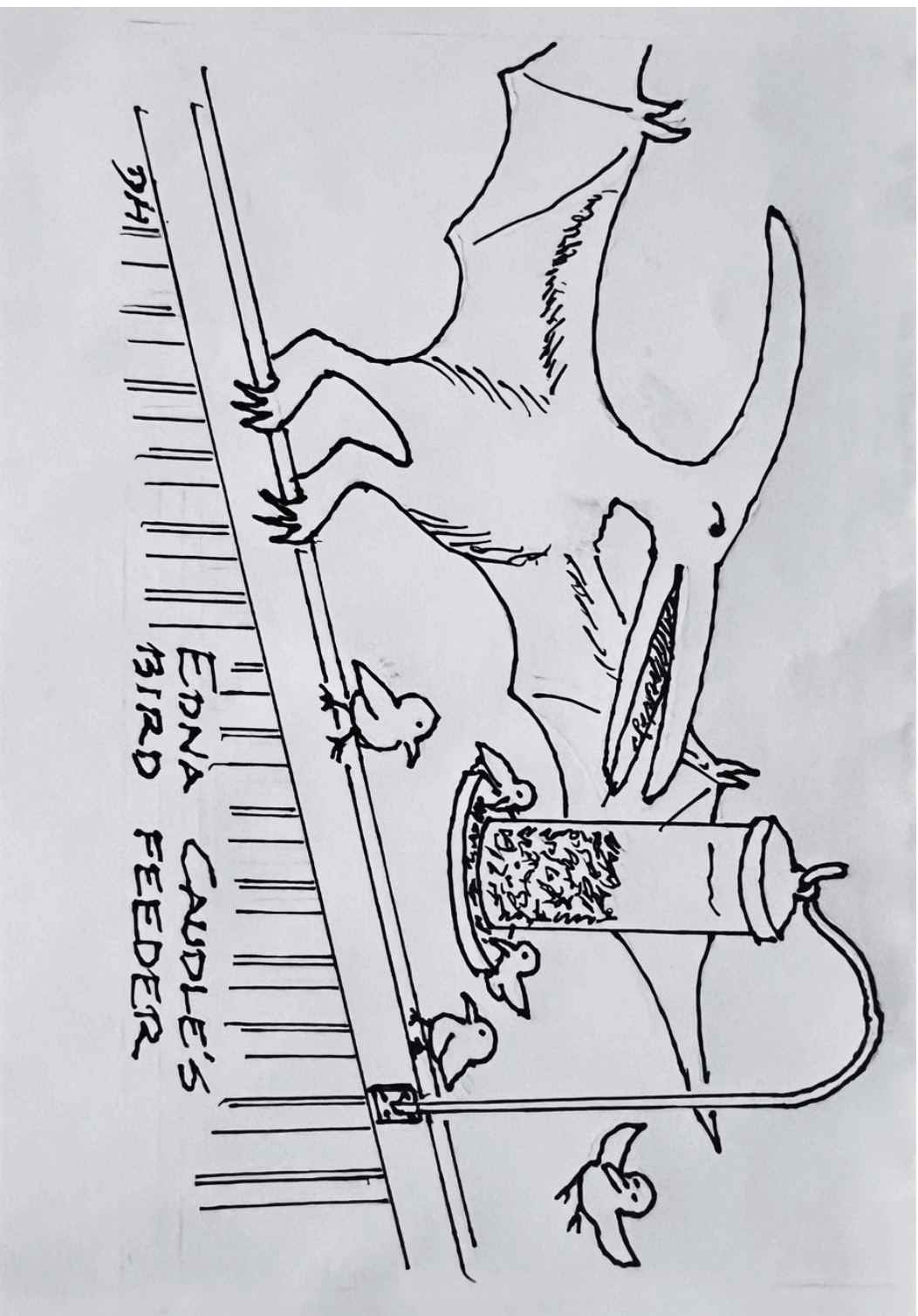


Birmingham Grotto
Newsletter



October 2024
Volume 54 Number 10

BGN Calendar

Details at Grotto meetings, on Grotto egroup, & on Facebook

Oct 3-6	TAG Fall Cave In , Tommy's Lazy G, Union Grove, AL *NOT Columbus Day Weekend *
Oct 12	Annual Tour of Weaver Cave , Anniston, by GA/ AL Land Trust https://www.galandtrust.org/weavercave
Nov 2	Blue Spring Cave clean-up , 9:00am. Grotto officers for more info
Nov 5	** Grotto meeting ** 7pm CT (First Tues.) Hybrid Monday Night Brewing -Social Club, 14 12th St. S 35233
Dec 3	Multi-tasking event , 6pm Grotto Christmas Party 7:00pm Grotto elections & meeting
May 2-4, 2025	SERA Cave Carnival , East Fork Stables Campground, Mena, AR, Hosted by East TN Grotto

Birmingham Grotto Online! Find us on:

Members eGroup {https://groups.google.com/#!forum/bham_grotto}
Facebook {<https://www.facebook.com/groups/150556684966936/>}
CaveChat {<http://www.forums.caves.org/viewforum.php?f=47>}
 or
www.bhamgrotto.org

Disclaimer

Caving trips are led by volunteers. No Grotto committee reviews any trip leader's qualifications. New cavers should inquire about the nature of the trip and the experience of the leader in advance. Those participating in the trips should be aware of their limits. On vertical trips all participants are expected to supply their own gear and be knowledgeable about rigging and safe practices.

