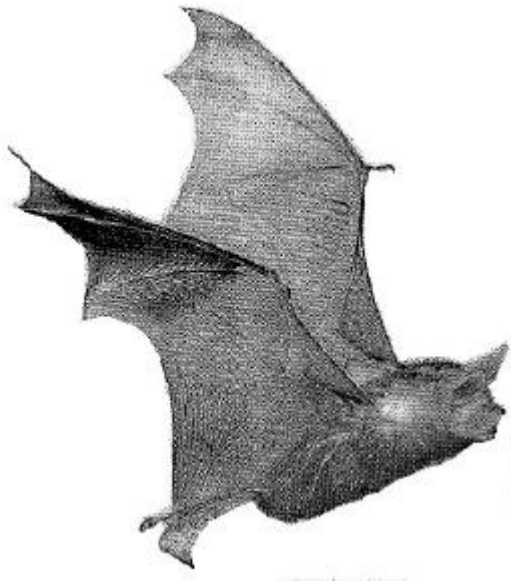


**The Florida
Speleologist**
Volume 34, Number 1
Winter 1998



It's been a while but it's back!

"You Don't Know Till Ya Go"

***There is a photo contest
coming up details inside!***



The Florida Speleologist

Vol. 34 No. 1 Winter 1997

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The Florida Speleological Society

is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the safe exploration, scientific study, and conservation of Florida caves. Anyone interested in caves or caving is invited to join. Regular membership is \$15 per year; family memberships are \$5 (family members receive no publications). Subscribing (nonvoting) memberships are \$10 per year. An additional postal charge may apply to international subscribers. Individual copies of *The Florida Speleologist*, as available, are \$2.50 each.

The society meets at 7:30 PM on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month in room CG-?? of the J. Hillis Miller Health Center on the University of Florida campus in Gainesville, Florida. Contact the Society at the address given for membership applications, subscriptions, orders, or information.

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Ken Peakman with carbide light in Confederate cave, Paul Smith in the Catacombs, Ken Peakman at entrance to Deadmans Cave, Troy Fussell in Tumbling Rock. Pictures taken by Ken Peakman and Brian Williams.

Back Cover:

Warrens Revisited by Jerry Johnson and ????

Quick Trip

by Caren Beck

The car clock read 7:02 PM as our small caravan of 5 cars motored away from Ocala, not quite knowing the adventure which lay ahead.

Destination: Confederate cave
Goal: To survive
Out time: Hopefully tonight

We were a motley crew, yet we shared the same unquenchable thirst... to delve to the very depths of the earth. Tonight's explorers ranged in experience from none to almost none. Sullivan and I were the ring-leaders; although James and Allan had the others convinced that they really knew what they were doing. Happy Birthday to Jennifer, James' wife, who voluntarily (very few weapons were involved) elected to go caving on this special day. Christina, Allan's wife, also joined the party. Yet another fearless couple joined the zoo, our very own Lee and Carley. I coerced three of my co-workers and former friends, Dang, Jessica, and Bruce, to put away their remote controls, text books, and cross-dressing apparel on this night. Sullivan was our fearless leader and trip planner. I was the designated photographer (incriminating pictures available for a small price). Dang wins the award for the most (over) prepared of the group...complete with handkerchief and face mask (dust filter).

At 7:34, the caravan moved off-road following what appeared to be a cow trail (everyone hoping that their Fearless Leaders were not lost). Luckily, the city road signs kept us on the right track (pretty soon they'll be putting up stop lights) and we soon arrived, right on time, 35 minutes late.

For the next hour, consisted of herding everyone into the cave. We set up some of the FSS ladders, but they didn't look like they'd been used in some time, so we decided to test them out. We flipped a coin and I lost. I safetied onto a rope (I may be crazy, but there are a few things I am in no hurry to see) and started down the ladder. Did you know that cable ladders can break? Well they can and do and it did. Luckily, we had replacements and that one decided to stay intact.

We sent our cave-babies down the ladder (on belay in case another ladder decided to break or in case someone slipped). James hung out about halfway down on a ledge to coach and assist (tickle and distract) while Allan and I helped from below. We entered the cave with acceptable losses (0 deaths, 0 broken bones, lots of laughs).

After safely landing at the cave entrance, we eagerly mustered up the energy to crawl on. Because of the nature of the group, we naturally stuck together like glue (broke up and went 10 different directions at once). The ring leaders were glad not to have to worry about losing anyone (lawsuits). Several of the caver wannabies learned first hand of the symbiotic relationship between man and kneepad. The more venturesome (stupid) kids crawled down the "s" shaped crawl that bends right, turns into a vertical drop, and bends sharp right (you know, that direction that your body just doesn't go). Everyone climbed (some more gracefully than others) the muddy slope in the southern section of the cave to see the crystals.

