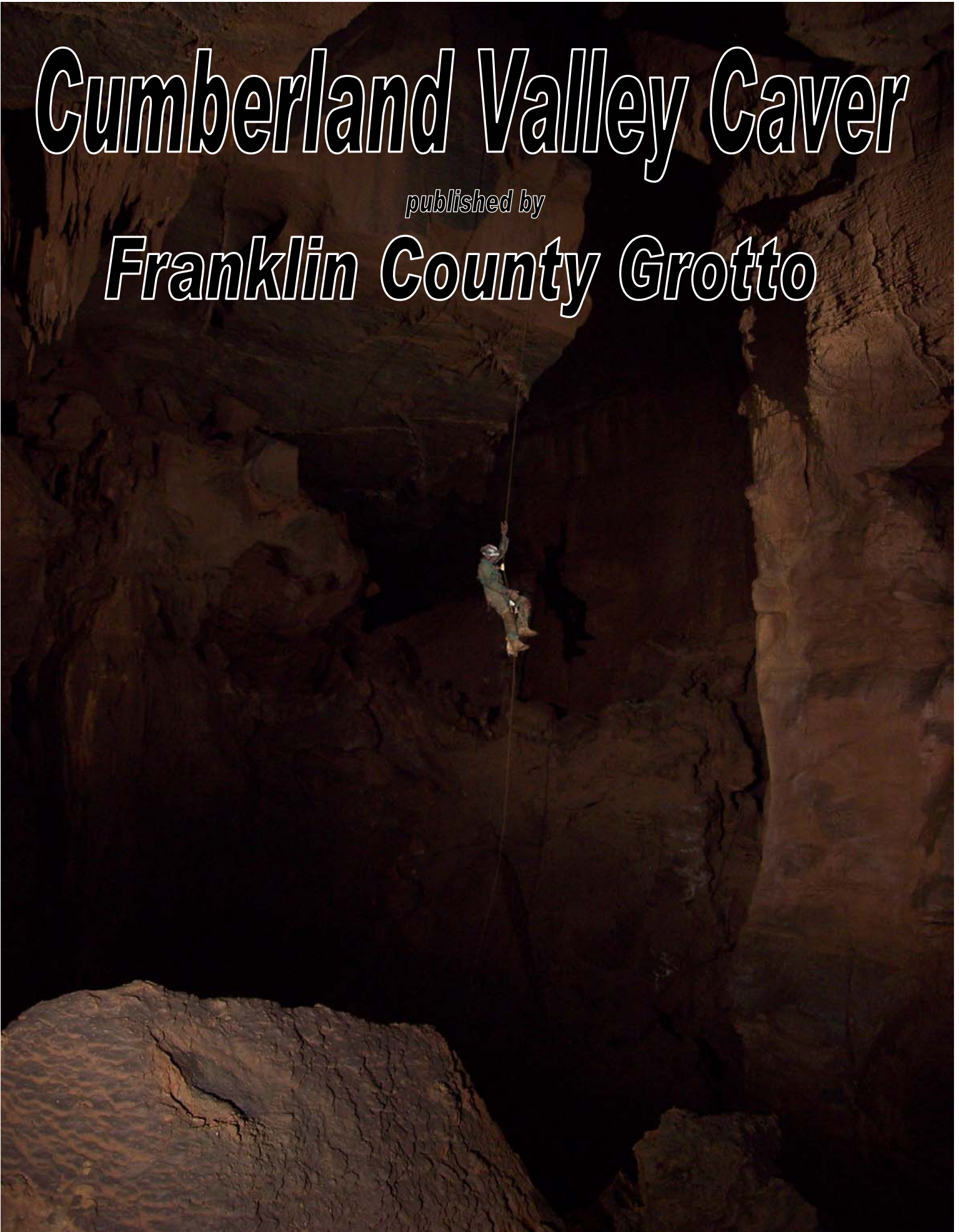


# Cumberland Valley Caver

*published by*

## Franklin County Grotto



# CUMBERLAND VALLEY CAVER

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**FRANKLIN COUNTY GROTTO**  
An affiliate of the National Speleological Society

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Franklin County Grotto meetings are held the 3rd Monday of the month in New Franklin Fire Department, New Franklin, PA. The fire department is located on PA Route 316, 3 miles east of I-81 (exit #14). The meeting starts at 7:30 PM. Both grotto caving trips and smaller individual trips are planned at these meetings. All members are invited depending on their ability to safely participate. You must attend at least one vertical training session in order to participate in vertical trips. Contact any of the above individuals for more information.

The Cumberland Valley Caver is published a couple of times per year by the Franklin County Grotto PA. All cave related articles should be submitted to the editor for publication. The contents of this publication are not copyrighted unless previously copyrighted by the author. Material from this publication may be reprinted by other official organizations of the National Speleological Society without prior permission provided credit is given to the original author and this publication, and the article is not changed in anyway. Other interested parties must request permission in advance. Franklin County Grotto actively participates in a newsletter exchange program. All exchanges should be mailed to: Ken Jones, 4446 Duffield Rd, Chambersburg, PA 17201. Information regarding exchanges should be coordinated with the secretary so the exchange list can be updated.

