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The Alaskan Caver



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The Alaskan Caver

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Marcel LaPerriere - Editor

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Back Cover: Lynn Canal Karst. Lakes in the background
drain into karst. Photo by: Kevin Allred, Fall 2000

Note from the Editor

Due to lack of material this issue has been reduced from 20 pages to 8. Unless you want the Caver to shrink even more I need your submittals. Material must be submitted no later than the 1st of each even month. Please send submittals to:

Alaskan Caver
P.O. Box 9062
Ketchikan, AK 99901

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Annual dues are \$15 for a single and \$20 for a family membership. The Alaskan Caver is included in the membership fee. For an additional \$8, six Cavers will be sent by airmail to overseas addresses. Institutional subscriptions are \$20 per volume. Send dues to Glacier Grotto Treasurer.

• Anchorage Meetings: Call Jay Rockwell, 277-7150 or e-mail Harvey Bowers at agate@alaska.net

• Ketchikan Meetings: 7 p.m. the first Monday of the month at the Alaska Public Health Service Building, 3054 Fifth Ave., Ketchikan.

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JOURNAL of the GLACIER GROTTO

The ALASKAN CAVER

October 2000

October President's Corner

FREE \$\$ TO ANYONE THAT REPLIES TO THIS ARTICLE!

That should get your attention! I always wonder if anyone reads these Presidents' Corners. Ever had a song stuck in your head? I've had one in mine ever since last week when I re-read a rather disturbing email from the "Membership Committee" of the Glacier Grotto. Our Grotto membership is down from nearly 300 to about 60 members. Does this mean that interest in having an Alaskan chapter of the NSS is waning? Will the Glacier Grotto be dissolved? Marcel LaPerriere, the editor for the Alaskan Caver, is having trouble finding enough cave-related material to print on a bimonthly basis. Maybe we will have to resort to publishing Alaskan cave-related material on a quarterly basis. That song stuck in my head: "Where have all the members gone_" played to the tune of the 1960's "Where Have all the Flowers Gone_" (Not that most cavers should be considered analogous to flowers, except maybe on skunk cabbage...)

What then, if anything should be done about this turn of affairs? Why haven't nearly 240 ex-members renewed? Has the novelty of the "Alaskan Cave" worn off? Are caving trips too few and far between? Do those outside SE Alaska find no connection to the amazing places so many of us have experienced and shared through this Grotto? Or does a lack of interest exist, an abundance of apathy? Rekindle the wonder, get motivated, go caving, map a cave and write a trip report and get involved with the Glacier Grotto! We need your support! I would like to hear more from those people caving in other parts of the state. Surely someone in the

interior or elsewhere is exploring carbonate, volcanic and/or ice caves. Write an article, learn about what it takes to begin to protect the wonders you've explored, become a member if not already or give a membership to a friend. I'd also like to hear about the fascinating work that the paleontologists and archeologists are doing at On Your Knees Cave and elsewhere. What is the latest in our understanding of human and animal pre-history?

What about the continued explorations on POW and KOSI? When will we hear the stories about these areas? In this great and varied state, Marcel should be having problems deciding what not to print, not troubled with a lack of material! Glacier Grotto members have been a part of many positive achievements. Examples include a UAS/USFS karst and cave curriculum available to the state's school districts, identification and protection of many important karst features and continually improving USFS management on karst in SE Alaska. We have much to be proud of, but much remains to be done. Protection and exploration of karst on state and private lands, for example. I know for a fact that most of the Glacier Grotto members enthusiastically volunteer to promote interest in, advance the study of, and push for protection of caves and their natural contents. In short they support the very purpose of this Grotto as stated in the Grotto's by-laws. You, the members, make the Grotto function. I would like to recognize your selfless dedication without which we would not have a Grotto. Thank you all! But we need new ideas, new blood and most of all more members, if we are to remain a sanctioned NSS Grotto. I'm proud to have been elected the President of the Glacier Grotto and look forward to getting the Alaskan Caver each month. This small magazine provides a mode, a voice for sharing our concerns about karst, its' enjoyment, its' appropriate management. Do not let that voice die, becoming only a song in one's mind.