Many exclamations were heard about how cool this was. Others noticed the fossilized shells in the wall (it's easy to forget that Florida was once under water). Other fantastic formations included the aptly named "Picnic Table" - a true marvel of nature. We were especially impressed with those formations near the entrance that bear a remarkable resemblance to beer cans and potato chip bags. These were so impressive, we just had to collect a few of them and keep them as souvenirs.

On our way out, we decided to leave a priceless gift for posterity... a record of us having visited the cave. Much to our dismay, we found that no one had thought to bring along a knife or other suitable engraving tool. We didn't even have a can of spray paint among us. Oh well. Maybe next time. :-)

YUCATAN 1996

by Buford Pruitt, Jr.
November 1996

I flew Saturday, October 5 to Cancun to meet up with Bruce Morgan and Ann Harman. The next morning we drove south with our gear to Buddy Quattlebaum's Dos Ojos Dive Center. Buddy set us up with camping, jungle wandering, dry caving, snorkel caving and cave diving: campsite, guide, porters and pack horse, and in my case cave diving, all inexpensively.

Throughout this adventure we would be on lands owned by the Ejido Jacinto Pat An ejido is a Mexican version of common ownership where a group of people, in this case Mayan Indians, are granted by the Mexican government ownership of land for agricultural purposes.

Sunday afternoon, we packed our way in to our crude base camp at a cenote called M1, which is an entrance of Systema Ejido Jacinto Pat (SEJP). There is a tenthouse consisting of a tarpaulin roof and sides made of greenhouse shade screening where we stored our food and the Mexicans slept. Cooking was done on a rusted-out, single-burner propane stove, and there were several tables and a bench made of lashed sticks and plywood. An "outhouse" in the nearby bush is founded on a crack in the rock and is visually shielded from the trail with more greenhouse screening.

The ground at the camp is nothing more than the sharply jagged, eggcrate-shaped top of the limestone bedrock, with only the thinnest mantle of organic soil settled into small depressions on its surface, over which thick roots and lianas only add to its unevenness. The ground is always wet, so sitting or sleeping just anywhere is not an option. Inside the tarp tent, a hammock was needed which I didn't have, and anyway, I didn't think the tarp tent would provide much protection from mosquitos. I could see that the possibility of finding flat, smooth ground for my tent and sleeping bag was grim.

Abandoning base camp, I climbed down the lashed stick ladder to the M1 entrance and found, at the very edge of the boundary between twilight and aphotic zones, a tent-sized flat spot

completely out of the rain and ceiling drips, covered by what appeared to be a bed of coarse sand that had obviously been camped on before. I smoothed it flat where my bed was to be, and then piled up more sand for a soft pillow. In so doing, I discovered that the "sand grains" were actually tiny cave pearls! They are dry, uniformly sized and relatively round, so the individual particles don't interlock and stiffen the bed like angular sand can. When you lay down the pearls roll like ball bearings and mold perfectly to your body contours. The Princess of the Pea would have slept fine.

Fruit bats hung out by day in the caverns of these cenotes, but would fly around the cavern and my tent all night, too, their wings swooshing loudly. A popping sound would often be heard, and would carry a hundred feet or more, apparently caused by the "Whop!" sound of the bat making belly-flop landings up into mini-domes in the ceiling over water. They do not squeak audibly at us as our Florida cave bats do, and in spite of frequent encounters with them they never bumped into us.

SEJP is being mapped by Quattlebaum's team (<http://www.cavedive.com>), and at the time of my visit its total length was 186,772 feet; Mike Madden and his team are trying to exceed this length in Nahoch Na Chich but I believe they are well behind. The two caves occupy the rock strata on the two sides of a narrow "karst valley," very close to each other, and a connection between them has not yet been made but is probably inevitable. I believe SEJP is currently the longer cave, but regardless, when eventually joined the combined system will be the longest underwater cave.

The first morning of the camp, we gringos hiked with minimal diving gear while our Mexican porters carried the heavy stuff to one of them where Buddy I dove it that day, Monday, basically on a tourist jaunt for me. We had a maximum depth of 56 ft but most of the dive was at less than 30 ft, for a total bottom time of 126 minutes with no decompression.

SEJP is an intersecting maze of moderately large passages averaging 25 - 35 m wide and 3 -

6 m high along a single level. White crystal formations are all around, on the floors, ceilings and walls, mostly elongated types (stalagmites, stalagmites, soda straws and columns) indicating rapid formation under relatively high water flow, but also other types of formations including flowstone, draperies, helictites, angel wings, statues, popcorn and rimstone dams with pools filled to the brim with cave pearls. It is very beautiful.

Macco and another porter took our tanks back to the dive shop and Noe' took my remaining heavy gear back to M1. By the time Bruce, Ann and I hiked back to M1, Macco had already returned with hot barbecued chicken, steamed rice, baked potatoes and iced soda! Bruce promptly concocted an interesting lime, rum and brandy medicine for the weary, and there we sat in the rain on the lumpy, backless, lashed stick bench, shoulders and backs slumped in exhaustion, flicking off ants and ticks, waving away mosquitos and the occasional flying beetle, eating melt-in-your-mouth chicken, alternately sipping medicine and swilling iced Coke and thinking, "It doesn't get any better than this."