**Cover:** FCG member, Terry McClanathan, ascending the Southwest Dome in Hellhole. This dome was scaled by Bill Stone and Yvonne Droms in 2002 or 2003. The total height is about 270'. The main drop is 247'. It is the second deepest (highest) pit in W. Va. *Photo: by Brian Masney*

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## ***From the Editor.....***

The year is off to a good start. We had good participation getting the new ladder into Cleversburg sink. It was a long time coming and we just did get it in before it re-flooded for God knows how long. Thanks Howard for another good design and sturdy construction. We will continue our efforts at the Cleversburg area with projects to update the Kiosk and place signs with guidance regarding parking in the area and use of the park’s bathroom facilities. This includes an education program for cavers going into Carnegie. We plan to continue Jonathan’s very successful Wednesday night caving trips and are attempting to have several vertical practice sessions that hopefully will lead to a couple vertical trips for our new vertical cavers.

Extra effort is being directed to getting the website back up and running. We plan to make good use of the website regarding status of caves closed due to the White Nose Syndrome, status of water level in Cleversburg sink, guidance for Carnegie Cave, and several other nice to have subjects.

The New Year Party went well, raised lots of money with the auction. Todd R. presented a good draft of the Fantasy map. We are still filling in gaps with new sketches. All members are now also aware of just what a “White Elephant Auction” is!

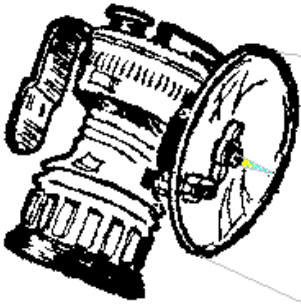
I want to mention the “White Nose Syndrome (WNS)” that has hit the bat population in New England very hard. Caver support of closed caves is solicited. So far the Franklin County area is supporting the approach of avoiding infected areas and cleaning all gear thoroughly between caves and trips and we will be following guidance established by government agencies and cave property owners. We plan to keep all members up to date on “Official” status of local and regional caves. Pat and I are finalizing the call out roster, which will be forwarded to all participants for review very soon. Thanks to Jim, Jonathan, Nick, and Terry for submitting articles and photos for use in this issue.

Sincerely, Ken Tayman

# Speleo-Spotlight...

Todd Roberts

NSS# 48351



**T**odd's first wild cave adventure was as a teenager when he went to a week long summer caving camp in Pendleton County, WV. Quarry Cave, New Trout, Kee Cave and The Sinks of Gandy were the caves that got him hooked. Several years later he found himself driving in that same area, recognized the parking area near New Trout and scrambled up to the entrance. This rekindled his interest in caving. He recruited some friends, read up a little, got some maps and went caving whenever he could. His mother gave him membership in the NSS as a Christmas present, hoping it would get him together with some knowledgeable safe cavers.

After a few years he moved to Winchester, VA. and decided it was time to join a grotto. He found Tri-State Grotto on the internet and went to their meeting the next night in Martinsburg. There he met up with Jonathan Peterson and me, who were also members of Franklin County Grotto. We invited Todd to a Franklin County Grotto Vertical practice session and also recruited him to assist with a mapping project in Huntingdon County, PA. This turned out to be a very smart move on our part. Todd started out the survey on the "dumb" end of the tape and quickly assumed compass, book, sketching and cartographic responsibilities and became a "KEY" member of the survey team.

He finds it difficult to name a favorite cave. He likes mazy, multi-level caves, with pretty formations, streams and waterfalls (don't we all?) Some of his more memorable caving moments include the first time he entered Mystic River in Scott Hollow, exiting Sharps cave into an unexpected 3" of snow that fell while in the cave, the chest deep water in narrow canyon passage in Mercer County, WV that exited at the top of a water fall in a steep ravine. He enjoys cave photography and enjoys the challenge to try and light large rooms and



**Todd at Cleversburg Sink ladder project. Photo by Ken T.**

passages. Just getting started in his vertical caving career, he did Elkhorn Mountain, Roadside pit and 185 foot Sites Cave. He hasn't had any really scary situations yet, but has found himself in situations where a misstep or wrong move would be "very bad" or, after squeezing through a long tight spot realizing that if anything were to happen, rescue would be next to impossible.

Todd currently works as an Audio/visual Tech for Shenandoah University Pharmacy School, recording lectures for students who take classes online from around the country. Previously he did audio work at the Kennedy Center in DC. Great to have Todd as FCG member.

*Written by Ken Tayman* □

# Return to the Omega System

*By Terry McClanathan NSS 12103*

The lure of deep pits has always been a strong magnet for me. This would explain why a cave such as the Omega System, in the extreme southwest corner of Virginia, would attract my attention. The cave is the deepest in the east at nearly 1300', and there are at least five pits in excess of 100' deep. Two of these exceed the 200 foot mark. I had been in the lower Blowing Entrance Sept. '06 on my first trip there. I didn't think that entrance was particularly difficult, and it included two of the hundred footers, plus a chance to look up a high dome which extended to a height of 200+ feet. This had not been rigged yet at that time. When an invitation by Ben Swartz and Mike Ficco to join teams that would be working on leads accessed by the upper Lori-Cori Entrance appeared on my e-mail late this past summer, how could I possibly refuse. Knowing something of the super-hardcore nature of Swartz, Ficco, and some of the other team members, I did venture a question regarding the nature of a trip in this entrance. The only reply I received was, "Well, it's different." (From the Blowing Entrance).

