. Private contractors will be hired to remove debris, sort it and recycle it if possible, he said.

The sinkholes targeted for treatment in some cases represent dumping sites for farmers and city dwellers. The money comes from Iowa fertilizer and pesticide fees collected under the 1987 Ground Water Protection Act.

The owner of the land must establish and maintain permanent vegetation on the



# SINKHOLES TO BE CLEANED TO STOP WATER POLLUTION

former sinkhole site and agree not to permit future dumping there.

Two experimental sinkhole cleanup projects were demonstrated last year, one near Osage in Mitchell County and one near Decorah in Winneshiek County, said Dan Lindquist, the sinkhole cleanup coordinator. More than 70 truckloads of junk and wastes were taken out of the two sinkholes.

"Sinkholes are a direct link to ground water and can present a potential danger for contamination", Cochran said. "Our department is doing everything it can to reduce the risk and assure safe water supplies."

Lindquist said the 34 projects were selected from 69 applications. More applications will be considered next year, he added. Landowners must apply for financial aid at local county soil and water conservation district offices.

[illegible]

trip reports

## SPRING MVOR

April 24-26, 1992

Brad Smith and Liz Robinson

by Liz Robinson

Brad Smith and I went to the MVOR in St. Genevieve County, Missouri the weekend of April 24-26, 1992. There were 518 people at this MVOR from all over the Midwest and from Oklahoma, as well. The Friday evening, there was a hotdog roast by the bonfire and free beer. The next day there were several cave trips scheduled. Brad went on a trip to the Berome-Moor system which he enjoyed. This is a long system with many parts to it. I went to the Kohm's trip which I also enjoyed. The cave is mostly walking passage with a cave stream going through both parts. The first part, the stream was mostly shallow and quiet. The trip leaders took the time out to point out interesting geological features in the cave and to look at the little animals that live in the cave stream, most notably some amphipods, isopods, planaria, salamanders, and some little crustaceans with lots of legs, one pair of which we interrupted their mating rituals. We saw some pipistrelles and some larger bats throughout the cave. As we had some brand new novices with us, including a student from Central State University in Ohio who has been staying temporarily with me, the trip leaders took the time before we entered the cave to discuss proper caving etiquette regarding landowner relations, keeping hands off formations, looking out for each of the eleven members of our trip, and being careful not to disturb the living creatures in the cave.

The second part of the cave, the stream was much deeper and the current stronger. The leaders asked if anyone wanted to drop out of the second half of the trip which nobody did. We just took a minute for some of the people to exit the cave for a pit stop. The second part of the cave had some really nice canyon passages that had a lot of flowstone. There were some really nice domes in both portions of the cave, but more in this half. Walking required exercising some caution, especially around the rimstone dams where the water could be knee-deep. We went pretty far back into the cave, but when the cave got to the point where there would be a lot of ducking under and getting really muddy and wet, the trip leaders decided to end it for two reasons: the portions of the cave that were coming up were best done with wetsuits and they did not want us to come out chilled to the bone and then have to rush us back to the campground, and last but not least, it was around 2:00 p.m. and they wanted some lunch.

All in all, it was a pretty cave and a lot of fun, with a little bit of crawling and scrambling and lots of walking passage. It was very warm, 56 degrees, which for a Northeastern caver, is a regular heat wave. Brad and I both agreed we want to go back and see more of the caves in the area.



At the business meeting which was mercifully short, they gave away an award to Phil Moss and gave away a lot of door prizes (I won some nice stationary), and approved the minutes and treasurer's report. The evening featured a nice nonobstrusive bluegrass band, a sauna and a bonfire and excellent chances to meet and talk with other friendly cavers who were present. I definitely did not feel like a stranger and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Discussing the day's cave trips is a great opener for meeting new people. We plan to attend the next MVOR which will take place the weekend of September 25.

#### EXCHANGE

Gouldsberg Cave, Fayette County, Iowa

May 2, 1992

by Mike Nelson

Mike Nelson, Delores Nelson, Wes Whitfield, Jack Decker, and Mike Lace

The Iowa Family Grotto finally pulled off another outing. Jack Decker had wanted to make the survey of Gouldsberg Cave a grotto project; now it is. Mike Lace had had a keen interest in mapping the cave and asked to join in. His company and skill in helping us get the project off on the right foot are greatly appreciated.

Delores and Wes explored for fun while Jack, Mike, and I ran a bee line through the main passages. We picked up the few passages that ended and chipped those that didn't. This went surprizingly fast and we had the bulk of it done before chilling out. We broke for lunch on the outside to recharge and warm up.

After lunch we poked around to be certain of a potentiol loop. Then we utilized Wes' abilities to access one of the small side passages. We then worked our way toward the major loop. It was a bit complicated with the side passages to be chipped on the way, its main entrance passage, and an inaccessible window. It was more complicated before we got done. As we were surveying the loop room, Wes pushed up into "The Birthing Canal", (yes, it's kind of a tight spot) and discovered some passage that none of us had observed before. It rejoined the loop room above but in a line with its entrance passage. There was a small loop through a breakdown room and potential passage beyond, as yet unpushed. There is a sizable room viewable down a joint off the loop room. Maybe this discovery will take us to it.

In light of the new discovery and the grief it's going to cause in surveying it, we called it a day. We had mapped probably over half of the cave, but the rest will probably be twice the work. We plan on surveying religiously until the data is gathered. The project is open to any willing to assist. One or the other of the first two weekends of each month will be devoted to it. Feel free to call for details.

#### INTREPID, NOT-

Staffords Sandstone Cave, Alamakee County, Iowa

May 3, 1992

by Mike Nelson

Mike Nelson, Delores Nelson, and Wes Whitfield

On our last visit to Stafford's (4-17-92 Mike Nelson & Marc Ohms) we found that 20 years without visitation had allowed the squeeze between the entrance room and the main gallery to fill in somewhat. Greg McCarty had assured me that it was enterable by backing in and kicking the loose sand into the gallery, thus enlarging the passage as needed as we went. After a little tidying up and stablizing around the squeeze entrance, Wes and I took a couple of turns at the aforementioned technique. Though neither of us got our feet as far as the tightest spot, Wes did manage to find that the ceiling rose quite a bit between the initial passage and that tight place.



We dug the floor down to a level of sticks and bones and chipped away at some of the sandstone on the ceiling of the narrow joint that the passage followed, with Wes intermittently trying the passage on for size but never getting down to the worst spot. In the frustration of digging and almost abandoning the idea of getting in, I whopped the ceiling a couple of times with the hoe. A 60-80 pound bunch of rotten sandstone dropped off the ceiling with very little antagonization, right on the spot where Wes was moments before. We removed that detritus then did it again with similar results. We now had a tolerably pushable passage back to the tight place.

It was certainly a fine display of teamwork that we ever got in there at all, each of us digging and dispersing the sand then trying to "badger" dig our way in in reverse until being overtaken with vague feelings of unease. Then after a little more digging and clearing and hemming and hawing, someone else would give it a shot. Knowing what we did about the cave provided the faith to see it through. Had this been a new find it would have mandated digging head first on a downhill slope, not a savory proposition.

Eventually, I got my feet to the tight place and Greg's prescribed method worked wonderfully. I worked through past my waist until those vague feelings of unease hit me again. Then Wes tried it again and slithered backwards into the gallery. He took a quick look at the first 40 feet then we all regrouped outside in the sunlight. Wes could make it so he'd go first. Delores isn't that much bigger than Wes and figured she could make it, too. She figured if she got in, I could probably force my way in too. We agreed to go for it but I made them take the digging tools in case I became a cork in the passageway.

They both backed in without any bother. I found it a little tight, but once inside, I worked my pants back down from my armpits to my waist and got my navel to its original position from the one it had assumed between my adam's apple and chin.