All us gringos arose late Tuesday. While eating a breakfast of homemade pan-fried bread (called hardtack or flour tortillas), I noticed a carpet of ants moving toward us. They traveled forward slowly as a unit thoroughly blanketing several square meters of ground at a time, foraging frenetically for prey over and under plants, rocks and leaf litter. Wave after wave of horror-stricken spiders and other little monsters erupted from their discovered lairs as the army ants methodically searched for them under every log and rock. Macco sprayed bug killer around camp and the tarp tent to keep them out of our food, and they aren't really aggressive toward people, so they proved to be only a mild but very interesting annoyance. Also that morning, Ann got three stings from wasps living in a hanging nest at the dripline of M1, evidently her only provocation being the act of walking along the trail three meters away. One sting was at the edge of her eye, which swelled up almost shut.

Taking an "easy day," Bruce, Ann and I explored several nearby cenotes, wading around in numerous shallow pools looking for dry or Snorkling cave to explore. Fruit bats were in all

such places, and their guano and cast-off fruit seeds were ever-present. Dry cave was short and rare, being largely limited to the entrances to underwater caves, but what is there is filled with stal and fruit bats. Wednesday, Bruce and Ann walked off around mid-morning to snorkle a cave that was a kilometer or two away down the jungle trails.

I went down to M1 and began preparing for my solo cave dive into SEJP. My rig assembled, in pre-dive testing I discovered the valve o-ring on my left tank leaked a little. I cranked the regulator yoke down hard, and though it still leaked a tiny bit I felt comfortable in using it first, promising to abort the dive if it still leaked upon reaching thirds. Often such tiny leaks will stop when tank pressure falls, and luckily it did this time, too. I entered the water and was immediately greeted by billum and catfish looking for a meal. Billum (*Astyanax mexicanus*) is the Mayan name for a 2 - 8 cm long, bream-looking relative of the piranha. It is extremely common in Yucatan's epigeal freshwaters, like the mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*) is in Florida's. Billum swarm like piranha, never leaving you. They bite and tug on your gear and on flaps of loose skin, not wounding or even hurting but certainly causing occasional little surprises. Yucatan cave catfish are not our garden variety of bullhead, being a little smaller and darker and having much longer barbels. They, too, check out divers and other things that fall into the water, but they keep their distance after discovering what we are, just hovering in the background like the worried parents of the bratty billum. I silted out the water at the opening to the cave, but it was easy to follow the continuous guideline that began on a stalactite above the water's surface. Swimming through a 1 m wide, 2 m high corridor, I quickly passed through the silty water and a few billum and catfish in the twilight zone. Negotiating a vertical restriction about 6 m into the dive, I swam into more of the same passage and floated through a thin cloud of troglobitic amphipods. Next was a 25 m wide, 3 - 6 m high decorated passageway, and from then on the main line took me through numerous spacious corridors and hallways and rooms, most of them chock full of formations. Troglobitic amphipods and isopods occurred occasionally in the cave, and they were usually near obvious entrances and debris cones. I

caught one amphipod in a vial in the first room; they can zip around pretty good and this one was tough to catch. I saw several individuals of a curious troglobitic crustacean about the size of and almost as round as a dime, which rolled up like the "pillbugs" we find under boards in the garage. I also caught some kind of eel, perhaps a worm eel (*Ahlia egmontis*), about 500 m from the M1 entrance, and released it alive the next morning.

After the dive, I climbed out of the cenote and walked to the camp where Noe' was hanging out. Noe' is the Mexican version of the biblical name of Noah, which is also the name of my maternal grandfather and his eldest son (my uncle). Discussions in his broken English and my atrocious Spanish revealed this man, Jose' Noe' de la Mora Castro, to be no ordinary campesino, not just a simple Mayan Indian from the swamps. No, Noe' used to own a hundred-employee credit card company, his plastic accepted by a thousand Mexican banks, but it was so successful that _____ took it away from him and he is now forced to make a living as a laborer. He and his three children are educated, and Noe' has read all seven of Carlos Casteneda's books (I only read the first four). He may be the only non devout Catholic Latin I have met in Mexico; and not only is he not Catholic, which is notable in itself, but he is an atheist too (by my definition) although he insists he is not. He is very spiritual and lives in a commune in Merida. He has found peace within himself from the torment of glory lost and has accepted his humble "fate." Hmmm, ... maybe he is just another ampesino...