And so after 7.5 hours on the highway, followed by six miles up a narrow road which had more hairpin turns than any road I've ever seen in both the Virginias, then four miles back a gravel fire-tower road, I found myself at the designated camping area for all trips to the upper end of the system. It was 9AM, Saturday, Sept. 15, '07. There were, I think, 16 cavers milling around in various stages of preparation. I knew some of them. Ben and Mike were the primary organizers. Tommy Shifflet was there. Jack Thomison, a TAG caving friend I've known for many years, was present. I'm pretty sure Jack is a bit older than me, so he would have been the oldest participant. Bob Alderson, from Roanoke area, I knew from survey trips together in Germany Valley caves. This would be his first trip in Omega. The others I had never met before and I do not remember most of their names. I will say, though, that they collectively appeared to be the meanest, leanest, caving machines I may have ever laid eyes upon. I didn't know there were that many really tough

cavers in the entire country, let alone gathered in one place at the same time. This was actually the last weekend of a nine day work effort in and around the system. Some of those present had been caving all week. Lines had been strung between trees, and these were full of drying cave apparel coated with generous quantities of caked mud. All the cavers were wearing big smiles with no hint of weariness to be seen. There was little doubt in my mind who the weakest link in this group was going to be. Once again, I queried, "What is this end of the cave like?" The answer, "Well, it's different."

As is often the case, there were a few no-shows (maybe they were the smart ones). This meant a reshuffling of assignments. Jack was on a team that was off to complete a dig in nearby Hairy Hole, and then survey whatever lay beyond. Three teams consisting of four cavers each would enter the Lori-Cori entrance to Omega. I think I got put on the team with the easiest assignment (at least our objectives were closest to the entrance). I wasn't going to complain. I was getting just a bit concerned looking at all those wiry, muscular bodies, totally lacking in even an ounce of excess body tissue. Mike Ficco was my team leader. I wondered if Ben's secret instructions to Mike might have been something like "keep a close eye on McClanathan". Besides Mike and me, Kelly Mathes and Jon Lillestolen made up the rest of our team. Tommy and Ben each lead fast teams of four which would go deeper into the cave. Our objectives were to survey any existing leads already marked on the map, plus check for new leads and survey those we found.

The hike down to the entrance was less than a mile but very steep. It would be "fun" coming back up. The Lori-Cori entrance had been gated following the unfortunate death of Dick Grahm in 2003.

Past the entrance, the passage consisted of a series of short crawls, climbdowns, and narrow canyons. After about 500 feet the first pit was

encountered. This was a nice 90 foot free drop. Shortly past this pit, the nature of the cave began to change. A narrow canyon cuts into the floor as you progress forward. It is necessary to stay high in this canyon for many hundreds of feet, while the floor below you keeps dropping. The walls are slippery and in many places footholds are dubious. There are also several short sections where footholds are non-existent. Friction traverses and tricky maneuvers seemed to be the only manner of traverse. At one point in the canyon it was necessary to rappel about 30' to a lower level.

The section between the 30' drop and the top of the big pit, called Gollum's Abyss, was the hardest to traverse. The canyon continued as before, except it was deeper, more slippery, and with even fewer good holds. There were several places where we passed packs along to make the traverse less cumbersome, and less dangerous. I know that if these traverses were in, for instance say Hellhole, there would have been safety lines to clip into. As was pointed out to me by Mike and Ben, if that were done in Omega, there would have to be a thousand feet of extra rope just for the traverses. This was definitely a gymnastic cave. As I thought about climbing back through this canyon after a hard cave trip, my anxiety level increased. I would certainly have to be extra cautious. After about another 500 feet of this "exhilarating" canyon, we came to Gollum's Abyss. This was the pit where Dick fell. I could only cringe, thinking about the ordeal and mental state of the rescuers who were involved with getting his body out of the cave.

Gollum's Abyss starts out with a 20' drop to a rebelay ledge. From here it opens into a vast blackness. The thing was huge! It started out at about fifty feet in diameter and then got bigger! From the rebelay point, the drop was 213' free. About a third of the way down, the walls on one side were covered in a white cascading flowstone, which might have been as much as a hundred feet long. Coming off the ends of the flowstone were draperies whose ends tapered to a myriad of twisting helectites. It might be a long, slow climb back up this pit, but at least it would be scenic. Once on the floor, we climbed up a large pile of breakdown from which we could watch other

cavers descend. The pit was truly awesome. I got the feeling that those more familiar with the cave, having lived through the tragedy of Dick's fall to his death in this pit, have, understandably, a bad feeling for the place. But on its own merits, I think Gollum's Abyss is probably the most spectacular pit in the two Virginia's.