It's hard to speculate the variety of animal that had its dining room within the immediate reaches of the gallery, but considering there were enough bones to reassemble most of two ungulates, it must have been larger than a fox and rather persistent. It's easier to speculate on some of the cave's features. The joint to the hillside that the entrance followed continued inside. It formed a sheer wall from the ceiling (roughly 8 feet + for most of the gallery) half way to the floor. Then there was a wide expanse below it that arched under the wall to the floor. The wall on the valley side arched from the sheer wall at the ceiling to the floor. The sheer wall was multihued with colors from black to rust to yellowish orange. The valley side was the near white of the sandstone unexposed (or should I say freshly exposed) to the elements. The floor was fairly flat under the overhang of the sheer wall, but from there toward the valley wall was the evidence of accumulation. This outside wall is apparently susceptible to somewhat broader ranges of temperature fluctuation than it is exposed to as apposed to the more consistent ambient temperature of the inside wall. Most of the accumulation was fine sand but there were also large sandstone breakdown boulders. A ridge of breakdown material rose near the back of the cave, perpendicular to the passage then dropped back down. There was some surface seepage here as the passage tapered, both horizontally and vertically to its end beyond more breakdown.

Like so many caves though, it offered one more tantalizing tidbit. On either side of the breakdown that reached into the end pinch of the cave was a well trodden path made by countless little feet. The soft sand denied us identification of the makers of the path, but their constant use of it is obvious.

This entire peculiar sandstone cave was the result of the collapse of the sandstone into a preexisting limestone cave below it. Is there more sandstone cave beyond this or are the creatures accessing the original cave below?



A half dozen little bats adorned the walls and quite a few cave crickets were seen. A few flying insects were also noted.

I dug more on the restriction and still needed Delores to provide some leverage to my feet to get back out. She and Wes dug a bunch more from the inside, which was easier going, and guaranteed me I'd find it like a two tiered four lane highway next time. Next time will be a mapping and photo trip, probably accomplished by the time this is published.

Checking out with the landowner's, we were given very reasonable considerations with reasonable restrictions. They wanted me to be the responsible party, leading any future trips and seeing to it that liability releases for new visitors were signed and delivered via their request. In return, I have open access and can visit even if they are not home to provide permission. I intend on a low impact winter trip to see if it is a bat hibernaculum. I'll plan a yearly trip, each spring (T.B.A. well in advance) to maintain the entrance. Please honor the landowner's requests and bother me, not them, about access. I'm doing a lot in the area and small (3-4 person) trips will be no problem for me (or them) to accomodate.

### ODESSA MAMA CAVE

Odessa Mama Cave, Jones County, Iowa  
May 3, 1992  
Gary Engh, Mike Lace, and Chris Beck

by Mike Lace

It had only been a few short months since our first visit to the cave. We wanted to give it a proper map and do a little more ridgewalking before the brush along the river got too thick to do either one. Old age must be taking its toll on my memory because it took a little longer than it should have before we finally put ourselves at the entrance to Odessa Mama.

The survey was easy enough at first, with a steep slope reaching into the huge breakdown chamber that includes most of the accessible cave. We eventually got tied up in the survey over around and even under the massive central breakdown block. We did notice thick clusters of fossils in the ceiling above the block and a small upper room to the right that was missed on the last trip.

After a couple of hours, and a few photos, we headed downstream to try to scare up a few more leads. We unsuccessfully covered about a mile of the riverbank but were treated to a bluff view of the river and its already overgrown banks before heading back to the trucks.

### DELAWARE COUNTY PARK HOPPING

Hardscrabble Cave, Retz Cave, Delaware County, Iowa  
May 9, 1992

by Mike Lace

A Saturday of lead-checking ended up in a couple of Delaware County parks with rumored limestone outcrops. Hardscrabble Cave barely slides over the 15 foot length limit to qualify as a cave. It's a small crawl-in affair with little to recommend it except the cooler inside temperature versus the hot walk it took to find it. The floor is covered with enough small rubble to build character in your knees and no going leads were noted.

Retz Cave is a small shelter with a crawl off of the back that lets you pop up into a small room with a few small speleothems. I surveyed Retz because I really don't



feel the need to see the cave again and maybe seeing the map will convince others that maybe it's not worth the long walk after all but it definately was worth documenting.

## AROUND AND AROUND GUTTENBURG

Bill's Old Lead Mine, Schwendinger Cave, Clayton County, Iowa

May 10, 1992

Lowell Burkhead, Chris Beck, Mike Lace, Stacey Cyphert, and Linda and Bob Wahlstrom

by Lowell Burkhead

Even though there was little chance of getting into anything worth seeing in this lead mine that belongs to an acquaintance of mine and Bob's at work, I planned this trip and on the second attempt, several people decided to come along. The location of the mine was found along a "B" maintainance dirt county road and I blew the horn. That was the prearranged signal that brought Bill along in no time.

The mine was a vertical shaft about 70 feet up the very steep hillside. It was quickly rigged and Chris rappelled down. He reported that it was about three feet square at the bottom and about 45 feet deep. It had a dirt bottom and no sign of passage off it. There is no way of knowing how much fill is in the bottom or how far down horizontal passage may be. The top of the shaft was funnel shaped in dirt which kept raining down where the rope had disturbed it along with some rocks. Because of this, no one else went down. Chris made it back out with minimal damage. We then unrigged and went to check out the bottom of the hill where a tailing pile had been spotted upon our arrival. If the passage ended at the tailing pile, there would be about 80 feet of passage. It is either collapsed or filled with dirt from the hillside. There was no stable spot to try to dig open. We suggested to Bill that he could divert a waterway next to the shaft into the shaft. It should blow open the passage so that it can be explored, but if it doesn't, it would eventually fill the shaft with silt. It is presently very dangerous to hunters and anamals. Bill thanked up for coming to check it out and we thanked him for inviting us.

From there we followed the county roads up Miner's Creek and stopped at a few houses looking for more lead mines. We got directions to a crevice from one owner. It was a typical hillside crevice. The problem with that is that roads are at the bottoms of hills and the crevices are near the top. Then after climbing all that way, there's still nothing to see but a crack in semi-stable broken rock. Stacey chimneyed down. The rest of us stayed outside with the very aromatic anamal carcasses left there by a trapper. He had been trapping raccoons that were using the crevice. Stacey reported that it was small and hadn't been worth the trouble.

We had lost Bob and Linda who had stayed back at Bill's to talk for a while. I didn't find out until Monday that they had planned to come with us but couldn't find where we had stopped. We also didn't see each other when we drove past the place in Guttenburg where they had stopped for lunch. That was after trying to find Schwendinger Cave with no luck.

We drove up out of the Mississippi River valley north of Guttenburg and I tryed to remember where a large crevice was that I had been to back in 1969. There has been too much development in the area and no landmarks remained that I recognized. We stopped at the only house that could have been the right one and it wasn't. The man there said that the people across the road own a lead mine along the river. There was no one home.

Then back through Guttenburg and one more try at finding Schwendinger Cave. There was only one road left that we hadn't tryed and that was it. I recognized the end of the half mile long driveway and the correct name was on the box. We got permission and had no trouble finding the cave entrance.



Schwendinger Cave is under a line of sinkholes on top of a low ridge. The entrance is at one end of that line where a surface waterway runs into the entrance sink. After removing a few small logs and a couple of armloads of sticks, I backed over the edge and slid down to my armpits before my feet reached floor. The mud on the floor was solid enough to hold me up for a change due to the recent dry weather. The cave is mostly walking passage punctuated by a few stoopwalks and hands and knees crawls. The water from the entrance sink runs through about 2/3 of the cave and down a narrow crack to a lower level. Due to the difficulty and the time of day, we didn't rig the drop. Then there is a climb up into a canyon passage that leads to a back door. Daylight could be seen around a five gallon can wedged into the entrance. The cave continues beyond there following the sink line but seems to be open at the top and completely filled with rocks. It is really a very nice cave and even has some formations worth a photo or two. After a few photos were taken, we headed back out. There is probably 300 feet of passage that is enterable. Several bats were gracing the vaults. This is really too nice a cave for the neglect that it has seen in recent years. It is easy enough for the novice, has good landowner relations, and has the very difficult lower level for the adventuresome. I enjoyed seeing it again and the new people also liked it. Mike wanted to survey it, but luckily there is already a good map.