CALENDAR

Ketchikan Area Grotto meetings are the first Monday, at 7 pm at Ketchikan Public Health Center 3050 Fifth Ave. 907/247-1559 or marcel@alaskamade.com

OR ajmurray@ktn.net

Southcentral Area meetings or expeditions will be called by Jay Rockwell 277-7150 or Harvey Bowers at <agate@alaska.net>

CAVING IN JERUSALEM

by: Kevin Allred

In the first part of May, 2000, Carlene and I found ourselves in Israel as part of a fancy tour that Carlene's parents took us on. When we first found out about this family trip, Carlene's very first comment was "I hope you aren't going to make this tour into a caving expedition". Would I even think of such a thing? Everybody should know I exercised lots of self control, passing up some real neat caving opportunities to be with the family. However, on a free day, I did make arrangements to survey Hezekiah's Tunnel, a 2700 year-old aqueduct said to be hewn about 1770 feet through limestone bedrock. The map is to be given to the Israelis for a tourist guide. This tunnel is a popular destination and for four dollars one can use a flashlight or candles to wade through it. Carlene and I started the survey, but the gate keeper at the lower entrance would not let Carlene join me. They may have felt that a woman should not be permitted such things, or the language barrier was the problem. At any rate, I was left to survey solo. Being somewhat prepared for such an eventuality, I had previously cut a few short lengths of bamboo-like stalk that could be jammed across the width of the narrow passage in order to hold the end of the tape measure on the stations. I started from the outlet known as "The Pool of Shiloam". It is mentioned in the New Testament as where Jesus cured a man of blindness. The meandering tunnel has a gradual slope with slow moving water from one to two feet deep. Cross sections of the passage are generally about 1 1/2 feet wide at the floor, and 2 feet wide near the top, with a flat ceiling about 6 1/2 feet high. It sort of resembles the shape of an Egyptian coffin. I always managed to tuck myself into small alcoves along the sides whenever tourists came through from the other direction. In one large group of local young people, some of the fellows were carrying carbine rifles, presumably to impress the young women. I jokingly counseled them not to fire them inside the tunnel. No one could understand what I was about with hardhat, headlamp, and survey gear. I got tired of trying to explain. Finally, the day ended, and I worked on, finishing the main tunnel at midnight. I did not survey some high climbs and one long side passage. Total passage in 15 hours was 2036.8 feet. We checked out of the motel to leave Israel only three hours after I exited the tunnel.

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THE TONGASS IS REALLY THE PITS

by: Carlene Allred

Forrest is our youngest. I first suspected I was pregnant with him while camped up on the top of El Capitan Peak on Prince of Wales Island. I was awaiting my turn to drop the newly-measured, 600-foot-deep record pit. I was nauseated with what felt like morning sickness, and could not eat breakfast, so I did the pit on an empty stomach. Forrest was born the next spring. That was over ten years ago. I have always told Forrest that he is the youngest person ever to drop El Capitan Pit.

Yesterday Forrest came home from a friend's birthday party bearing a new special edition Monopoly game. It was designed for children and has an Alaskan theme with little plastic igloos instead of houses. Game pieces are plastic Eskimos with mustachioed "Monopoly man" faces. Land for sale includes things like Mt. McKinley and walruses. While playing the game with him I noticed a piece of land for sale called the Tongass National Forest. The little picture on it was not of trees as one would have expected. I could not believe my eyes--- the picture portrayed a SINKHOLE in a treeless plain! I looked at the picture up-side-down to see if the publisher had made a mistake and inverted a picture of a stump. No, it was definitely a sinkhole. I then looked through the contents of what was inside the game box and noticed a color brochure explaining the places featured in the game. Below is some of what I read:

WOLVES

Wolves keep out of sight-- tracks and howling may be the only signs of their existence. They inhabit all of Alaska including the region surrounding El Cap Pit, known as the Tongass National Forest.

El Cap Pit in TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST

At 598.3 feet deep, El Cap Pit is the deepest known natural Pit in the United States. Imagine going down into the ground the equivalent of a building fifty stories high!

For those interested in buying this game it is called Monopoly® Junior, Trek Alaska.

Continued on next page

STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER

by Kevin Allred

About 10 years ago, while poring over aerial photographs in Juneau, I marked some karst areas located in a limestone band shown to exist on a general geologic map of southeast Alaska. The limestone is located only some 19 miles by skiff from our cabin near Haines. Such things as holes, karst, and sinking streams were noted - all in sub-alpine elevations up to 2500 feet. The years came and went with so many distractions that we never went to check it out. Then several years ago, David Love organized the first karst and cave expedition for nearby lowlands of the Lynn Canal. We did find some small caves there. It got me to thinking about what there might be up higher on the mountain.

A family trip was finally planned for July, 2000 which would coincide with the harvest of wild strawberries of beaches below the high elevation karst. Several friends were invited, but things began to fizzle out. As a last ditch effort, just before the Kosciusko caving expedition, our family piled into the 14 foot skiff on a reasonably calm day. Present were Soren, Flint, Forrest, Carlene and me. Carlene planned to preserve the picked berries in sugar this time around. They would last a few days until we got back home. In the past, we had taken bottles along and canned them on site. One day was set aside for some of us to carry up minimal gear and recon the karst to determine how much rope, equipment, and time might be needed in the future. The weather was gorgeous and the sweet strawberries were more plentiful than I've ever seen. It was marvelous to do nothing but relax, pork out on berries, and enjoy some of the most beautiful scenery in Alaska. Judging from the plentiful wolf tracks and bear sign, we weren't the only ones there. We ate so many strawberries, we basically did not need to drink any water for the whole trip, although we ate some real food too. The first day we stored five or six gallons. That night during a full moon, we were awakened by a howling wolf in the woods. It really sounded weird because it could carry its voice up to a very high pitch.