Bruce and Ann showed up just as I arose to put on a pot of rice - great timing -and Ann redirected me into helping her prepare a vegetable stew. As the stew was being taken off the grill, Macco showed up with hot barbecued chicken, hot fajitas including guacamole sauce, a big pile of hot corn tortillas, bread rolls and iced soda. The night air was cool and for once there was no rain, the mosquitos were rare and the ticks without infectious diseases. After Ann and Bruce finished dinner and left the table, I was able to stretch out on the lashed stick bench, lean my back against a dry tree trunk and teeter on the razor's edge of comfort. The brandy was perfect and kept me from tottering. No, it really doesn't get any better than this.

Thursday morning we breakfasted and packed out to the trailhead where Buddy was to meet us with the truck. Buddy is in his mid-40s, very tall and very thin, and with a worried countenance. He claims to know and I believe him more about the jungle and cenotes and trails in the SEJP - Nahoch region than anyone other than a few of the Ejido's hunters. He spends much time in shorts and sandals exploring along Mayan jungle trails, even those extending well beyond the cultivated milpas, looking for entrances at the perimeters of known caves. He has adapted to a very foreign way of doing business in an alarmingly competitive market, remaining apparently independent but poor as a churchmouse. He has dedicated half of his life in his quest to make the Systema Ejido Jacinto Pat the longest underwater cave in the world, and the other half to keeping his trucks running.

Thursday afternoon, Bruce and I drove to the airport to pick up Bill Berryhill, a long-time NSS member and a friend of Bruce and Ann's. Friday, Bruce worked on his waterfall construction project with Bill in attendance, and Ann and I did two open water dives off a boat near Isla Mujeres, in 10 m deep water, exploring reefs that constitute the northern terminus of the Belize Barrier Reef. Even so, the rocks teemed with fish up to a meter in length including barracuda, grouper, snapper, stingray, scorpionfish, sargent-major, triggerfishes, and a rainbow of small reef fishes. Colorful sponges, corals and other invertebrates abounded, including langusta and black sea urchins. The water's visibility was reduced to 10 m due to the stormy influence of an offshore tropical depression, but the dive was enjoyable in all other respects.

Saturday morning the four of us piled into the car and motored south to Akumal. We found Mike Madden's Dive Center in a little tourist plaza development, and had lunch there but never did find anyone to talk to at Madden's place, so off we went to Buddy's. Buddy took us back to Macco's store and explained to Andres that we wanted to do some dry caving and snorkling.

Andres and another fellow took us a few hundred meters west of the store back down the jungle road we had earlier traveled, and then the two of them hacked a trail through the jungle

undergrowth from the road to a cenote climbdown entrance into dry cave.

The cave has several pools which I presume to be connected to SEJP. Unlike the other cenotes we had checked out, the air-filled passageways in this cave are fairly extensive. They are mostly walking sized grottos proportioned like their underwater counterparts but generally smaller. There are abundant but mostly dry formations, and thick twining columns of tree roots occur wherever a solution pipe or other window allows access from the surface to the cave's waters. One grotto has a couple of artificial enclosures of rock in one place, allegedly constructed by ancient Mayans for them to hide behind while waiting to ambush gibbon on the way to their nests in the cave. The gibbon is a delicious, rabbit-sized guinea pig eaten throughout its range in central America.

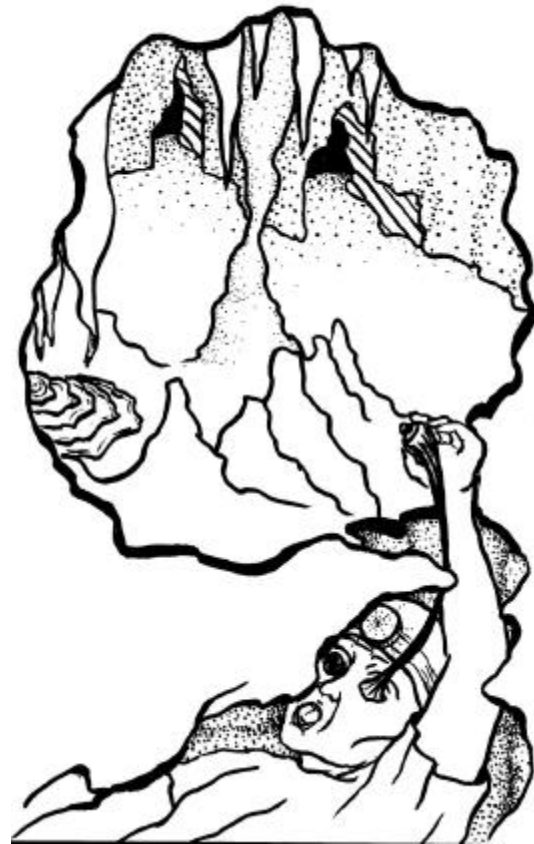
Sunday morning we piled into the car and headed west, aiming for caves and ancient Maya ruins. Along the way we stopped at a wet prairie surrounded by low limestone hills and walked

around the perimeter of its northern half looking for cave entrances, following a hunter's trail that threaded through a perimeter band of small, scrubby shrubs and trees and thick tall grass. The trees had epiphytic Bromelia, Anthurium, orchids and cacti. One tree was so gnarly and infested with epiphytes that Bruce was convinced there would be a snake in it. While scrutinizing intently for one, damn if a snake didn't suddenly crawl over my boot as it tried to escape in the tall grass. Bruce quickly identified it as a nonpoisonous species, and because it was nearly blinded by its opaque shedding skin, he easily snagged it; we took photos and then released it. He might have called it a *Melanogaster margaritifera*, a kind of rat snake, I think.