## HUMBOLDT COUNTY

May 17, 1992

by Mike Nelson

The Nelsons, Mike, Delores, and Aaron

I was recovering from the thralls of a mercifully short but very nasty virus on the Saturday morning of this month's Coldwater weekend. My condition wasn't tops and the weather was less than ideal, so I moped around home, taking things easy and working on cave related stuff, feeling darn good and sorry for myself. Sunday I was feeling quite chipper, updating cave files with maps and files and personal reference material spread out over 5/4 of the living room floor.

At about 2:00 in the afternoon, I found on the top of the stack these two listings for admittedly insignificant caves near the confluence of the branches of the Des Moines River, one north of Dakota City, one in Humboldt. I thought "when am I ever going to find the time to check these out?" Instantly I realized if I didn't do it right now, I probably never would. I asked Delores, "You wanna go caving?" Sure, she responded. "Hey Aaron", I hollered downstairs, "You wanna go caving?" "Are you mental?" he responded. "Sure", I said. Before 3:00 p.m. we had our basic gear and snacks in the car and were heading out on the hour drive to the southwest to go caving.

If there is anyplace that is right smack dab in the middle of the karstic destruction wrought by the last glacier as it retreated, leaving one of the youngest landscape features on the face of the earth in its wake, it's Humboldt, Iowa. But rest assured, there are caves here. Passing the sign pointing south off of Iowa Highway 3 toward the town of Thor, reminded me of a little tale I've related to cavers but never rendered to paper.

In the early '60s when I was but a lad, we made many a sojourn through this area on the way to my grandmother's in Fort Dodge. One summer we observed a derrick being erected near Thor. Curiosity and thirst overwhelmed my father, so we stopped in a quaint little establishment in Thor that dispensed malt based beverages to make a discreet inquiry. As it turned out, Northern Natural Gas was looking for a way to supply peak winter demand for its product. They had done considerable seismic research and had discovered vast voids deep beneath Humboldt County. The derrick was drilling to tap into one of these voids. Eventually the void was pumped full of natural gas to see if it could be recovered later. However, it dissipated and that was that. Shortly there after, one of the world's largest natural gas storage facilities



was built ten miles south of my present home.

In a couple more miles we pulled off of the highway on the west fork of the Des Moines River. We scouted well past any limits that could be construed by any error on the old cave file. 1,000 feet north of the bridge could have meant 1,000 yards. 1,000 yards south could have been just as likely; old files require occasional imaginative interpretation. Luckily the east bank was flatter than my second grade first friend, so we could rule out errors in that direction. I did manage to find four firm fresh morel mushrooms though, and the river banks were teeming with birds, so it was a fine walk.

Next we headed over to Humboldt and searched for the cave "under" the U.S. 169 bridge over the west branch of the Des Moines River. There was one clay and root filled joint aligned poor digging prospect. We let "under" encompass about 1,000 feet up and downstream. There was one joint aligned triangular niche at river level that might have been six feet back into.

We then talked to some young fishermen whom I rightly assumed would be intimately familiar with the local river environs. Yes, they'd covered every foot of the target areas, no, they'd never seen anything remotely mistakable for a cave. "There was one possible six footer up one of those two ravines over there past the profuse collection of no trespassing signs". We never got around to looking for it.

I've never yet checked a lead that didn't result in another lead and these fishermen sent us off with a couple. (Besides that, upon letting them keep the morels, who's identities they verified for us, and telling them where we found them, they were now our friends for life.) One of them told of a stream that ran underground for a short distance near Rutland, the other of a cave in a quarry near Bradgate. One showed a genuine interest in caving and said he'd evaluate the stream lead and write. I got directions to the quarry. Before heading out there, we swung by the Dakota City Historical Museum. It wasn't opened for the season yet, but the old fellow who lived out back and mowed the grass for it corroborated the fishermen's observations, a lifetime of walking these rivers and never seeing a cave. Maybe these two should be deleted from the files.

The quarry owner was intrigued at the notion of a cave, and a look at my "full cave diving" certification made him a bit more receptive. The story as told to me by the fishermen involved the discovery of the cave by recovery divers searching for a drowning victim. However, they told me it was in the area of the quarry opposite where the boy drowned. Considering there were 33 surface acres of water, having a clue as to where to look would be helpful.

The owner told us of how it was once the Mecca of central Iowa open water scuba diving, that there were days when 200 divers were in the water at once, how one club was negotiating to build a club house and install their own compressor, how it got to where they couldn't even enter their own property on summer Saturday nights because of hordes of local youths partying, how they could have sent their kids through college by picking up the refundable beverage containers on a Sunday morning and how it all came to an end with the drowning. Sad, all of it, but he liked us and our offbeat intriguing hobby and we were not flatly refused the opportunity to search for the cave. We'll do some more research and were invited to contact him again should we be able to substantiate the stories with the divers he knew.

Often dubious of leads in real cave country, I was doubly so here. So I quizzed him about the quarry which lay only slightly below the farmland to the north and only slightly above the west branch of the Des Moines River to the south. Looking at its north rim, I pondered out loud at the mere 8 feet or so of overburden on the rock. He said "Hell, that's why we started the quarry. Out in what's the middle now, we used to scrape bedrock with our plow." So I asked if ground water keeps it this high all the time. "Heck no, that's spring fed. The river just run into it this spring but most of



the time, it's the clearest water you'll find in Iowa. Divers could see their flags from 40 feet down. When the river's not running into it, it puts out a considerable crick into the river, constantly."

Humboldt County doesn't strike me as prime cave country. But what the heck, Gilmore City, "the limestone capital of the world", is only a few miles down the road. It's not that far off and the diving should be worthwhile even if we don't find a cave. I might have to follow up on this lead sometime.....

## INDIANA CAVING

Marengo Cave, Langford's Cave, Southern Indiana  
May 22, 1992  
Mike Lace, and Marc Ohms

by Mike Lace

En route to Mammoth Cave, Marc and I camped in Wyandotte State Park to break up the long drive down and see Wyandotte Cave. We arrived at Wyandotte Caverns just in time the next morning to find out that all of the tours had been swamped with 120 school children but the ranger told us we were welcome to tag along - no thanks! We polished off our breakfast box of chocolate donuts and headed to Marengo Cave, hoping to find an open tour there. We were in luck.

The cave is actually well-decorated and has large borehole-type passage along the tour route. We were treated to the latest news on some of the local caving both in and out of Marengo Cave since we were the only two on the first tour. The second tour was with a small group of grade-schoolers that ended with an area where visitors have thrown coins not into a "well" but up onto the mud-covered ceiling to stick! An estimated \$30,000 in small change coats the ceiling now. It was the first time I'd ever seen that in a cave.

On our way to Marengo Cave, we had also spotted a large set of cave entrances in a quarry. We asked the folks at Marengo Cave if they knew something about it. Eric, our tour guide, mentioned that the owner was very hostile to any visits to the cave and he also recounted a local yarn about a young girl who had been one of the local Satan worshippers who used the cave for rituals years ago. She tried to escape during one such ritual but they wouldn't let her leave and cut up her face. They say she still lives down in there.