The next day, some of us were planning the assault on the karst. However, towards morn

ing the wind picked up, and our weather radio predicted 20 to 25 knot winds. I decided to use my better judgment and scrap the caving portion of our trip. We did not wish to be marooned for a week and miss the upcoming Kosciusko adventures. In addition, we could plainly see the karst area was still partly covered in snowfields. Carlene and the kids also took a look at the Sullivan River which we would need to cross. The glacial-fed rapids were four feet deep and at least 30 feet wide. We took a bit more time berry picking and the boys were briefly entertained by following a swimming black bear along the beach. It had gone into the ocean to avoid and go around our camp. I called the boys away so the thing could get out of the cold water and on its way. Soren said the bear was a "sissy" for swimming around us. After a total of eight gallons of strawberries we had a rough, wet ride in three foot seas back to our place. As with some caving trips in Alaska, no caves are actually entered, but there are always adventures. This was not the end of it though.

Determined to see that karst, I took the skiff solo in the early morning of September second. I had a following sea with a 15 knot north wind, and just one day before a weather front was due in. I had to miss watching two of the kids run in a cross country meet to do this. There was about 200 feet of line to tie the boat to high tide, but since it was medium tide when I landed, that reached only halfway up the gradually sloped beach. I had to tie up to a rock and hope that our leaky skiff would drift into the beach before it became swamped, or an unexpected storm smashed it up. The planned route up to the karst plateau was a strip of timber (to avoid brush), and then alders and cliffs from there to the top. The way proved steep and difficult, sometimes following mountain goat and bear trails. In a couple hours, I was on top enjoying a fine day. Views were incredible with the Lynn Canal, glaciers, and peaks on the one side, and the boundary peaks for Glacier Bay on the other. At least four different colors of wild flowers were in bloom in the alpine meadows. The main challenge with finding any major cave system in this area is caused by the poorly drained beds of schist between beds of pure thinly banded marble. Abundant sinks and sinkholes on the carbonate all were plugged by schist and schist soils less than 25 to 30

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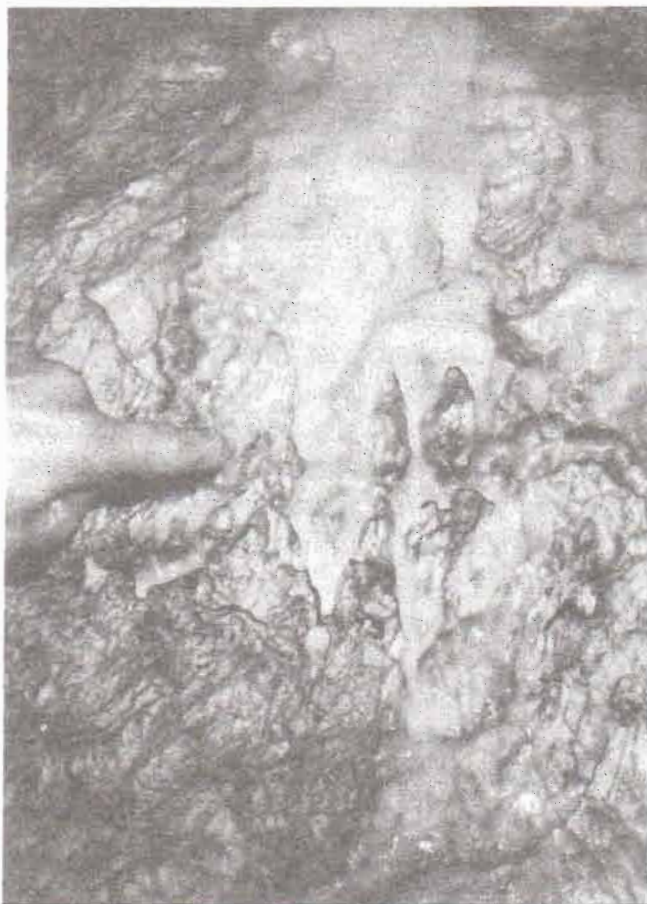
feet down. Of hundreds of them I peeked into over the next several hours, only in six or eight did I need a headlamp to enter, and these also became plugged. My earlier notations showed two lakes draining into a marble and schist gorge and the water disappearing. Some schist contained scattered cubes of iron pyrite. A quick check down the dry bed did not pay off, although I could have missed an entrance into the system off to either side - especially to the north.

