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Lowell Burkhead

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I N T E R C O M

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THE IOWA GROTTO

National Speleological Society



Volume XXIX Issue 5

September - October, 1993

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Volume 29

Issue 5

The INTERCOM is published semi-spasmodically by the - - - - - Iowa Grotto
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only is \$18.00 per year. All Iowa Grotto
members are encouraged to join our parent organization, The National Speleological Soc.

Material for the INTERCOM may be sent any time as it becomes available, but in
order to guarantee inclusion in the next issue, it must be in the hands of the editor
by January 1, 1994 with a few days grace for those later trips. This should include
material covering November and December, 1993. Send articles, trip reports, photographic
negatives, prints, or slides, artwork, cave maps, 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
Wednesday in November and December, in room 125 of Trowbridge Hall on the campus of
the University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

Air Force Rescue Coordination Center
National Cave Rescue Commission
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Iowa County Emergency Management
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This number calls out Iowa Grotto rescue personnel

Cover Photo: Doug Schmuecker in Hollow Hill Hole, a crevice pit in Clayton County, Iowa
Photo by Scott Dankof



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

Chairman - - - - - Mike Lace
Vice-Chairman - - - - - Marc Ohms
Secretary-Treasurer - - Jay Wells

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IOWA GROTTO MEETING MINUTES

Regular meeting September 22, 1993

The meeting was called to order at 7:52 p.m. by chairman Mike Lace following a slide show by Chris Beck. The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved as read. *TRIP REPORTS*: Greg McCarty reported on a lead checking trip in Fayette County. Marc Ohms reported on a lead checking trip to the Galena area. Chris Beck told of the trip to the TAG Region. Coldwater Cave trips included a survey trip to Waterfall Dome. Other trips were limited due to the high CO₂ level in the cave. Mike Lace gave an update on the Wonder Cave restoration project. He also reported on a new cave several hundred feet in length. (No name yet.) *FUTURE TRIPS*: Coldwater Cave the third Saturday and Wonder Cave on Sunday. Fall MVOR Oct. 16-17. Fayette County surveying trip TBA. *OLD BUSINESS*: Grotto members will assist Iowa Public Television in filming some Iowa caves in late October. A few phone number corrections were made on the membership list. *NEW BUSINESS*: Chris Beck donated a 120 foot rope to the grotto. The Coldwater Cave entrance shed has a new stove.

Regular meeting October 27, 1993

The meeting was called to order at 7:37 p.m. by chairman Mike Lace with 13 members present. The Treasurer's report listed \$153.72 in cash and \$294.60 in the checking account for a total of \$444.32 in the club treasury. *TRIP REPORTS*: Liz Robinson reported on trips at the MVOR. She visited Lowell Cave and Little Smittle Cave. Brad Smith also reported on the two caves he visited at the MVOR including Blowing Springs Cave. Jay Wells reported on a trip up the Pig Trough with Larry Welch in Coldwater Cave. Mike Lace discussed the Iowa Public Television filming in Coldwater Cave and Wonder Cave. Greg McCarty reported on some lead checking trips in Fayette County and a trip to Brush Creek Canyon and Blue Spring. Mike Lace reported on a trip with Mike Nelson to Mitchell County. A recent new find, Good Fortune Cave, and Feldt Caves 1 & 2 were visited. Chris Beck reported on a survey trip to Railway Cave and Near Miss Cave, a lead checking trip in Jackson County, and the vertical cave training session. *FUTURE TRIPS*: A Fayette County survey trip TBA. An April Cave trip was proposed. There will be a vertical rescue training session. The NSS Convention in Texas will be June 20-24. *NEW BUSINESS*: There was a discussion on the extensive bolting being done in Pictured Rock Park in Jones County. A motion was passed to send a letter to the Jones County Conservation officer expressing our concerns on the defacing of public parks by out of state rock climbers. A motion was passed to permanently move the November meeting to the third Wednesday of the month like the December meeting. A cave fatality in a Minnesota sandstone cave was discussed. Iowa Grotto member Warren Netherton has been made a Fellow of the NSS for his life-long caving achievements. Warren runs the Minnesota Mystery Cave state park as well as having helped build it. Congratulations Warren. The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