Then on to the ruins of Chichen-Itza where we wandered around taking pictures and deciphering hieroglyphics, following which we drove to a commercialized cave on private property. Costing ten pesos (\$1.40 US) each to visit the cave, it is self-guided, well-lit and with limited walkway improvements. A short, low stairway leads to the main room, most of which is occupied by a pool of water harboring dozens of catfish. Only a few bats remain, though, and

most of the formations appear to have been vandalized.

The tropical heat and humidity can be uncomfortable, but endure them you must for the privilege of exploring tropical caves. Its worth the effort, though tropical caves being so rich in size, formations, biology and culture. Anyway, the weather is not all miserable; most is good and a lot of it is really very nice.



Drawing by Jennifer Otto

A Trip to Tag

by Ken Peakman

Almost in-avoidably family matters, financial responsibilities and other excuses have prevented me from going to the annual Tag Fall Cave-In, in the last few years. Oh, I talk about it all the time and finally my co-worker (Troy Fussell) said I'm tired of talking about it, I want to see it, lets go! So being put on the spot like that I started planning where to go and what to do.

I came up with this plan; Ok we will leave on Wednesday night at midnight, drive straight through and arrive Thursday morning at 8:30-9:00 just in time to register and get a jump start on caving before everyone and his brother got there. We'll definitely do Tumbling Rock (I've been there before several times and would appear like a professional) then we will see what else is open or closed and go from there. I also mentioned that I wanted to do some real Photography and that I was going to pack the usual tripod, strobes, plenty of batteries, and all the other essential caving gear. Troy agreed and the plans were set in motion.

A couple of days later plans changed (of course) this time it was for the better. A business trip was planned for Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama. Because it was now a business trip we were now able to leave on Tuesday at 8 AM and drive the 600 mile trek to Huntsville. Upon arriving at Huntsville we set up camp at the local Motel 6, proceeded to drink a twelve-pack of beer and finally pass out. The next morning we went on our business trip and then returned to our camp. We spent the night and planned our next morning, the long 65 mile drive to Tumbling Rock (check-in at the campsite could wait).

I couldn't help myself from boasting how beautiful the drive is to Tumbling Rock once we turned off the highway. This is how I described COUNTRY. As we drove Troy was now exclaiming how gorgeous this part of Alabama was. We arrived at Tumbling Rock at 8 AM.

We met the owners daughter and paid our \$5 each filled out release forms and geared up. The whole time I am telling Troy, your not going to

believe this cave, it's going to blow you away. I was telling Troy how lucky we were to have the cave all to ourselves being it's Thursday morning the opening day of TAG. Just then a 4-wheel drive with three cavers pulls up! To our surprise the vehicles plates were from Florida. Then the driver stepped out and I realized who it was, It was Kevin ???????? from the DCS (Dead Cavers Society) from Orlando, Florida. We greeted one another and they (DCS) went into the cave before us. I had lots of gear to pack about 20 pounds of camera equipment. I was finally ready.

Troy was anxious (so was I) and we proceeded to the entrance. The cave was blowing out the entrance pretty good, and surprised Troy as he has never experienced wind blowing out of a hole in the ground before. We entered and started walking slowly letting our eyes adjust. We stopped at the first big room while Troy was letting his eyes adjust, I was laughing because our eyes were already accustomed to the lighting we were providing. After a few minutes of looking around Troy was stating that he was a little dizzy but this went away when he looked at something close by. I told him he was experiencing vertigo because of the immense size of the rooms, anyway after realizing this and that he was just not used to the size we proceeded on to the back of the cave.

We met the DCS cavers back by totem grotto as they were heading out. We paused and talked for a few minutes and then we proceeded to the back of the cave. After reaching the back of the cave we started out slowly looking around and admiring everything. Troy kept saying "man someone could really get hurt in here."

We stopped here and there and took some pictures with an automatic camera. Then I showed him the King's Shower. Boy was Troy impressed. It was raining slightly and we sat in the shower turned off the lights and were listening to the echoes of our voices, then like kid's started yelling stuff like H e l l o o o o, then started singing some old Lynyrd Skynyrd songs, followed by some good-ol Gospel songs.

Then I decided to take some stills with the shutter open and firing multiple strobes. We used the curtain in front of the lens trick to be able to move around then snap another strobe.