The Birmingham Grotto Newsletter is published approximately twelve times a year by the Birmingham Grotto, Inc., of the National Speleological Society, Inc. Other NSS Internal Organizations may reprint material provided credit is given to this publication and the author. The Birmingham Grotto will exchange publications with other NSS Grottos. Exchange newsletters should be emailed to editor@bhamgrotto.org or mailed to:

Birmingham Grotto
P.O. Box 59607
Birmingham, AL 35259

Articles, trip reports, graphics, poetry, and any other speleo-related materials are welcome. **Email submissions to: editor@bhamgrotto.org** or contact us for other options. **The deadline for publication is 2 weeks before the next Grotto meeting;** however, the Newsletter is limited to 8 pages per month and submitted material may be held for future issues. Annual dues are \$15.00 per individual and \$20.00 per family, which is payable on October 1st. Dues are prorated for anyone joining during the year. A Lifetime membership is currently available for \$250. Newsletter subscription rate is \$15.00 per year. See PayPal link on the Grotto website (bhamgrotto.org).

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Immediate Past President

(Executive Committee Member)
Tawnya Abts NSS 70101

On the cover...

**Homage to the creatures that
appear on the Caudles' deck**
(Art by Dave Howell)

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*Corrections to the posted version accepted
thru the end of this month-Eds.*

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David McRae and Jeff Harrod

More about Caves and Caving National Speleological Society

The Birmingham Grotto recommends that all Grotto members join our parent organization. More info can be found at <http://www.caves.org/>

Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc.

The SCCi is a wonderful organization led by cavers for cavers, which purchases and protects caves with reasonable management. Learn more at <http://www.scci.org/>

Prefer Paperless?

Grotto Newsletter e-subscriptions are now available on request. Just let the Treasurer and Editors know, confirm your email, and you can get the next issue, in color, before the meeting.

Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes

September 3, 2024

The September 2024 live meeting of the Birmingham Grotto was called to order by President Dave McRae at 6:58pm.

Visitors

- Jennifer Gibson
- Chris Jones
- Josie Jones
- Abbie Greene
- Jason Riles

Minutes

Last month's minutes were not mentioned in this month's minutes.

Announcements

- Dues are due next month.
- TAG is the first weekend of October 3rd - 5th

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Lee Abts reported on Grotto account activities since the last meeting:

Beginning Balance: \$10,155.91

Income:

Dues: \$0.00

Total Income: \$20.00

Expenses:

Dave McRae food for Getaway/ auction and Sinking Cove \$370.76

Total Expenses: \$370.76

Ending Balance: \$9,785.15

Outstanding Debts:

Outstanding checks and commitments:

Dave McRae Auction Food: \$60.47

Dave McRae Sinking Cove Food: \$310.29

Total of outstanding items: \$370.76

Total balance taking into account above: \$9,785.15

Old Business

- Tawnya will be compiling a list for t-shirt orders over the next couple of weeks.
- We now have a parking lot for Graves Cave! Gravel and chert have been ordered, and by the next meeting, we will have a date scheduled for a work weekend to build the gate. The lot will accommodate about 10 cars. There will also be a campout and workday.

New Business

- GAIA GPS app– Be conscious of data sharing and potential breaches. They are making everyone's data public.
- Snail Shell – The trip will take place in the fall, potentially the last weekend of September (27-29) before TAG.
- Halloween Party – We will decide whether to attend a party in town or host one ourselves. There's also the Witches Ball— someone should research it, and let's plan to dress up and go. Halloween is on Thursday the 26th, and Ray is in charge of organizing the Witches Ball event.
- Anderson Cave Preserve opens in October.