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WEST UNION SINKHOLES

VVCC Cave, Falling Spring Cave, Wagon Wheel Cave, and Mittelstadt Cave, Fayette County
 September 7, 1993
 Marc Ohms and Greg McCarty

After the long rainy summer, it was about time to do some caving again so Marc and I grabbed a decent looking day (forecast wise) and headed out for some relaxing Tuesday caving. Marc picked me up in Fayette. I took him over to see a couple of diggs I have going near town. After taking a quick look at VVCC Cave, we checked a nearby roadcut where I commonly find snakes. Marc spotted a black rat snake in a small solutional tube half way up the cut and I found a northern water snake while making my way up to check on the rat snake. When we drove up to the next cut, we found three eastern milk snakes under a couple of rocks

After walking down into the mosquito ridden railroad cut to look at another dig, it was time to head north. Our "rain free" day that we were supposed to have was looking worse all the time, especially when we drove through the showers. The sky was looking very bad but it turned out that we spent the whole day just a mile or so north of the rain line and were only periodically sprinkled on by the time we reached the Falling Spring area. Our first stop here was to talk to the owner of the Falling Spring group of caves. When I had talked to him last spring while photographing the snow melt event, he had described some sinkholes that I wanted to have a look at. Some interesting sinks had been filled on various neighbors' land in the past but he still had some things for us to look at.

We started with a hole in the pasture north of the farmstead. This almost certainly had to be a crevice and it definitely seemed to fit the bill when we looked at it. An enterable hole in the dirt caused me to put on my coveralls and jump in but it pinched out after one body length of depth. Marc gave it a look also then we scouted the nearby area. Nothing else in the way of karst was spotted but we did find an unusual insect. I have seldom seen anything like it so I called Marc over for a look. Looking like some sort of huge purple wasp with a several inch long tail, it was definitely a sight while cruising through the air around us. After I got home and looked it up, I found out it is closely related to the wasps and is called a Long-tailed Ichneumon Fly. The female has the long ovipositor for piercing several inches of wood so she can lay her eggs.

After driving around to the other farm, we took a look at a sink near the old farmstead. The previous owner told me that one time some guys lost a crowbar down into a hole while trying to pry some rocks out and gain entry. I have always kept an eye on this sink, hoping it would someday look a little more promising. This definitely wasn't the day, though. We next walked down to Falling Spring so Marc could take some pictures then I showed him the Wagon Wheel Cave entrance to the Falling Spring Cave system.

We moved Marc's truck up the road a ways and checked out a couple of small sinks at the south end of the karst area. Then it was time to march off into the woods and recheck the sinks I had seen there in the mid 70's. The worst rain of the afternoon occurred while we were in the woods so the trees fended it off for us. The woods are very strange in appearance as you walk through them until you suddenly realize that the only plants there are trees and wood nettles. Lots of wood nettles! We waded on through to each of the sinkholes but found nothing too exciting until we arrived at the last one. This sink had seemed the most promising in the past and now looked very promising. Raccoon tracks led down the drainage way to the sink and there was an opening under a loose bedrock ledge. In the mid 70's I had poked at this sink a little but now it looked like a snap to open up. Marc's skepticism aside, I started pulling away the loose rocks and digging out the logs and debris. Within twenty minutes, I had a hole that was about passable. I worked on pulling out the rocks and trying to squeeze down the slope but could only get in half a body length at best. I suggested Marc try and he was able to squeeze down to the corner I had been trying to reach. Ahead lay a slot that was passable but blocked with rocks. I asked Marc if we should get more tools from the truck and dig it open now but he declined the offer. I wonder if the constant supply of gnats in the face while hanging down in the hole had anything to do with it. Definitely something to come back to, though (the hole, not the gnats).

We drove back to the owner's house and, after a couple of misses, found out he was checking calves in the field. While trying to find a way through the barnyard, we spotted him coming up the road and joined him. The wind was starting to turn cool now so this was a chilly talk. He gave us some more information on local sinkholes, then we headed off to Mittelstadt Cave. On the way, I pointed out the entrances to Yauslin Cave and a small cave that was dug open by Mike Bounk. By the time we geared up to go into Mittelstadt, it was getting pretty dim and pretty cold. The thermometer by the owner's driveway said 38 degrees but I know it wasn't nearly that cold. Not bad for the day after Labor Day, though.