After a fine set of Marengo tours (and a good grisly cave yarn) we followed the directions to Langford's Cave in the forest preserve nearby. The entrance dropped right off the trail into a canyon that must have reached 70 feet high and was nicely decorated with travertine and large stalagmites. It obviously takes water - a lot of it. We followed several hundred feet of muddy stream canyon before turning around at a breakdown choke. I like Indiana caving.

## IN A SLUMP

May 23&24, 1992  
Mike and Delores Nelson

by Mike Nelson

Having to work Saturday 'til noon and be back in time for a wedding Monday afternoon, cut our long Memorial Day weekend a bit short. Delores and I got underway about 2:00 p.m. Saturday determined to make the most of it.

We made straight for Howard Spring, which we found on May 3. Rising smartly from the Yellow River basin up the St. Peter Sandstone, the spring run is as picturesque as



any in Iowa, and as accessible as Falling Spring. The smooth sandstone troughs littered with both sandstone and limestone breakdown amid the spring greenery, was striking.

The Decorah Shale wasn't apparent at the contact point with the Galena Limestone. At that point, however, was an 18 foot waterfall. (14 feet freefall, 18 lip to base.) Below the falls and on a ledge part way up it were what looked like moss covered flowstone formations. Closer inspection disclosed sandstone facsimilies, eroded particles were reaccrating in a limestone like fashion. Above the falls the run climbed back toward the spring in a short series of gentle tiers.

We spent a couple of hours lowering the streambed and digging back looking for some solid rock. I tend not to be as positive about digs as Delores and eventually stepped back and called a break. The topo showed sinks up on the plateau, so we wandered up to take a look. Immediately over the resurgence, I spotted an animal run into a hole. The hole was deep into breakdown material. Beyond the hole was a sheer rock face. Sometimes I can be very slow and this was one of those times. I realized that the spring was running through a slump that ran from the resurgence to the sheer wall. Instead of a quick dig, we were looking at 100 to 150 cubic feet of dirt, rock and tree roots.

We walked a bit of the plateau, found one sink with an opening in the dirt and got orientated enough to place the spring fairly accurately on the topo map. We returned to the spring, picked up and cleaned our tools, and started down. We took a few pictures of the falls and headed out, daunted.

We had some daylight left, so we figured we could pick up some of the missing data for some of the cave files. As Penny Spring was just up the road, we dropped in and got permission to drive down to determine a precise location. I also walked around a bit to see why I couldn't find it from across the valley a few weeks ago on a mapping trip with Marc Ohms. It was somewhat further away from Wet Reebok than I had thought, but I still can't figure out my disorientation. By the way, I now try to always carry a compass in the woods. Anybody's sense of direction is worthless on a cloud covered day and they are especially useful in relating features to topo maps.

Done here, we checked out with the landowner, sought out a camping spot, downed a quick supper and crashed. Sunday morning we hit the Waukon Hardee's for its warm restrooms and hot water, skipping breakfast. Revived and refreshed, we obtained more missing data for the files from a couple of features along our pathway to another dig project in Winneshiek County. We spent no little time trying to locate What Cave and its owner and as of yet are uncertain if we succeeded in finding either. We then visited a friend who has supplied us with several very good but unfortunately unfruitful leads, and got another lead to check out.

Finally we got to our main dig project. As we had taken most of last year off caving due to burnout and pressing real life requirements, we were leary of what we might find. We found that the majority of what we had dug in the past was replaced by fresh frost shattering and the dig shelter, made to protect the digger from the constant dripping, casual rock fall and/or bucket failure, destroyed from moisture soaking into the plywood bracing and the battering of falling rock. We spent the day removing the shelter and properly discarding it.

We were not so daunted on this dig, it still has fine potential. However, it is a longterm project and the problem of frost shatter will have to be addressed before we continue. So out of three digs, one is done and two are on hold. (We are waiting for the water to clear at Livinggood Annex, having struck both water and conduit at about 8-10 feet down) I'm in a diggers slump, but no doubt Delores will try to con me into one of those two leads I recently tried to give away.



## FITTON TO BE TIED

Fitton Cave, Arkansas

June 2, 1992

by Scott Dankof

Scott Dankof, Larry Welch, Chris Poe, and Arvind Rajpal

A trip to Fitton Cave, Arkansas was called for by Larry Welch. I asked my wife for permission and it was set. After an eight and a half hour drive, I arrived at the Erbie Campground in the heart of the Boston Mountains of Arkansas. Larry and crew rolled in around midnight. We awoke early Tuesday, ate a gourmet breakfast of gruel and headed to the Cecil Creek trailhead. Just as we were gearing up it started to rain. I had a feeling this was going to be an interesting trip.

Larry, Chris, Arvind, and I slogged down the damp trail. All three creek crossings brought wet feet. We found the hollow that the cave was in and quickly located the entrance and dialed in the combination to the gate. Headlamps kicked on and we headed into the entrance and down a rocky slope to the large passage beckoning us onward. "Wow" and "excellent" were the keywords as we viewed flowstone, columns and totem pole stalagmites.

After shooting some pictures we headed toward the right-hand side of the passage, went down about twenty-five feet through breakdown and into a small passage that heads into the heart of the cave via The Manhole. The Manhole is a fifteen foot chimney down into a canyon type passage which then opens up into very nice walking passage.

At the t-junction room the water passage comes in from the Bat Cave entrance. We stopped for some pictures in this large room and then took off down the East Passage. The East Passage is a dry walking passage approximately ten to thirty feet high and fifteen to thirty feet wide. At the Needles Eye we climbed up a slick flowstone slope, and crawled through a small body sized hole which drops down into the continuation of the East Passage. As we continued on our journey the passage regained its large dimensions but became a little rougher with more breakdown and steep dirt hills. The ceiling then opened up leading into one of the largest rooms in the cave, the Out Room.

After taking more pictures I tried to find the passage that led to the Tennouri Room. Even though I've been there twice, I still couldn't find the way. An upper level lead was found with some nice gypsum formations. My lost passage remained lost. The decision was made to find our way out of the immense Out Room. I thought it was one way and Larry thought it was another. We were both wrong. It took about 15 minutes of searching till we successfully found the right passage. I don't see how we missed it but we did. The trip back to the entrance was uneventful except for the two more episodes of disorientation.

We had discussed exiting through the Bat Cave entrance. This is a wet entrance with a 47 foot waterfall. Our choice to go back out the dry entrance turned out to be a smart one. On our approach to the entrance we heard the sound of falling water. There was a small waterfall cascading through the gate and it was pouring rain outside. The dry creekbed outside of the cave was a raging torrent. Going back on the creek trail was definitely a bad idea. We hiked up to the service road and then down the mountain to our trucks. Upon arriving, both the Buffalo River and Cecil Creek were flooded. We were trapped like rats.

Larry and I pulled out our maps and found a 4-wheel drive road that might get us out, but only if it didn't cross any creeks. It didn't and after a little mud throwing and tire spinning we made it to a paved road. I was just happy I didn't have to rescue another American vehicle from a muddy death and fill Larry's Cherokee with two tons of native rock.



## CAVING ALONE IN JACKSON COUNTY

Fossil Rock Cave, Surprise Cave and Nettle Cave, Jackson County, Iowa  
June 2, 1992

by Marc Ohms

I found Fossil Rock Cave and Surprise Cave two years ago during the winter. Nettle Cave was found by Gary Engh this past spring. Two years and a lot of foliage made it somewhat difficult to locate the caves. I managed to stumble across the entrance to Surprise Cave and began surveying it. I finished it in twenty minutes (5 minutes surveying and 15 swatting mosquitos). The cave has a wide entrance with two passages leading off. The northern passage leads to a small chamber that is packed with speleothems.