This worked real well for the first picture. Then the batteries in the camera were not strong enough to open the shutter a second time. So I packed away. We got back to totem grotto and took some more pictures. And had a brainstorm of how to charge batteries to be able to take a few more pictures with the open shutter technique. It worked at least for one picture. then we worked our way out of the cave only being turned around once or twice (I still appeared like a professional caver to Troy at this time).

We made it out of the cave giving the entire trip a duration of six hours. We then headed for the CAVE-IN, but first had to stop for beer.

We made it to the cave-in and proceeded to look for Bill Birdsalls truck. We found it and setup camp next to his, (this time we had to resort to using tents). Bill returned with Jennifer and Tim and shortly after Jon Singly showed up.

That night was a typical cavers party including my over indulgence in beer. The next morning Troy and I went to Guffey's Cave. I had never been there before but the description made it sound simple, just what I needed cause I had what Troy called . (a case of the MULLET HEAD). Anyway we went in and tried to find our way around, it looked simple but it seemed like everywhere we went we had to crawl. This is definitatly not what I wanted to do in this condition, especially carrying around a 20 pound pack loaded with photography gear. After not really finding the walking TAG passages we returned back to the Cave-in.

The next day we tried to gain access to Anderson Spring Cave. As we arrived we were confronted by some of the people working at the farm. They ended up running us off the property, telling us that if we wanted to access the cave we would have to do it from the top of the mountain. We tried but failed to find the cave from the top. So we resulted to go to PettiJohns Cave.

We entered the cave and meandered around a while (lots of cattle trails) and finally found our way to the bottom aerea. There we found nice stream passage for a while then turning to mud then turning to crawl. We crawled and crawled

until we reached the end. We felt like we were in a very damp and cold Warrens cave.

We took our time and exited the cave and returned to the Cave-in for the big party. Oh what a party it was. We had a very impressive fireworks show and a wicked bonfire and the band (The Cosmic Gypsy's) got better as the night went by (or maybe it was the beer (hum).

The hot tub was hot and in not to bad of shape for the third night of use, the sauna was smoking hot (actually melting the plastic at one point, and the fire was great (the co-ed showers were the best in the park). Sunday came and prompted the drive home with another case of the Mullet Head.

I think Troy is hooked, he's already talking about going back next year!



Another drawing by Jennifer Otto

Brian Williams

ANNOUNCING THE ALL NEW NEVER BEEN DONE BEFORE PHOTO CONTEST

Ladies and gentlemen, and cavers, announcing: the semi-annual, every other month, whenever we can remember to do it, PHOTO CONTEST! Yes folks, a real live contest with fabulous prizes* featuring actual photos from real FSS members taken in or around actual caves. Yea!

We are going to keep it fairly simple so even us cavers can understand. Just send in your best photo or your worst photo (hey, it might be the only one that gets sent in). Of course, try to make it a photo that has something to do with caving, rappelling, etc. Please, no photos of your baby, grandchild, etc.

Once, every other month, our top panel of expert judges (the general attending membership) will carefully scrutinize each photo for composition, subject matter, quality, conservation and nudity. Ok, so lets try to keep them PG anyway. Once our experts have compared and contrasted the merits of each photograph they will forget about all that crap and pick one they like best. The winning photo will be displayed on the FSS web page as well as the next newsletter we get around to printing.

"So what do I win?" I'm glad you asked. "What do we have for our lucky contestant, Ed?" "Well, Bob, they may be eligible to win one or more of these fabulous prizes*."

- 1) A beautiful 2-color FSS logo T-shirt with a stunning map reproduction of the infamous Warren's Cave on the back. Don't forget to take it with you on those long trips to the pit area.
- 2) Or, a shiny new carabiner. You can't have too many of those can you?
- 3) Or, a 4-pak of brand new, unexposed 35mm film. Take more photos, win more contests.

In addition to one of these exquisite gifts you will receive.....Heaps of self-esteem!!!!!!
So don't delay, start snapping away. Just drag your most expensive camera into the wettest, muddiest cave you can find and grab your 15 minutes of fame.

Send photos to:

Or better yet, attend an actual FSS meeting on a regular 2nd or 4th Thursday night and bring them in person.

It's Always the Last One of the Day

Brian Williams

It was a dark and stormy Sunday. Ah yes, I remember it well. Actually I don't remember it well at all. It has been six months and I am just now writing about it. We just knew we were going to find a new cave that day. Well, really after a long day scratching through mountains of limerock, it became fairly certain we weren't going to find anything worth squat.

Ah but the cave we finally did discover was HUGE! Well, maybe not huge but extensive

none the less. Well, maybe not extensive but beautifully adorned. Ok, Ok, it's a real small cave on an obscure quarry wall in an old limerock pit. Hey, where do you think you are, TAG? It really was on a Sunday though. A wise caver once said, "Any day below ground is a good day!" With that in mind I called up my cave hunting buddy Quinton and said, "Hey Quinton", (because that's his name), "Want to go down to Highway 326 where they are cutting through the new extension? The Ocala dudes

have been there already but it's always worth another look." It seems the state is spending a lot of money to cut off a little corner and straighten out 326 as it cuts east off I-75. In the process, they have cut through a couple of old quarries providing easy access to those ever-curious cavers. Foolishly believing that I may have a point, Quinton agrees to go.