A change in the fencing caused a little delay, then we worked our way down into the huge Mittelstadt sink. Still no sign of Mittelstadt Bypass Pit. After climbing down into the entrance, I removed the piece of rope that some kid had tied in there. I had forgotten to remove it last spring when I found it. I'm not too worried about the entrance but I'd hate to see a kid try to go down the next drop. Once we were down the second drop, it was quite obvious how the floods had affected the cave. Logs were jammed up into the passage straight ahead, of course, and into the little slots that go down to a deeper passage. The big change was down the slope to the water passage, though. The water passage had been silting up from the time I first saw it in 1974. Now it has been swept clean and features deep water going back to the sump. We didn't bother to follow it to make sure it still sumps as the water level was no different from past times. Also, the water smelled like a barnyard! Once the microbes do their work and remove the organic stench from the water, it should be possible to dive the sump. Since it was getting late, we decided to call it good for the day so Marc could drive back to Dubuque without getting sleepy. We got a few things accomplished for the day and we shook off some cobwebs from a less than vigorous summer.

"NED AND FRIENDS TAKE A TRIP"

Camps Gulf Cave, Stevens Gap Cave, Ship Cave, Pettyjohn's Cave, Ellison's Cave, Catacombs Cave, and Mammoth Cave

September 5-11, 1993

by Scott Dankof

Scott Dankof, Doug Schmuecker, Chris Beck, Katrina Johnson, and Brent Johnson

Doug and I left early Sunday morning and met Chris at Larry Welch's house in Galesburg Ill. All the gear was moved into Doug's Isuzu and we headed for TAG country. (TAG- Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia NSS region)

Monday morning we drove to Camps Gulf Cave near Spencer, Tennessee. Chris and I had been there last year and were so impressed that we had to come back again. The jeep trail leading back to the cave was in pretty good shape so we made it all the way back to the parking area. A short distance away at the base of a large cliff is the sinkhole entrance. We walked down into the cave trying to stay along the left wall on top of a high mudbank past a few dried up columns to an immense breakdown pile. Chris led the way up over the pile, through a few squeezes, then onto a ledge overlooking one of the largest rooms I've ever seen. I took out my photo gear and Chris took out his. My job was to run both cameras while Doug and Chris spread out and blew off flashbulbs. They ended up using about 20 bulbs on two different shots.

We explored the left-hand side of the room passing truck sized breakdown blocks. The sound of water attracted us to a climbdown of about 60 or 70 feet to a mudbank overlooking a stream. Chris checked out the stream then we headed toward the opposite side of the chamber to a lower level trunk passage. This started out as a walking passage about 10 feet high and 30 feet wide which went through two short crawls then opened up into another very large room. The far side of this room is where an underground river emerges from under a pile of breakdown. The water was about 10 feet lower than last year. Unlike Iowa, Tennessee looked to be quite dry above and below ground. I took some pictures in this room and then headed out.

Tuesday, we drove down to Chattanooga, Tennessee. Katrina had arranged for us to camp cheap at Raccoon Mountain Caverns, cheap being my favorite word. After setting up our tent, we headed for Alabama and Stevens Gap Cave. The directions I had led us to a parking area in the woods. From there, a trail led up the valley to the cave. Stevens Gap Cave consists of about 1,600 feet of passage and multiple entrances. But the main feature is the pit entrance, a beautiful 143 foot open air pit complete with cascading waterfalls and green ferns hanging down the sides. A TAG classic. Chris rigged his rope from a tree on the high side of the pit, making for about a 160 foot drop. He then started to rappel down. About 30 feet from the bottom, he noticed a spot in the rope where a strand was puffed up outside the sheath. It looked OK but we rerigged with

Doug's rope just in case. I dropped next, then Doug. After pictures were taken, we dropped the pit one more time then hiked back down the trail toward the truck.