Next I went looking for Nettle Cave, actually it was not called that yet. I followed a "trail" into a side ravine where Gary said the cave was. I soon spotted the entrance in a bluff about 150 feet away. Unfortunately, my "trail" did not lead to the cave and I was forced to wade through 150 feet of waist-high nettles. When I reached the cave entrance I was quite sorry that I had worn shorts. The cave was then named. I surveyed the cave which consists of two rooms and a short crawl.

I found Fossil Rock Cave without much difficulty and began the survey. This cave got its name from the numerous fossils found in the host rock. It has four entrances and is very dry and dusty.

## ????????? CAVE

June 7, 1992

by Doug Schmuecker

Doug Schmuecker, Mike and Delores Nelson, Gary Engh, Mike Lace, Stacey Cyphert, and Alex Krakinovsky

We met to reach the bottom and survey the as yet unnamed cave. (We are waiting for the owner to name it as was agreed.) Plans called for bolting the rigging points.

The first drop was bolted with the aid of a drill. The next pitch was drilled by hand. Mike Nelson, Stacey Cyphert, and I dropped the first pitch and rigged the second drop. Alex and Delores then rappelled the first drop, as Mike and I with Stacey's help, rappelled the main pit. Alex joined us later. I then belayed Mike down a slope to another drop which had to be left for another trip due to time. The cave was exited after eight and one half hours.

Is this the deepest cave in Iowa? Time will tell. The rigging is some of the hardest done in Iowa to date.

## DOWNER SINK

Downer Sink, Jones County, Iowa  
June 14 and 21, 1992

by Lowell Burkhead

Dave Schwendinger, Lowell Burkhead, and Bob Wahlstrom

Dave's friend near Monticello who had given us leads before called him and gave him another one while he was visiting his parents in Monticello. His father-in-law had a new sink drop open this spring in an alfalfa field. Dave called me to come up and look at it with him. That was Sunday the 14th.

We went out to have a look. It was a very round hole 10 feet across and 12 feet deep with vertical walls and funnel shaped at the bottom to a little rat hole in the middle. We decided to get together a crew and come back the following weekend and see



if we could dig into something. It didn't look very promising but it was so close to home that it was worth a try.

Our crew turned out to be one added person, Bob Wahlstrom. Bob and I arrived promptly at 10:00 with Dave close behind at the sink site. We opened up the snow fence that had been erected around it and dropped in a ladder. Then we started digging with one person at the bottom digging, one on the ladder pulling up the bucket on a rope, and one at the top emptying the bucket back from the lip. The dirt walls were as stable as cement due to the five foot long alfalfa roots and the drought conditions.

Then the downers started. The first one was small. There were two toads trapped in the sink and when one was tossed up, it went two feet then went clang into a ladder rung. The second try got him to the top and I carried them both over to the fencerow and released them. Hopefully he wasn't badly hurt. Dave told me not to put this in the report, but it set the tone for the whole project.

Then after about 20 buckets, the owner arrived. It didn't take us long to realize that he wasn't expecting us or didn't know who we were. He was angry. Finally, Dave introduced himself and the owner remembered his son-in-law had mentioned that we may come and check out the sink. An angry owner is always a downer. It seems that every-one had come to check out the sink. A local newspaper reporter and all the neighbors and people from town. According to him, a constant stream of cars. He thought that we were just one more of them. Then when he found who we were, he wanted to know if we had reported it to the newspaper. He said that we could stay and do whatever we had to do but come Monday, he was going to fill it with rock. News like that can take the fun out of a dig project. Downer number three!

Most of the digging had Dave in the hole, Bob on the ladder, and me emptying buckets. Bob did take a turn at the bottom. I think he was digging when we turned up downer number 4. We dug out a baby red fox. He was limp and dead and completely emaciated. He was still warm. The dirt that had gone down the funnel as we dug had smothered him, apparently. His little claws were worn completely off from trying to dig his way out. We had seen the digging the week before but assumed that whatever did it had escaped. Instead, he had worn himself completely out and slipped down the hole. Having once had a red fox for a pet, it took me several days to get over this. What a downer!

Then the digging started to get somewhere. There was solid rock down there with a hole in it, a solutional hole. It appeared to be a solutioned out joint with an enterable size hole. The deeper we dug into it, the larger it got. It was belling out as we went down but there was no sign of air filled passage, just more dirt. The whole dome was probably filled with dirt. We dug about six feet down below the top of the rock. Shoving a shovel handle down into the loose, wet dirt revealed that it kept getting bigger but wasn't going any direction except down. It was going to take a major dig to get anywhere here, and we were out of time. We were too worn out to explore anything if we had dug into passage. So as it was starting to look a little promising, we had to give it up and go home, knowing that tomorrow, it would be filled with rock. That would be that. Another downer! That's five, if you're not counting.

That evening, Dave called me at home. He had looked through his records after he got home. This is the same area where all the neighbors have wells that breath with barometric pressure changes. The only new house in the area less than a mile away, when they drilled the well, they hit an 18 foot void less than 25 feet down. Knowing that there is possibly big cave down there makes this dig look a little more worthwhile. Even if it turned out to be an extended project, with it less than one half hour from home, it could be worked on evenings after work. The problems are that it would require an artificial entrance installed and it would have to be done before it rained and destabilized the dirt walls, and then there's the owner.



I went back Monday after work to talk to him. His son-in-law and daughter were there. They were very interested in the possibility of a large cave in the area. I proposed to him that we would stabilize the sink and install proper drainage at our expense. In exchange, he would allow us to install a vertical culvert artificial entrance and allow us access to whatever we dug into, if anything. His wife, son-in-law, and daughter pretty much forced him to agree and we had a project.

Then after work Tuesday, the owner called me. He had had time to think about it and changed his mind. He didn't want to have to put up with people coming on his property for any reason. He's done fooling with it and is going to fill it with rock. The final downer. Aint cavin fun!

## THE CAVE MAP II

by Marc Ohms

I had hoped to finish this for the last issue but did not. I would like to start it with a quote from Lanford Brod's "Reading Cave Maps" 1987.

"In addition to the personal bias of the surveyor, there are a number of drafting styles. Despite the restrictions imposed by the cave map format, individual styles and techniques are evident. Furthermore, there is a great variety in the quality of the maps, depending on various factors such as the size of the cave, its complexity, the surveying difficulties encountered, and survey leader. As a consequence, maps range in quality from rough sketch maps to precise and highly detailed cave cartography. It should not be inferred that less detailed or less accurate maps are necessarily inferior. There is no formal standard of excellence to which all maps must comply. Whether or not the map pleases the reader is a secondary consideration. The primary question is did the map serve the purpose intended by the person who drew it? All cave maps should be observed with this question in mind rather than a critical appraisal of style or technique."

There are two types of cave maps. Type one is a map that shows where the cave goes and type two shows what the cave is like. Type one has little to no passage detail but is not less accurate or useful. Large to semi-large caves tend to have type one maps.

Cave passage detail is indicated on a map by symbols. These symbols are sometimes difficult to understand as there are so many different ones. There is at least five sets of "standard symbols" that I know of. I tend to use the 1976 NSS Standard Symbols, published in 1979 Bullitin #2. I do not like the Symbols for stalactite and stalagmite and the fact that there are different symbols for sizes. What is a large formation in an area may be a small one somewhere else. For these formations I tend to use a black triangle. Symbols are a problem for cartographers as well as map readers. We can only do our best with what we have available.

The amount of detail (symbols) that is put on the map is up to the cartographer. The size of the cave and the size of the final draft is a major factor. If the map is reduced and the detail is unreadable, what good is it?

The cave length seems to be something that is misunderstood. Total surveyed length means the total length of all survey shots, including pits. Total horizontal length is the total survey minus vertical inclinations.