At the far side of the breakdown pile at the bottom of Gollum's Abyss is a small hole blowing generous amounts of air, which leads to the rest of the cave. Mike informed me that considerable modification was needed here before the original explorers could get through. We downclimbed through the constriction for about fifteen feet to a tight crawl. While the top part of the cave (before Gollum's Abyss) was difficult, this crawl was the only genuinely nasty, gnarly part of the cave I would see on this trip. Fortunately it wasn't much over fifty feet long, and opened up into a fairly easy canyon. At one point we took a bypass which led to a welcome strolling passage lasting for about 500 feet. Mike said originally that the canyon could only be followed at a lower level they referred to as Razor Alley, which was pretty bad. I didn't need to be convinced, and was glad the easy alternate route had been found. Not much past the easy stroll we came to a rigged up climb of 35 feet. This took us up into the beginning of the Gael Force section of the cave, which was where we were to start mapping and checking for leads.

We looked at a few high leads which were nothing more than upper levels of the same passage we were already in, but then I found a nice virgin section that was heading in a direction away from our canyon. The survey was on. There were four of us so we did a pretty good job of dividing up the work load. Mike assumed the hardest job as sketcher. The passage was complex, consisting of basically three intertwined levels. All of it was virgin. Portions of the middle and bottom levels were nicely decorated with colorful flowstones topped by small snakedancer heligmites. There were also lots of delicate straws and the usual stalactite/stalagmite displays. Even though the survey was tedious, it sure was pretty.

We got 410 feet of new survey, and then our passage popped out into a large room. I was doing point and setting stations. At first I thought we had hit something really sweet, and my adrenaline starting going. Then I espied footprints and a survey station. How could this room have been surveyed, but not the passage we had just come through? Mike checked his notes to try and determine where we were (remember, The Omega System is 20+ miles long). The survey station in the room was a high number, indicating it might have been the end of a long previous survey trip, and even though the leads from the passage we had just surveyed were pretty obvious, this room may have seemed like a good point to terminate a long trip. We eventually found other stations and were able to determine that the room had been entered from a completely opposite direction. Mystery solved, we quickly tied in to the station in the room and went off to look for other leads.

We checked several back out in the main passage, and even started surveying into one of the more promising, but they all looped back around into the main canyon, and therefore Mike disqualified them as new survey. We continued further into the cave, but found nothing which wasn't just an upper level of our present trending passage. Our trek took us about 3000 feet further along what was now a stream passage, mostly of walking dimensions, interrupted by two short water crawls.. At one point there was a precarious up climb of about forty feet which seemed to be heading about 90 degrees away from the stream passage. Mike got up the first part of the climb, and while he thought he could probably climb the top part, he decided not to try it. A wise move, I thought. Deep in a cave like the Omega System, is not the place to risk injury. The lead was noted and would be tackled with proper aid on another trip. We proceeded as far as a rigged waterfall up climb, but found no more promising leads along the way.

The hour was getting late and a decision was made to start out of the cave. I was a bit tired and I knew I would be slow in some parts of the cave. My greatest concern was the deep canyon traverse between Gollum's Abyss and the 90' pit. To avoid a backup at the tight crawl before Gollum's Abyss

(going out) and at the big pit itself, we split up, with Jon and Kelly heading out first. When it was our turn, Mike climbed first. As his light illuminated the walls of the shaft, I once again admired the vastness of the pit. My turn to climb. I rested several times and admired the twisting draperies with their helectite tassels. When I reached the top I think Mike was taking a nap. It probably took me about twenty minutes to climb that 213 feet, and truthfully I was glad it wasn't any deeper. I hadn't reached exhaustion yet, but I was definitely getting tired. I'm not even sure if Mike had worked up a sweat. We ascended the 20' drop and started traversing the deep canyon. It wasn't any easier on the way out. All of my moves were slow and deliberate. Once again, at some of the trickier spots, Mike helped me with my pack and gave me some pointers on the safest way to proceed. We eventually made it to and up the 90 footer, which seemed like it was well over a hundred feet to me. More traversing, and by sometime around 3AM we were back at the entrance culvert. The trip had only been fourteen hours, but I was easily as tired as I would have been after a 20+ hour trip to Silent Stream in Hellhole. My concluding thoughts were that this part of the Omega System was certainly "different" from the Blowing Hole side.

Once out of the cave, Mike and I hiked (at least Mike probably was hiking, I was trudging) up the steep mountainside to the vehicles, where we were greeted by a roaring campfire. We sat around, shot the bull, ate a bite, and waited for the other two Omega teams. They hadn't shown up by 4:30. I pitched my tent and slept pretty soundly for a few hours. I was awakened by voices at about 8:30. Ben and Tommy's teams had just returned from their "routine" 20 hour trips, garnering over 1000' of new survey each. I didn't even think they looked winded. I'd like to return to see more of this end of the cave someday, but I'll have to get myself psyched up for it. I'm not sure in this case if knowing what to expect will be an advantage. Mike tried to console me by saying that many cavers got pretty tired on their first trips into the Lori-Cori entrance to the system. He said it got easier with repetition. I'm not certain that will be true for me. Maybe part of it is an age thing. I guess I'll just have to wait and see. □