Just past the parking area is Pipeside Pit. It's a 66 foot pit with some nice formations. We rigged from a tree and then rappelled down. I followed Chris up into a small side passage to check out some formations, then we all ascended out.

On Wednesday, we drove north of Chattanooga. Along the way, we tried to settle the debate about who most resembled Ned Beatty. Doug and I voted for Chris but Chris disagreed. Ship Cave was our goal for the day. My guidebook indicated that you could drive almost all the way to the cave. That was true but it took us about one hour to drive 2½ miles of very rough 4-wheel drive trails. At times it wasn't too bad, then it quickly degenerated into a boulder strewn obstacle course. Doug shifted into 4-Low and did some rock crawling. Near the end of the trail, we had to park because the rocks were so big that we didn't have enough clearance to make it over them.

Fifty yards ahead was a clearing and a trail leading off into the woods to Ship Cave. At the bottom of the bluff was the 8 foot high by 15 foot wide entrance. It opened into a gravel floored walking passage which lasted about 50 feet. At that point it was wall to wall water. We looked at each other, cringed, and then splashed on in. On the left was a climbup to a room above the stream level. I took a few pictures here then we continued on over a breakdown pile to another very big room. Many large formations covered the walls and breakdown blocks covered the floor. At the far end of the room, we found a slot that dropped back down to stream level. After about 150 feet of wet walking passage, we came to a massive breakdown pile. Chris led us around the edge and found a fairly stable way to the top. At the top was the underground view I'd been looking for: borehole approximately 125 feet high by 75 feet wide. I manned the tripods and Chris and Doug blew off the flashes.

I'm always amazed at how impressive it is to sit back and watch as a person lights up a huge section of borehole with a flashbulb. After Doug and Chris made their way back, we decided a pizza was calling our names, so that meant pack it up.

Thursday, Doug had called PMI to arrange for a tour of their rope factory in Trenton, Georgia. We met Larry Pickering who showed us around the building. He explained how the rope making machines worked and showed us how they test their strength. Chris showed him the puffed spot in his new PMI rope. Larry told us it was a sort of electrostatic discharge that can happen during the weaving process. It doesn't affect the strength but should be taken care of. On the spot, he replaced Chris's rope with a brand new one. What came next left Chris almost speechless. Larry cut the puffed spot out of the old rope and handed him back the two lengths. One was about 130 feet, the other 170 feet. So basically, it's like this, Chris made out like a bandit. (He donated the shorter length to the grotto.) Three ropes for the price of one. I can't say enough good things about PMI (Pigeon Mountain Industries). They certainly believe in customer satisfaction! Katrina Johnson, who Chris and I had caved with last year, now works at PMI. We talked to her for a few minutes about a trip she and her husband were taking us on later that evening. After that, we packed up Chris's incredible multiplying ropes and drove west out of town to Pettyjohns Cave.

It's another of those TAG caves that is right next to a road, and you don't have to break a sweat to get to it. A nice blast of cool cave air came out of the 2 by 2 foot hole. We chimneyed down the corkscrew-like entrance about 15 feet and emerged into a 20 foot high by 20 foot wide trunk passage. We followed this up and over slippery breakdown for about 500 feet, took some pictures, and started out. By the time we got back to the entrance, it was pouring rain. A small waterfall was cascading down on us as we climbed up, and some wicked bolts of lightning were a bit too close for comfort. On the way back to Chattanooga, we stopped at the resurgence to Ellisons Cave. It contains the deepest pit in the US, at about 586 feet in a single drop.

Later that evening, Katrina and her husband, Brent, met us at the campground and we followed them to Catacombs Cave. A parking spot was found and off into the woods

we went. After about 100 yards, we crossed a dry creek and started bushwhacking the hillside. Finally, someone yelled that they'd found it. The entrance sloped down to a short stoopwalk and then into a nice 7 foot high by 4 foot wide walking passage. This section is very maze-like with many smaller passages taking off everywhere. We jumped a couple of canyons, then Brent asked if I wanted to see something interesting. We chimneyed to the next level down and backtracked about 15 feet. Above me was the canyon I'd just crossed. When I went across it, I'd looked down and thought it was about 20 feet deep. From where we were standing, I could see the rest of it and it ended up being more like 50 or 60 feet deep. I just hate it when that happens.