The new roadbed had recently been graded and it was a simple matter to pull up on one end of the rock pit, park and walk the entire area. Of course it rained so hard when we were in the quarry getting back up the road was like dancing on a pile of banana peels. We were moving, but we weren't going anywhere. But that's a whole different story.

We spent the better part of the day poking around the obvious holes near the base of the walls. At one point we found a small opening at the bottom of the quarry wall. So I'm busy running my mouth about all the holes I had already checked out in the area, blah, blah, blah, and I notice Quinton laying on the ground not moving. I say, "Hey, what are you doing, taking a nap?" Quinton says, "No, I was just waiting for you to shut up long enough to see if these ferns are blowing because of this hole or if it's just the breeze from you flapping your jaws." (At least that's what it sounded like he said) "Hell, what are you waiting for? Get the tool, lets move some dirt."

All we had to do was get the hole big enough for a peak inside. It had to have some volume with all that air coming out. After about two hours of sweat, ant bites, and a few thousand swings from the rock hammer, we had a hole just big enough to squeeze in. "Cave dog" Quinton popped in for the first look. His initial assessment proved our theory correct. It definitely goes. He backed out and I squeezed in to confirm that it did indeed go...low and tight. Several more days of digging and we may both be able to get in a few more feet to look around the next corner. Oh, well, this one gets another visit on another day. It is promising though and from the amount of air that was blowing I believe there is some size to it. The passage may be all low and tight but size is relative isn't it?

Onward and upward. What we needed now was some instant gratification with little or no

digging. What did we get? More holes, more fissures, more digging. We even got desperate enough to rig a rope and crawl around the cliffs checking out those little dead end holes that always look better from far away. The day was dragging on. I couldn't help thinking there had to be more here.

Tired, hot, and running out of quarry, we headed for the eastern most wall, that also seemed to be the oldest in the pit. It's covered with ferns, saplings, some larger trees, ants, mosquitoes, and lots of small holes and fissures. Oh, did I mention that the limerock is somewhat crumbly and you will bust your backside at least once or twice while climbing the slopes? Bruised knees, cuts and scrapes, blood and guts and we still haven't found a decent cave yet! "Get-a-long little cave doggie. Find me a lead."

After a long hot day of moving biblical amounts of dirt and rock, you kind of begin to wonder just what the hell you're doing down in this pit. We began working our way along the last wall of the day anyway. I find a small fissure about 10 ft. up the cliff. It looks like it could go with, surprise, a little digging. I start hacking away at this crack while Quinton is searching higher up along the wall. Not to worry I think. He'll never find anything that high up worth digging. In just a few minutes Quinton yells down for me to come up to where he is. "Hey Brian, I think you should come take a look at this." "But I'm working on this fissure and it looks like it could go. I'll be up shortly." "Hey Brian, I really think you should come take a look!"

"Ok, Ok, does it go?" "Well, it's got possibilities." So I'm thinking; great, we've said that all day at every hole. I've got to climb up this cliff just to look at another hole that goes 10 ft. back in the bank then ends in a narrow breakdown. I think I'll just stay down here and work on my fissure. "Go on without me. Just don't go more than a mile or two. I'm headed that way." About ten minutes later I start to realize that I haven't heard from Quinton in a while. "Hey Quinton! HEY QUINTON!" Damn. I can't believe he found something good and went on without me. Sure, I told him to go on, but that was when I thought he'd just found another dead end. I scramble up the hill about 30 ft. between these two rocks just as the dog emerges from this 5 ft. x 2 ft. entrance with a big stupid smile on his face. "Hey you dog, that

ain't funny. You find a good lead then take off without me scoopin' up passage." "Well, Mr. "I'm too busy digging on my fissure". I called you twice. "Shut up. Is it virgin?" "Not a print in site. No trash or spray paint and the dirt on the floor looks like powder." "Did you scoop the whole thing?" "No, I saved you a foot or two." "Gee, thanks."



"Cave Doggie" Quinton Sniff out A Lead!

So we crawl back in and hang a few markers on the way. Wouldn't want to get lost in this enormous cave. Ok, so it turns out its not that big and even a flashlight caver couldn't get lost. You know it's not a great cave if you can't get lost but none the less it was the best find of the day. Amazing how you're not that tired any more when you find new passage.