# ILL FATED CAVE

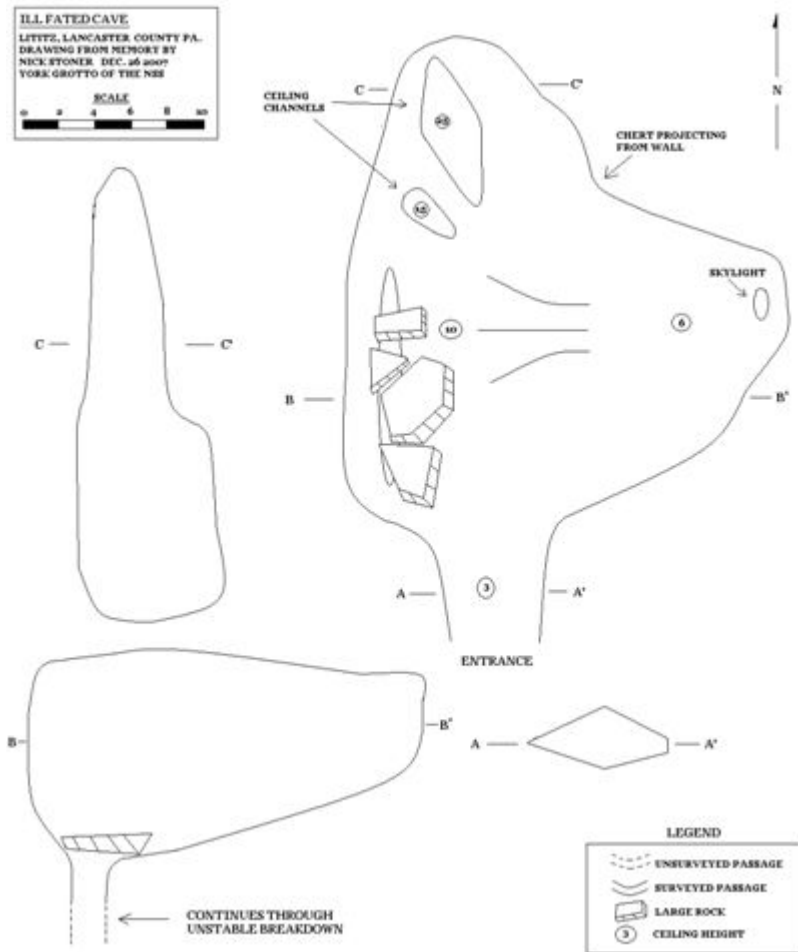
By Nick Stoner December 27th 2007

If history has taught us anything it is that progress waits for no one and nothing. Take, for example, the stripping of the rain forest, parking lots where fertile fields used to be and the loss of the real muscle cars. Some really great things are taken away, and no matter how much you want them back it can't be done.

Such is the case with one of my latest discoveries. By the time you are reading this, "Ill Fated Cave" has probably been destroyed by strip mining. Just recently, in the quarry in which I work, a sizable hole was opened up after blasting at a depth of about 150 feet below the original grade. I couldn't allow a cave with such possibility go unexplored. So, some after-hours covert activity had to be undertaken. Sometimes it's easier to ask forgiveness than permission.

The entrance was a very stable looking solution tube about 3 feet tall and about 6 feet long. It opened up into a fairly large room with a breakdown-strewn floor. On the one side there was apparently more passage that had been blasted away to form a skylight in the other quarry face. The larger of the two ceiling channels (probably more of a dome pit) extended quite high and may even have more passage on a higher level. The feature that intrigued me the most is the slot in the floor. It extends down almost completely vertical for an unknown depth. With the removal of some ugly breakdown, the possibility for more cave is a certainty. The walls have no scalloping, which suggests slow moving water, and the absence of any form of dripstone says the passage may have been flooded most of the time.

It will be disheartening to see the forces of man destroy this small karst aquifer, but without the quarrying operations I would not have been given this small glimpse into the sub-terrain (or a paycheck for that matter). □



## Ropes-For-Slopes Or

### What do Botanists and ecologists know about vertical work?

Chapter 2 (continued from Memorial Day 2007)

Jim Hart, FCG

During this chapter I will try to relate things a bit more un-creatively. Although humor is a good thing, sometimes it's best to back off and just relate the facts. Before I do, however, I must let you in on a little known fact. When using the top bunk after a night with Mr. Brooks, please, please remember where you are. Around 4:30am, nature called and I tried to answer. As I began to get out of my bunk, I kinda forgot where I was and hit the floor with a quite loud THUMP. Luckily my feet broke my fall and I was only shaken a little. God watches over kids and cavers...On to the things at hand.