I hope that I answered some questions and misconceptions that people had about cave maps. I cannot explain how to read a cave map simply by writing a short article. The best way would be to have a workshop. I tried to last fall but there was no interest. (For those who would like to reply to this article, please keep them brief and objective. Personal attacks will not be printed. Send replies to the editor. Thanks, the editor)

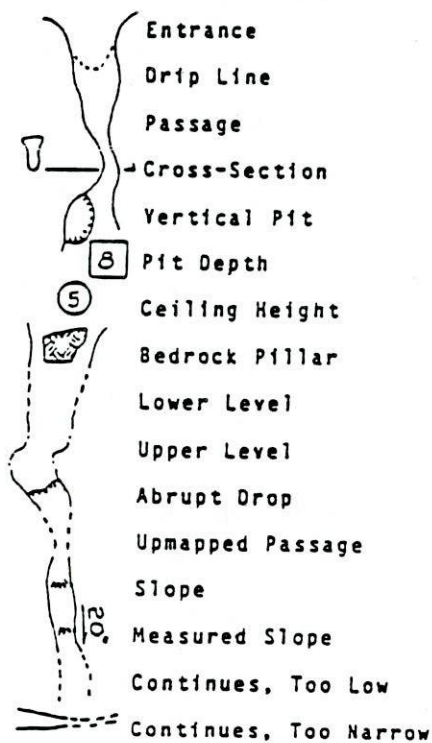


# Appendix A: Standard Map Symbols

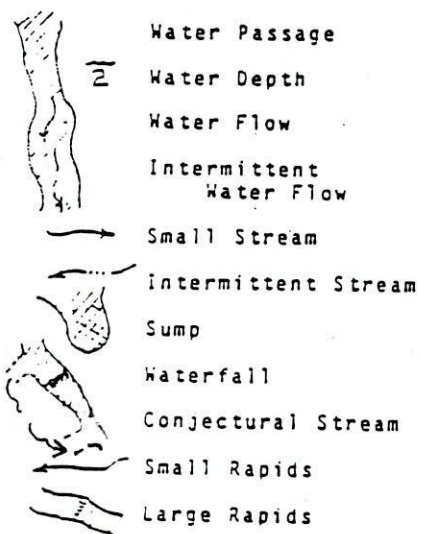
## \*\*\* CAVE MAP SYMBOLS \*\*\*

[From the April 1979; Volume 41, Number 2, N.S.S. BULLETIN.]

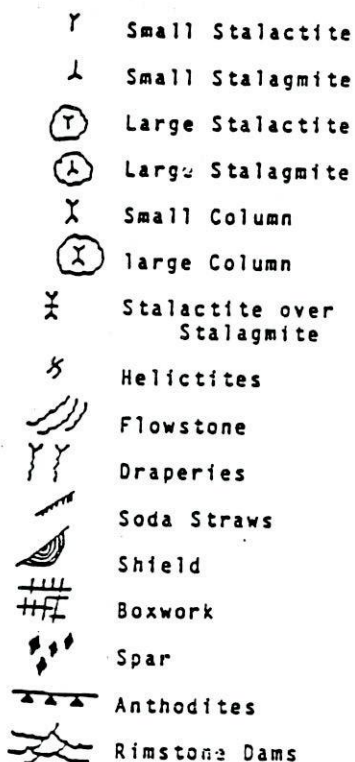
### PASSAGES --->



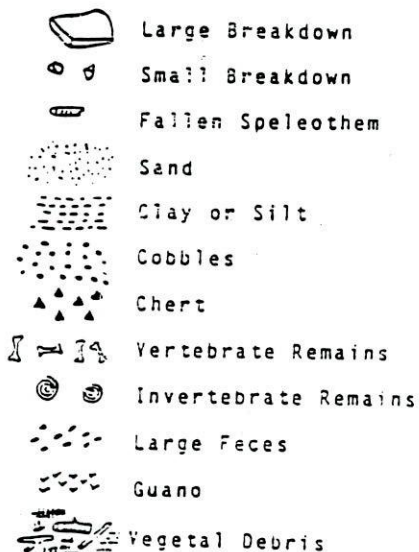
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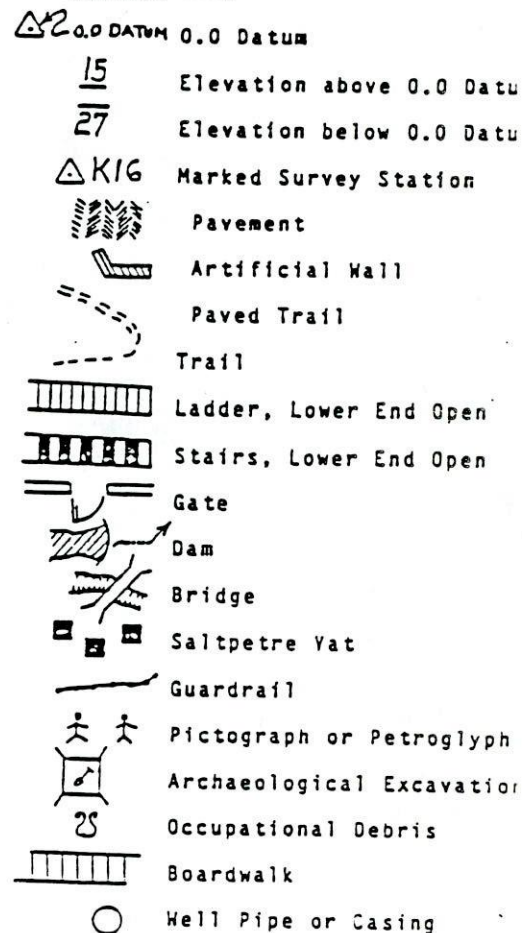
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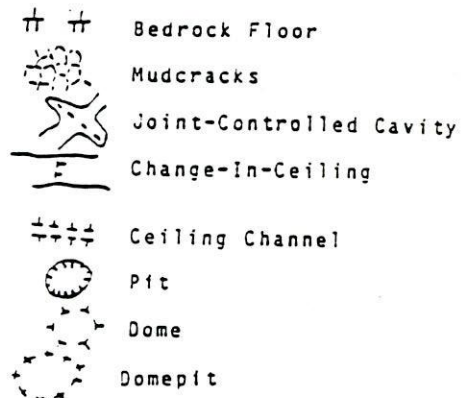
### SPELEOCLASTS --->



### CULTURE --->



### SPELEOGENS --->





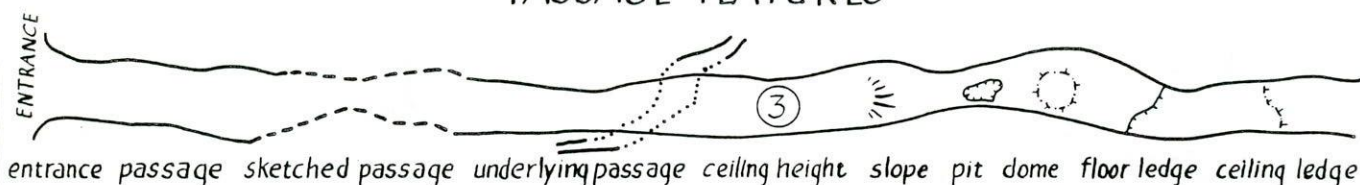
(There 11 pages in the unabridged version. Ed.)