We continued deeper into the cave till we entered the lower stream level. Brent and Katrina explained that the water levels were lower than normal and that this is not a great place to be during a rainstorm. You could tell that by looking at the walls of the passage. They had really beautiful scallops created by the action of the rushing water. The water wasn't too deep as we followed this passage, no more than two feet. Brent said that he'd been here once when it was almost chest deep with a nasty current. We checked out some of the smaller side passages and chimneyed up and down into the other levels. It was pitch dark when we exited the cave. One of us finally found a way through the brush and then eventually to the parking area. Katrina suggested that we all go get something to eat. They took us to a place in downtown Chattanooga that served great burgers, nachos, and beer (not necessarily in that order).

Friday, we packed up camp and headed toward Kentucky to Mammoth Cave National Park. After looking at all the trips available, we chose the Frozen Niagara Tour. It was a pretty good tour, with some nice formations at the end and lots of typical Mammoth breakdown trunk passage. Saturday arrived and it was time to head back home. All in all, it was a very good trip. Luckily, we didn't see any toothless nine year olds playing the theme from Deliverance on the banjo.

HIKE IN BRUSH CREEK CANYON

Blue Spring and small unnamed caves
October 10, 1993
Deb and Greg McCarty

by Greg McCarty

I had always wanted to see Blue Spring in the back end of Brush Creek Canyon Forest Preserve so Deb and I picked a nice fall day to hike back and see it. We had been trying to whip ourselves back into shape so the hike would do us good. We started a little late in the afternoon, naturally, but we were equipped with flashlights to find our way back. I also brought along a backpack full of cave gear in case we found something interesting along the way while Deb carried the camera gear. The leaves were pretty and the day clear so it was a great day for a hike. While we were getting ready, a couple from Decorah showed up and needed some directions. Deb and I led them back to the large pinnacle (the trail wasn't easy to follow in some spots due to fallen trees), then left the trail for the walk to the farther reaches.

After we had crossed the side creek and chugged up the side of the next ridge, we followed the bluffs looking for holes. The bluff features some very nice crevices between pinnacles and float blocks. It was fun to clamber around through them along the way. We had been tracing a solutional zone along the bluff for a while when Deb found a shelter cave a ways up a slope. There was maybe 30 feet of passage with a couple of spurs, and it showed signs of modern fires and maybe camping. Farther along was a round solutional tube about 4 feet in diameter. I had to climb up the cliff about 15 feet to reach it only to find it ends in less than five feet.

While I was climbing into the tube, Deb was working her way up to a shelter one third of the way up the cliff face. She was having trouble with the last move so I showed her an easier way to reach it. We sat in there amongst the raccoon dung and pulled rocks out that blocked the view into a stub passage. They looked like they had been

placed there by a trapper. Since trapping is illegal here and it's illegal to modify a den anyway, I tossed the rocks down the hill. The stub passage didn't go anywhere so after climbing back down, we continued down the valley. It was starting to dim but we found one more short cave. This one had a smaller entrance and had an easy crawl to a little chamber where you could turn around. Not much over 15 feet total.

As we rounded a sharp point and lost our bluffs, I wanted to climb to the top and check for sinks. It turned out there was one but it was plugged. Three deer were leaving a meadow of Pic acres just beyond the sink. We now were working our way up a side valley so that we could reach the spring. A plunge down the steep side put us in a dry valley just upstream from Blue Spring. Walking down to it, we found large talus blocks and a deep pool. The water was boiling up through rubble on the west side of the pool in several places. I'm not sure that this is all of the flow which was pretty respectable but it must be a large chunk of it. A submerged rock ledge was visible in the middle of the 20 foot wide pool and I would guess it could be eight feet deep to the side of it.