During our relaxation session with Mr. Brooks the previous evening, Jonathan had decided that he better get up a bit early and rig the ropes before the climbing crowd showed up. As it turned out, both he and I were up about the same time and while I set up the coffeepot for breakfast, Jonathan set off for the rocks to rig two ropes for the day's session. As the coffee was beginning to perk, Rocky Gleason, County Natural Areas Inventory Coordinator, arrived. As the rest of the crew began to arise, Rocky and I hit the coffee and chatted about the upcoming days events. Around 9:00am or so, we were all set to begin so we headed up to the base of the rocks and made the climb around the side of the rocks to the top. Kenny Tayman was already there and had brought all of his equipment along. We set out the various equipment and discussed what everything was used for such as rappel racks, various types of ropes, different types of ascending gear, etc. The group included Tina Walther from the Fish and Boat Commission, Kathy Gipe, a herpetologist, Mary Walsh, an aquatic biologist and Rocky Gleason. Later in the day, Charlie Eichelberger, an ecologist would be arriving with his girlfriend, Tina. The ratio of participants to instructors was 2 to 1 which made for both an enjoyable and educational day. The only problem that I saw was that the folks I had original set the training class up for, the botanists, were nowhere to be seen. It seems that the weather was such that they were likely out looking for that new sprout or seedling beginning to break through the ground. Amazingly, it had been upwards of 90 degrees the day before but today it was a rather comfortable 75-80 and sunny.



Kathy and the gear

I decided to begin with a short (yeah I know, nothing I say is ever "short") discussion about the evolution of vertical caving gear and what we, the instructors, all used individually. We then had a brief introduction on knot tying and some basic rigging techniques. Since this was an introductory course, we didn't get into the heavy stuff but left the participants begin to get a bit of practice tying knots and rigging some surface ropes, none of which we would be using. It was a pleasant surprise to see the folks tie correct bowlines and prussiks with very little assistance.

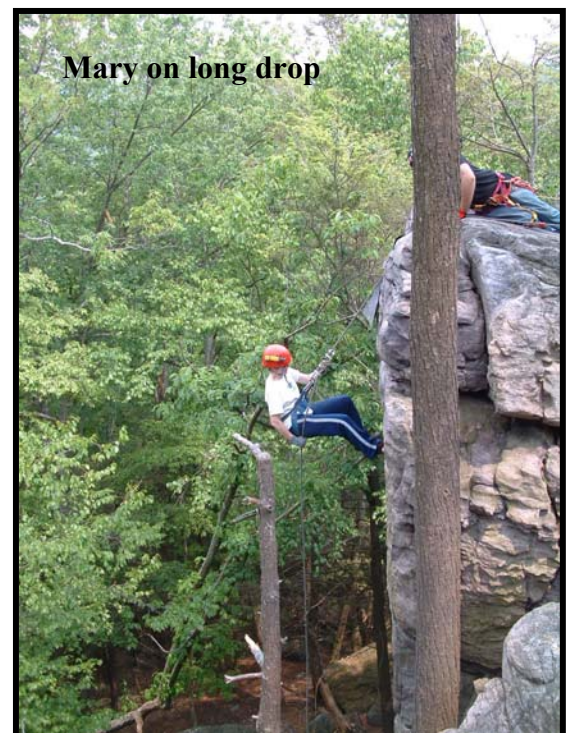
Jonathan had rigged a short, sloping drop of about 30 feet. As Jonathan and I assisted the participants with rigging, Ken stayed at the bottom and provided a bottom belay. Things went smoothly with each participant getting done to the bottom with little to no assistance. As each person reached the bottom, Ken showed them how to apply a bottom belay in case someone would loose hold of the rope or would loose control of their rappel. No one seemed uncomfortable with the drop and picked up the techniques fairly easily. After each person had the opportunity to make the drop at least 2 times, we headed over to the Rappel Crack area to begin dropping the longer, steeper drop. A quick break for lunch and some general banter and we began again.



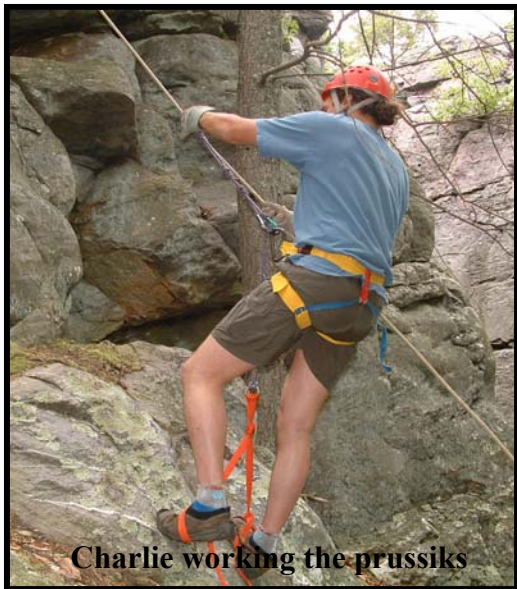
The group didn't seem to have any problems negotiating the longer drop. Rocky, being as tall and lanky as he was, had some problems getting over the lip but seemed to really enjoy the drop. Mary appeared a bit apprehensive about the coming rappel but got over the lip with no problems and descended to the bottom. I was below giving the bottom belay at the time as Ken had taken a short break. As Mary got off rope, she gave what sounded to be a sigh of relief and remarked that her heart was beating a mile-a-minute (luckily there weren't any botanists around). She said that she had been a bit scared the whole way

down but managed to keep a smile on her face. Tina, meanwhile, was above getting ready to descend. She had said earlier that she had done some rock climbing in the past and her form on the rappel reflected that fact. Her legs were angled just right into the rock keeping her in balance and able to descend in several bounds, just like the pros. Kathy, who also was on the tall and lanky side, got over the lip without any difficulties and made a great descent as did Charlie and his girlfriend, Katy, who had showed up a bit earlier as we were finishing up with lunch.