*Twenty-nine of the most frequently used*

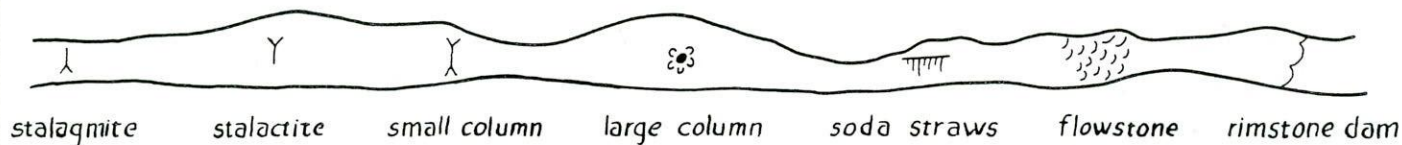
# BASIC CAVE MAP SYMBOLS

from the  
NSS Standard Map Symbols, 1976

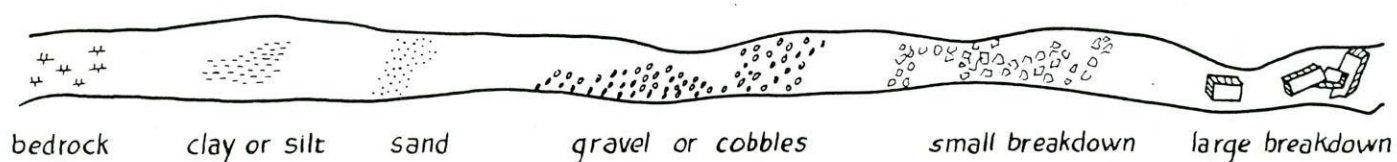
## PASSAGE FEATURES



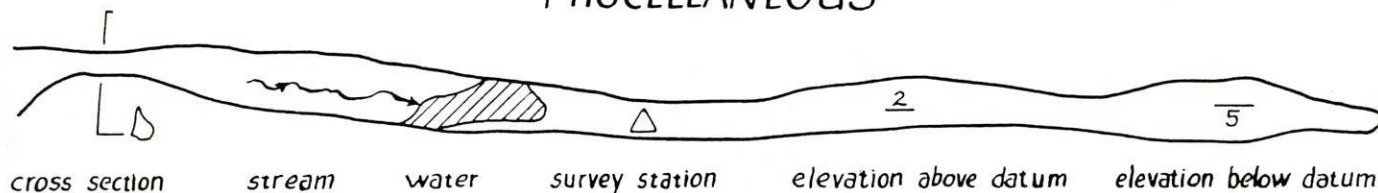
## SPELEOTHEMS



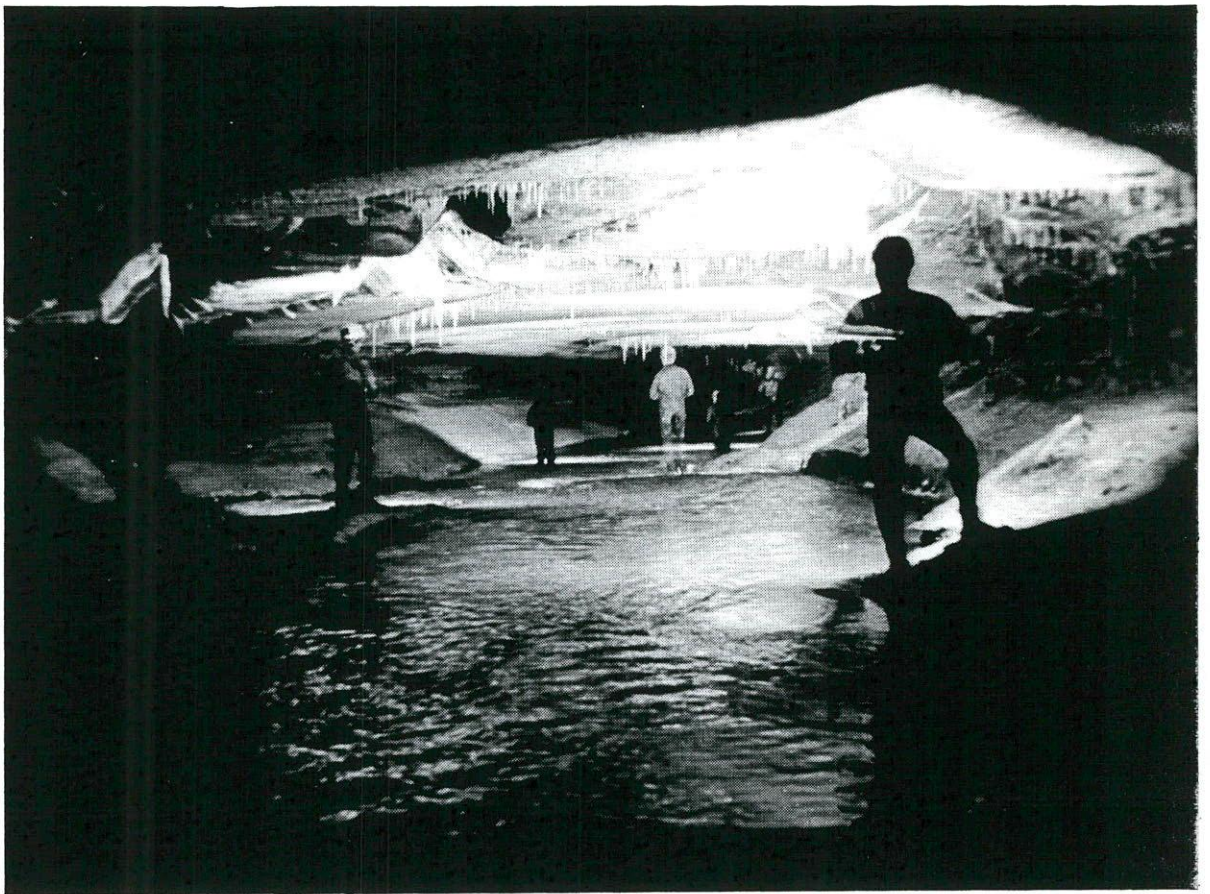
## FLOOR MATERIALS



## MISCELLANEOUS







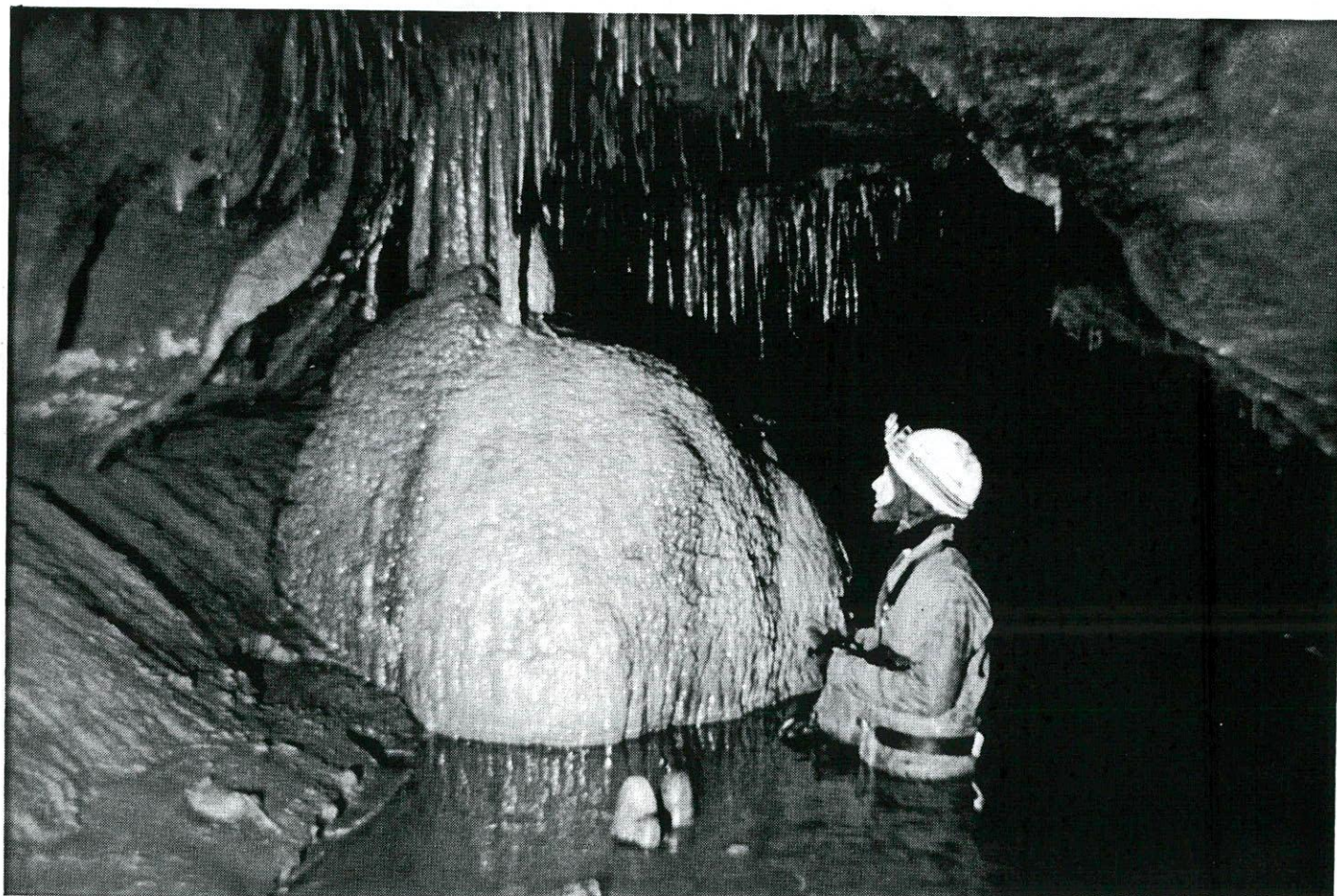
Upstream Coldwater Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa. Photo by Scott Dankof  
Near the North Snake Passage