It was too dim to see much in the way of color in the pool but I can imagine it looks very nice. I had to use the flash to take pictures. We rested and ate our sandwiches then felt our way back up the steep slope to the top of the ridge. By crossing through the narrow meadow on top, we would save a lot of walking. It was time to break out the flashlights by the time we reached the woods again. We went back down into the side valley again and then back up to the trail head near the pinnacle. It was quite a relief to have the vertical part of the trip over with. The temperature was in the low 30's by the time we reached the car so it made for very pleasant walking in the woods. Beats sweaty, muggy summer any day once you get used to it. The round trip to the back end took us about $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours counting poking around, so if you want to see it, make sure you allow a little time.

NEW HOLE OPENS UP

Impossible Boulder Cave, North Entrance Cave, Schuchman Cave, and Under Ledge Cave
October 19, 1993
Deb and Greg McCarty

by Greg McCarty

The owner of some property in an area where John Fuhrman and I spent a little over two years digging in various holes called to say that a new one had dropped open. Deb was going to be off on this Tuesday so we took advantage of a nice day to run over for a look. The hole was on the edge of a grassy waterway to the south of where John and I had done most of our work. The owner's son had spotted it and climbed down in for a look. He said that there was a passage ahead and then down that could be seen and he could hear water. A hay rack was pulled over it to keep cows out. I geared up for a look and found that the passage was a dirt tube. A nice sized belly crawl led for 20 feet to a choked slot in bedrock. At the slot there was a chamber in the dirt where you could easily turn around. The whole thing was pretty good sized but the ceiling and walls were just dirt. The tube was above the bedrock. It looks like a promising dig but you would have to come straight down through the bean field to reach it. It would be dangerous to work through the tube. I told the owner we would be back to open it up before the ground freezes as he would like to know whether to save the hole by next spring.

The owner next took us onto some adjacent land to look at a couple more new holes. The first was a dirt collapse sink about 12 feet deep while the second was a much shallower hole dropping in between the corn rows. While the owner headed back home, Deb and I went onto a relative's land to check a hole John and I had dug in. The cows in this field were very friendly so we ended up with wet nose prints all over us. Unfortunately, the cows weren't doing the hole any good. The dirt had been all stomped in and the hole was worse than ever.

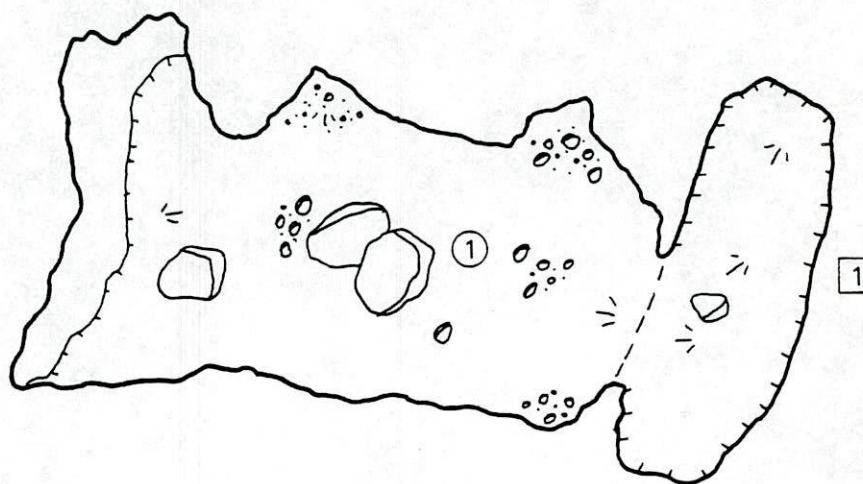
Our next stop was to check some of the caves that John and I had dug open to see how they were doing. We first checked Schuchman Cave. After clearing away all the tin from the entrance, I sent Deb down in so I could photograph her. I soon joined her and saw that the low spot before the upslope to the Funnel Room had silted in again (as I had expected). After closing the cave back up, we checked Under Ledge Cave but didn't enter it due to the stream of water flowing from the field tile that drains into the sink. We next walked around the woods to the sink containing Impossible Boulder Cave. The protective wire was still over the entrance. We didn't bother to enter this one as it is too tight. Last on the list was North Entrance Cave named because it is the northern most entrance for the presumed system the eight caves and assorted holes drain into. This one also featured a nice stream of water from field tile so we didn't enter it either. It was dark by now so we headed back to the owner's for a long talk and then headed home.