After looking into more sinkholes, I did find one cave only about 40 feet deep. I became disappointed. It was time for some diversion, so I found a small, shallow pool which had been somewhat warmed by the sun, and took a brief and refreshing swim. Dressing, I followed that drainage down the meadow and alpine heather, and to my astonishment, it dropped into a well hidden pit entrance about 10 by 20 feet, and 30 feet deep. It was only about 75 feet from where I had previously walked on an earlier pass. Out came the ceiling burner, hardhat, and sweater. Maybe this could be big! A tricky down climb led to the floor of the pit. A handline would be useful here. I was standing in a room about 40 feet long, 25 feet wide, and 20 feet high. A waterfall fell from its ceiling, and a drafty steep upper passage went at least 20 feet, but became low and dirty, so I turned around there. I was really curious to see what went down. That way soon became only a couple feet high, but with clean limestone breakdown and some impact marks; evidence of high water flows. This was just what I was looking for! Yes! It opened up into a stoopway with an ascending side passage which kept going after some delicate milky white flowstone and soda straws. A crawlway back at the junction of this side passage immediately opened up and dropped into a crack-like passage. the banded walls are gorgeous, and there is also some impressive and large brownish inclusions which are resistant to dissolution. A sample of this barely effervesced in acid later at home. Also, are flowstone and popcorn of a grayish color with just a tinge of green. The cave eventually became plugged with rocks and some woody debris, but some side passages might go. I saw perhaps 400 feet of cave. I named it "Skinny Dipper Cave".

After climbing out of the cave, I was faced

with the decision of either going home on the high tide that evening, or waiting until 4:00 AM the next morning when the boat would be in the water again. It should drift to the 17 foot high tide level. I decided on getting out early, especially since I was not prepared to spend a comfortable night. Well, when I finally got to the boat, it had not drifted in, so I went beach combing for a couple of hours until I could wade out and find my rock anchor as the tide level dropped. It was glassy calm much of the way home, and I grew sleepy watching the silver reflection of the water and the sunset glow on jagged peaks all around.

I visited only a small part of the karst, but what was seen warrants a more determined, lengthy, and complete expedition. I'm very excited about surveying Skinny Dipper Cave, and seeing what else is up there so close to home. And where are the resurgences to this plateau?



Milky white formation in Skinny Dipper Cave.
Photo by: Kevin Allred

Rope Cutter



The Rope Cutter is a place for cavers to voice their concerns, ideas or

gripes. Please send your entries to PO Box 9062, Retchikan AK 99901 (oops!) Make that Ketchikan). The answers and ideas in no way reflect any view of the Grotto as an entity, and may not even represent a sane viewpoint at all. We reserve the right to ignore, gloss over, edit or just plain plagiarize any entry. (A note from the editor: A Big thanks to Carlene Allred for the new Rope Cutter Logo!)

Dear Rope Cutter,

I was recently rigging a pit and when I tied my new nylon rope around a tree using a bowline knot, my caving companion recommended a figure 8 knot instead. Can you tell me why?

Signed Lost Mariner

Dear Lost,

I can tell you are lost at sea. First of all, who wants to trust their life to a knot which is commonly taught with these instructions: "go through the rabbit hole and around the tree." I for one, would like to avoid caving with a knot that has this kind of Alice in Wonderland mentality.

To quote from the cavers manual Vertical "Despite its popularity the bowline is a potentially dangerous knot, it is easy to mis-tie, can be jiggled undone by continued movement of the rope, and undoes very easily when loaded wrongly. For these reasons alone, the bowline is not recommended for any life support application." Any knot weakens a rope but the bowline has a

static strength of 50% of the original line. A figure eight nets you an extra 5%, at 55% of the original strength of the line.

The best thing about a figure 8 knot is that it can be inspected easily. It always looks like an 8 whereas with the bowline it is sometimes hard to tell where the rabbit ran around which tree.

Bowlines used to be the standard knot in Mountaineering, but today most climbers are also switching to a figure 8.

You need to know how to tie a figure 8 anyway, since this is **THE** knot to use at the end of the rope before you throw it off into a pit. This is because you never know when a rope will be too short and the knot will stop you from allowing yourself to be examined by a forensic pathologist to determine the failure of a "life support" system.

Just as a note of caution, the figure 8 can be tied incorrectly which results in a 10% loss of strength. This occurs when the line leading into the first curve of the bend takes the short route. In an 8 knot the long way is the best. A knot is also weakened when it is not dressed correctly. Keep it neat. Don't dress your knots like you dress!

One final tip is to be sure to leave a long enough tail, and a safety knot never hurts. When under a load the rope tends to suck different parts of the rope into the middle of the knot. Don't leave another mystery for the Pathologist to unravel.

I guess I would take a bowline over a gaggle knot, but in caving using a figure 8 reduces the chances of your friends having to say that you "ate it." Go Figure.



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