Upstream Coldwater Cave, Doug Schmuecker in the  
Spong Siphon.

Photo by Scott Dankof  
Chris Beck, backlighting





N.S.S. Pipe Organ, April Cave, Winneshiek County, Iowa

Photo by Scott Dankof

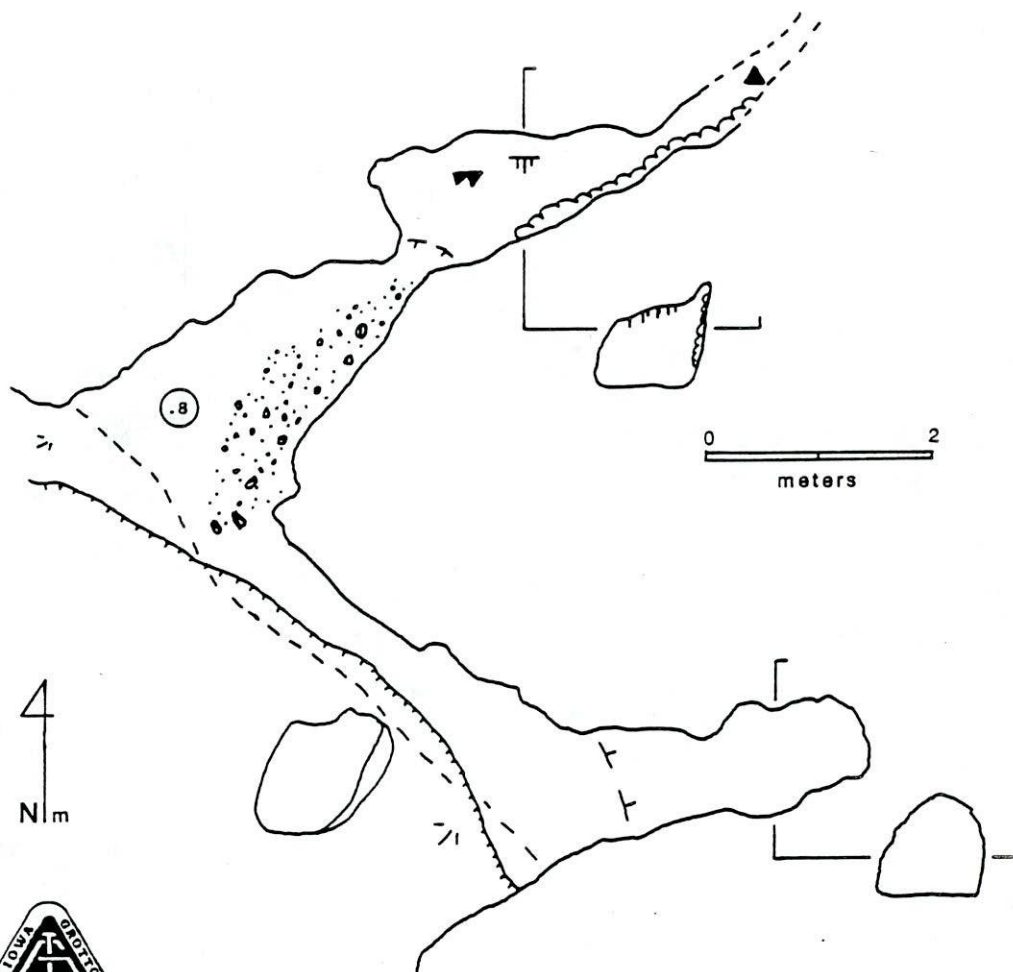


# Surprise Cave

Jackson County, Iowa

compass and tape survey  
6/2/92

T.S.L. - 12.8m / 42 ft



Marc Ohms

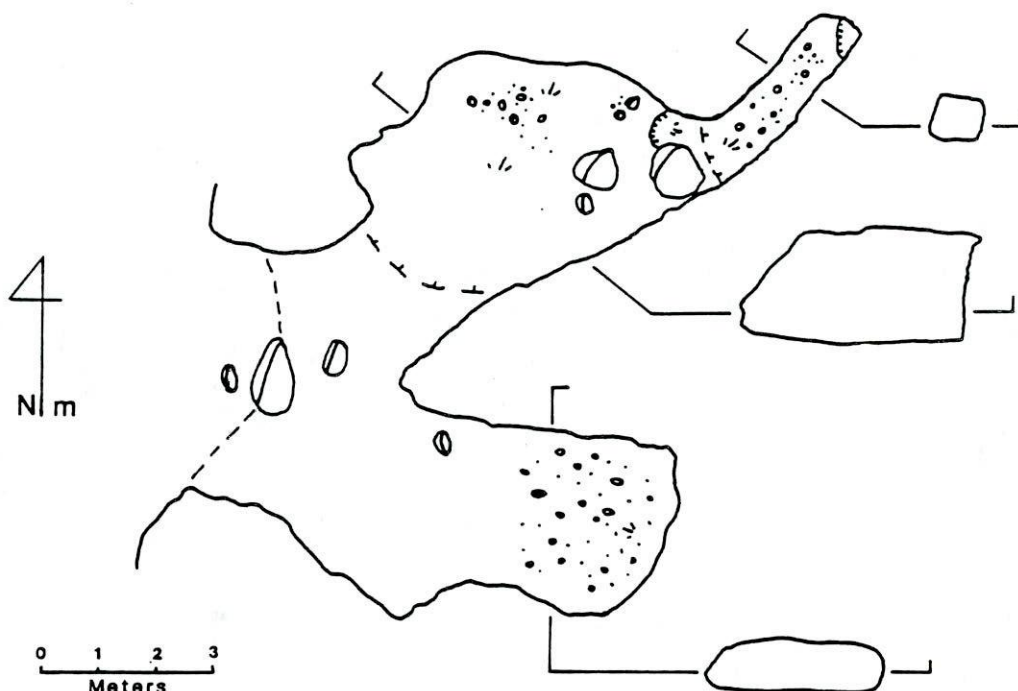






# Nettle Cave

Jackson County, Iowa



T.S.L. - 21.7m / 71ft

COMPASS AND TAPE SURVEY BY  
MARC OHMS

6 / 92