Stephanie Dankof in Sullivan's Cave. Photo by Scott Dankof

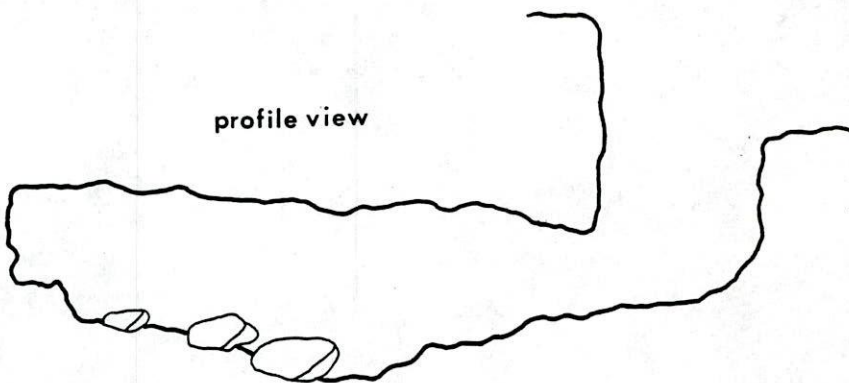
Trail Cave

Dubuque County, Iowa



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METERS

profile view

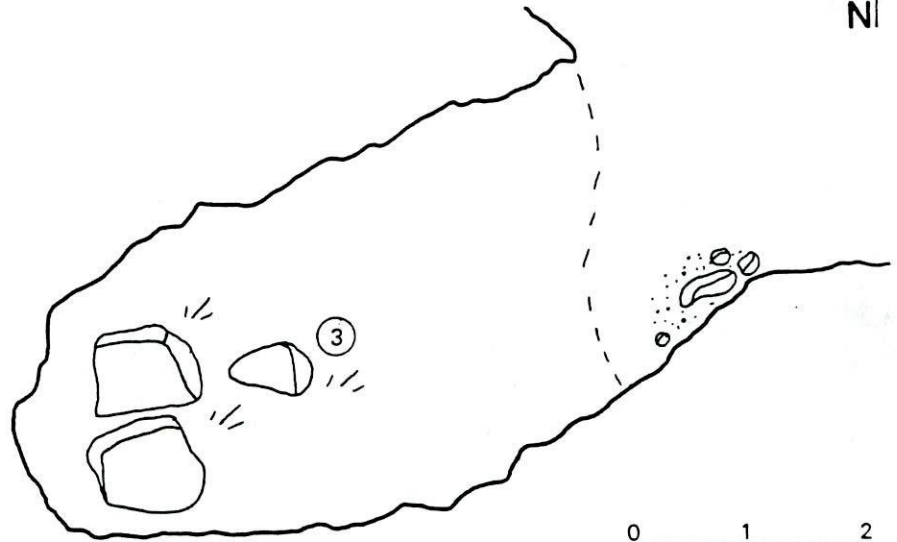


compass and tape survey by

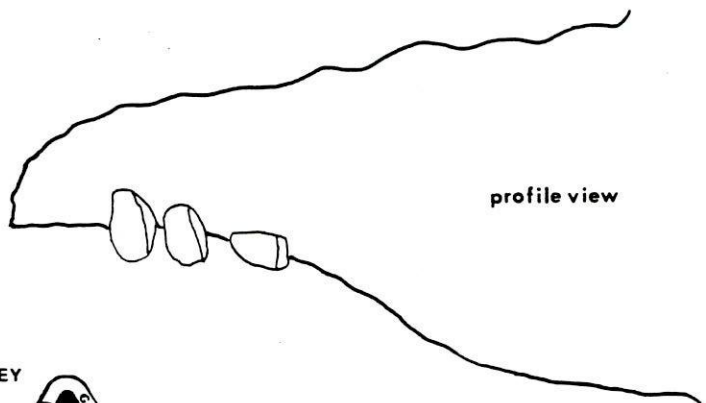
MARC OHMS

Pink Elephant Cave

Clayton County, Iowa



0 1 2
Meters



profile view

COMPASS AND TAPE SURVEY

MARC OHMS



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