Everyone hiked back up to the top for another rappel as I decided to do an ascent. Rocky hung around to give me a bit of help stabilizing the rope and I hooked up my Butt Strap Harness rope walker system and started up. I was about 20 feet off the bottom when I realized that I was taking a bit of time (must be the cigarettes) making the ascent. The other folks were at the top and waiting to drop so I decided to change over and drop back down so everyone else would have some more time on rope. Rocky told me, as I got to the bottom, that I was really taking off up the rope. It hadn't seemed that way as I remember when I could make the climb in around 35 seconds. Now it seemed that it was going to be around 5 minutes or so. At that rate it would likely take me over an hour to get out of Hellhole. If I'm going to make the 2009 batcount down in West Virginia at Hellhole, I had better do some prepping including quitting the smokes. As I was packing up my ascending equipment, the rest of the crew made another descent.



I was down below talking with Rocky and discussing who would be coming down. He stated that the way that Mary had seemed after her first drop, she was likely done for the day. As he was saying this, I heard her voice ring out “On Rope”. I shouted back “Belay On and she dropped over the lip and down in a perfect rappel. As she hit bottom, she said “Wow, that was scary” with a big smile on her face. She seemed to really enjoy the drop even though it seemed to scare her a bit. This is the type of attitude that many of the folks I work with have in the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. They don’t give up at what they do.



Charlie working the prussiks

As the folks all made their last descent of the day on the longer drop, we headed over to the short drop again to try and work up some prussiking. Both Jonathan and I had some prussic knots in our gear so we attached a set and let whoever wanted to try an ascent. Both of the sets of prussiks were set up for either Jonathan or I and not for others so it was with a bit of difficulty that Charlie was able to get up the climb.

As it was getting a bit late in the day, we decided to finish up. Everyone assisted with derigging and packing gear. We needed to get down to the cabin and have it cleaned up and closed up by 5:00pm so we decided to drop off the gear at the vehicles. As I headed down the trail to get my things, I found Rocky and Kathy headed up the trail carrying all my gear and the others had my cooler. There was very little for me to do except check out the cabin, close all the windows and lock up. Jonathan gave me a hand and we had everything cleaned and locked in about 15 minutes. Things go really well when you have a group that works together.

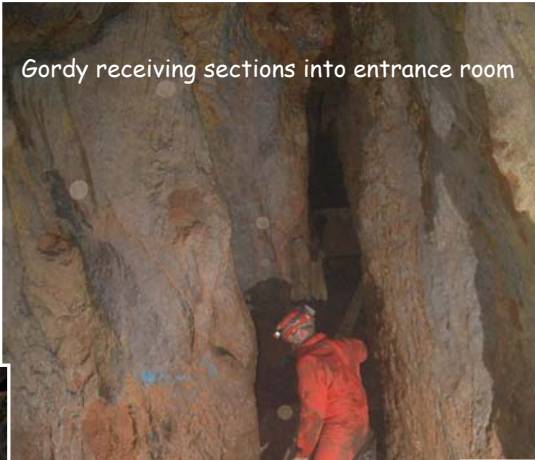
This was one of the most enjoyable days I’ve had doing vertical practice and instructing folks. It wouldn’t have been possible if not for the help and support of both Jonathan Peterson and Kenny Tayman. They were great to work with and all of the participants remarked on how easily they were to both understand and get along with. I am hoping that we can do this again next year somewhere out in the southwest portion of the state so that the folks from the Pittsburgh office of the PA Natural Heritage Program can attend. Housing is available at the Bear Run Nature Reserve and the rocks at the Baughman Overlook in Ohiopyle State Park would make a great training site.



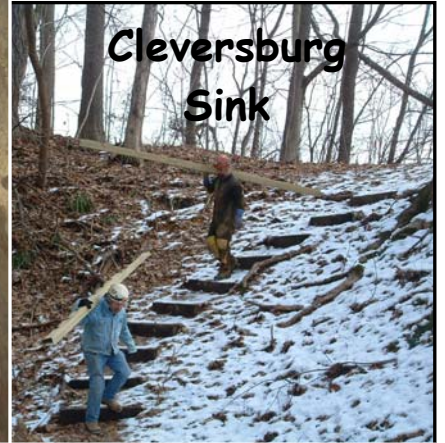
Participants (Left to Right): Rocky Gleason, Mary Walsh, Charlie Eichelberger, Kathy Gipe, Tina Walthers and Katy (Charlie’s girlfriend). □



Unloading Gear



Gordy receiving sections into entrance room



Cleversburg Sink



Old ladder



Todd



Todd & Ish lowering new ladder



Up and out with old



Ish positioning new ladder knee deep in cold water



Testing new ladder



Assembling Steps

# New Ladder in Cleversburg Sink

January 27, 2008 *by Ken Tayman*

recommended a pressure treated, 2x4, laminated ladder that would be strong, secure and long lasting. He would design and construct it in sections, so we could get it through the twisted entrance passage and then out into the crevice where it would be lowered down to the stream.