It's mostly crawlway with one room you can actually stand in. After about 50 ft. back the passage slopes up to a room with a big mound of dirt that has obviously poured in through a solution hole in the ceiling. It has the appearance of a large termite mound. Off to the right of this is another small passage with a lot of breakdown leading to a low wide room with sloping sides. There are possibilities here for opening up new passage. Going back into the termite mound room, there is a tight squeeze on the other side that will put you into the other main passage of the cave. We did not know this until we had backtracked down the main tunnel and took a small passage on the north side near the entrance, which led us to the other side of the system. At the back of this passage there is a junction right and left. The left dead ends with no distinguishing features other than a fox skeleton near the wall. It seems to be a recent, i.e., not fossilized victim of the cave. We have also seen a couple of lone bats back in this area. To the right is a small pit about 6 ft. in diameter

and 5 ft. deep. It looks like someone took a soil sample with a giant coring tool. Above the soil sample is a fissure crack that narrows as it goes up about 12 ft. into the ceiling. Just to the right we noticed a small squeeze and when I looked through it I recognized the termite mound. I call this "Sullivan's window" because on a subsequent trip with Caren and Sullivan Beck I told him where it led while we were in the termite room. For those who don't know Sullivan, here's a tip. If you look at a hole and say, "Well, I'm not sure if I can get through there," stand back. He's just got to try and he usually makes it. Caren went next and then I had to try. Everything went through except my butt until I backed out and hacked off a small rock attached to the ceiling. I made it through with a few pounds of dirt in my pants.



I shouldn't have ate that last donut! #@&!

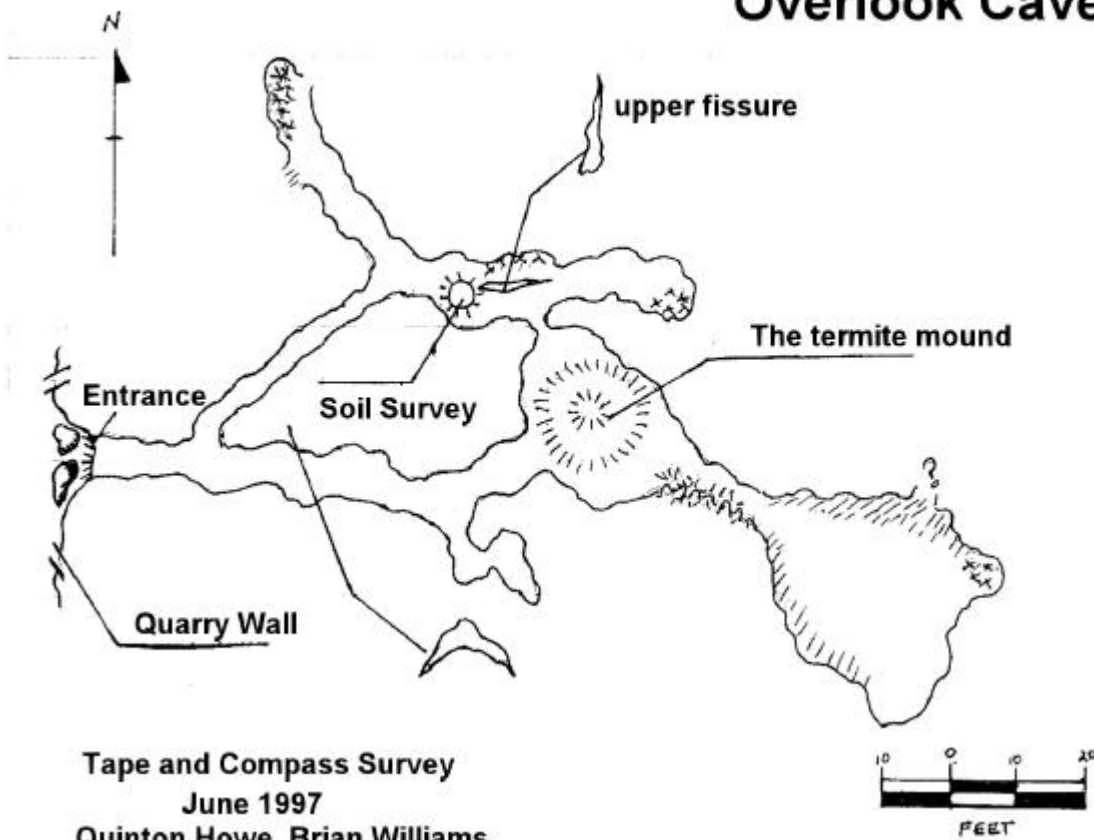
Quinton and I had gone back the following week and done a rough tape and compass survey from which the map was produced. (See map). It's a fun little cave and a good one to take beginners in for some crawling and squeezing.



Quinton crunching numbers at the termite mound

I still think there's something better and bigger out there. There are a few places there we still have not explored and anyone wanting to do a "little" digging may hit pay dirt. Let us know if you find anything, we're to tired, and lazy, to go back for a while. Good cavin'

Overlook Cave



**Tape and Compass Survey
June 1997
Quinton Howe, Brian Williams**