We picked January 27<sup>th</sup> to install the ladder only to find out that as of the previous Wednesday the water level has already risen to about the second rung of the old ladder. We almost wasted a three month window of dry cave. We decided to try and get it in anyway, before it flooded again for 5 more years. I put out the call for assistance and got several responses indicating they would be there, but weren't planning to get wet.

The following FCG members showed up to place the ladder: Howard White, Kerry Speelman, Gordy Ley, Dane Wagle, Jonathan Peterson, Jim Hart, Ish

**Gordy & Jonathan hauling steps to cave.** *Photo by Ken T*

Sometime around the year 2000, I made a motion that we replace the ladder in Cleversburg Sink with a longer one that came to the top of the wall in the entrance steam passage. The current one only came about halfway up and required you to stand on the tippy top of the vertical legs, squeeze one leg into a crevice and pull yourself up with a knotted hand line. I am not aware of anyone falling here, but if they did, their head would be dropping about 18 feet before they hit the floor.

During this seven year period, the water level was monitored and measured frequently, with the water being almost 30' deep at times. In October 2007, the caved went dry for 3 months, and we just squeezed getting the new ladder in as the water level started to rise again.

At the November '07 FCG grotto meeting we discussed the construction of the ladder, and Howard

**Howard lowering section into cave to Ish.** *Photo by KenT*



Passing section down to Todd.

*Photo by Ken T*

Urcuyo, Todd Roberts and me-Ken Tayman. Around 11:15 we split up the load of ladder sections, steps, battery powered tools and headed to the cave. After some difficulty getting the lock opened we started lower the sections down into the cave. We quickly found that the 12' sections were about as long as we could have gotten thru the passage and the decision to do the assembly inside the big room was right.

We assembled the two halves and then had to decide whether we could fit the 20' ladder thru the crevice and lower it to the stream as one piece. It would be close, but Jonathan made the decision to go for it. After another 45 minutes or so we had one, 20' long, very heavy ladder. It was time to try and slide it into the passage.

All of a sudden the ladder was looking longer and wider than when sitting in the big room. It took over an hour to twist, pull, poke and wriggle it into the passage. All this the time, we had to be careful not to knock Todd, Ish or Jonathan off of the ledge. Once we got the ladder in, then we discovered it was really heavy and had to figure a way to control its

transition from horizontal on the top of the ledge to vertical down into the crevice.

Todd and Ish were the ones wading in the water, searching for positions on the ledge where they could get a secure hold on the ladder with out it pulling them off. We spent lots of time working this out. Jim had a lot of input. Jonathan was in the middle between to cavers at top, and the cavers at the bottom and ended up a referee, trying to coordinate one person speaking at a time. The noise was echoing greatly. We tied some webbing to the bottom of the ladder, but couldn't find a place to control it from.

Dane and I were up top and had worked our way over the crevice where there was a window we could look down through. We could see the ladder on the ledge, Todd out on the ledge and Jonathan. Dane suggested we throw a rope down through the window, tie it to the center of the ladder and then we could sort take the weight of the ladder on the rope at its fulcrum, and then it could be tilted and guided into place. This idea was the key to success.



Ish, Dane & Howard assembling steps. *Photo by Kerry S.*

About 15 minutes later the ladder was in place and was being positioned for the best footing. It was just a little too long. The upper 2' protruded up past the edge so far that it partially blocked the exit route. Howard decided to cut about 2 feet off the top in case there was ever an emergency and someone needed assistance to exit the cave. We all got a chance to test it. It was very sturdy and just the right length. The only thing that wasn't perfect was that to get stable footing, the ladder is placed at a slight angle off vertical, but it is securely placed in a notch to keep it from sliding.

We removed the old ladder which we believe has been in place for 20 years or more. Most of that time under water. This new ladder is so much better and so well made, we figure Howard will be close to 90 years old when time comes to replace it. He said that will be someone else's responsibility to do that. This project was more involved than I anticipated when I suggested the replacement so many years ago. But the results appear to be worth it. We all exited the cave around 4 PM. That made for a 5 hour project in the cave.

We all stopped by Pharos truck stop for lunch, for which Franklin County Grotto was picking up the tab. While there, we learned that Pharos had just been sold a few weeks earlier. The new owner was there and we had a short discussion with him. It is now called the "Shippensburg Travel Plaza" and the new owner is Mr. Abdul Rathore. He said that the cavers can continue to park in the back of the lot as we could with the previous owners. Also, FCG has added Mr. Rathore to our newsletter mailing list and we will be sending him a complimentary copy of the Cumberland Valley Caver.

Cost of materials: \$106+  
Very good project!! □



Howard and Ken T securing steps.

*Photo by Kerry S.*



Maneuvering ladder into crevice.

*Photo by Kerry Speelman*