Trip Reports

- Jose Pilco, Amanda Bridges-Dunn, Will Lim – War Eagle
- Amber Lee, Jose Pilco, Brent Koch, James Goggins, Brendan Lee, Griffin Wal – Howards Waterfall
- Van Coffey, James Goggins, Ray Merrill, Amber Yeakle, Mitch Mitchell, Brent Koch, Wil Lim and Angela Evans – Jess Elliot.
- Shiny Partsup - Went caving up in DC with Kris in the Tristate Grotto
- Amanda Bridges-Dunn –Creek Cave
 - OTR cavers Shovel Eater
 - Hell Hole via Shovel Eater
 - Graves
- Tawnya Yates – Hana Lava Tube and Kahawaihapapa Lava Tube in Maui
- Xander Loss - Creek Cave
- Nathan Frederick - Tumbling Rock

Next Grotto trip

Tumbling Rock, September 28th

Program

Jun Ebersole, Director of Collections, McWane Center – Fossil Fishes of Alabama

Respectfully Submitted,
José Pilco NSS# 71404

Grotto in September Tumbling Rock

Anderson Preserve crew, you rock! Yesterday was a total success! New signage? Check! Trail? Smoother than flowstone! Cave entrance? Let's get muddy! Opens November 1st! Kris Green, the SCCi, and Birmingham Grotto- you're the heroes! - Donna Cobb

- Kris Green
- Wil Lim
- Amber Jackson
- Kevin Giles
- Lee Abts
- Mitch Mitchell
- Ray Merrill
- Angela Evans

Thank You



Amanda Bridges-Dunn: You didn't give a shout out to the people who didn't make it to the work day, but did make it to Mexican afterward.

Special thanks to:

Dave McCrae, Grotto Influencer extraordinaire #1

Amanda Bridges-Dunn, Grotto Influencer extraordinaire #2

On the Hunt By Bradley Jones NSS 63915

Current Surveyed Cave
Length: 27,153.9' | Depth:
200'

Last hike in/out was brutal with the heat, wetsuits, camping gear, etc. This time we went much lighter and decided against taking wetsuits.

On the Hunt cont'd on p. 59



On the Hunt *cont'd from p. 58*



A previous trip Walt, Jose, and I had easily surveyed 2103.06' so we didn't bother with any difficult leads. We returned to some of these. One of which had 2 leads we had yet to investigate that we surveyed. While in this upper paleo we also continued surveying the highest known point in the cave bringing our total surveyed depth to 200'. We continued working on a dig for roughly an hour so we could get a further look to see if it would start opening up or more of the same. Unfortunately, more of the same but one of the only such dig opportunities in the cave. Also in the land of shark teeth a plenty there were 2 other passages that we did not get to the true end of that will need to return and finish. In addition, on way in I had checked another area that has been sumped all year which is now open. I could see past ear dipper, actually more of a upside down helmet slider, that this passage opens up. We were going to survey it on the way out but decided to try to make it out before all restaurants were closed. Made it to Jefferson's at 9:20PM with just enough time for dinner before they closed, and then home by midnight. Surveyed a bit over 600' of passage this trip bringing our new survey length to 27,153'

Dave's Destinations

This is the eighteenth in my travelogue covering places that are not well known, out of the way, unusual, even weird. Not all are underground attractions, but all will be, I think, of interest to cavers.

Dracula's Castle

The location frequently billed as "Dracula's Castle," Castle Bran near Braşov, Romania, is actually not. Even though it looks like a

place a vampire might live, there is no evidence to suggest that Vlad Țepeș, also known as Vlad III, Vlad Dracul, or Vlad the Impaler, and reputed to be Dracula, ever occupied it. (He may have visited it briefly.) No, the real "Dracula's castle" where Vlad actually resided,



is Castelul Poienari near Arefu, Romania. Castle Poienari was built in the 13th century on a narrow spine of rock in the Carpathian foothills, some 300 feet above the Argeş River at a narrow pass that was the only gateway into Transylvania for many miles around. For many years it served as the citadel of the Basarab rulers, but was eventually abandoned and left to fall to ruin.

The history of Romania, of which Transylvania, Vlad Țepeș, and Poienari are part, is a colorful one, and the 15th century

was particularly so. Early in that century, Wallachia and Transylvania, both regions of Romania, were ruled by Vlad II, who was in 1442 invited to the court of the Ottoman Sultan Murad II for diplomatic reasons. He took his three sons to the Sultan's court, thinking the occasion would educate them in diplomacy, but the meeting was a trap. Vlad and his oldest son were imprisoned and tortured; Vlad III, who was 11 at the time and his younger brother were detained

as insurance that their father would support Ottoman policies. is detention, unlike that of Vlad III's father and older brother, was merciful, the Sultan educated them in science, art, and the skills of the warrior. Eventually Vlad III

escaped his detention and became Prince of Wallachia and ruler of Transylvania. When in 1447 he learned that his father and older brother had been killed while still in captivity, he mounted a lifelong vendetta against Murad II and the Turks. It was during this period that he gained the sobriquet of "Vlad the Impaler," for his bloodthirsty propensities - it is said he killed 80,000 people during his reign, impaling 20,000 of them on sharpened poles where they were left as gruesome displays of the consequences of crossing him.

Dave's Destinations cont'd on p. 61

Dave's Destinations cont'd from p. 55

Poienari Castle, after its abandonment by the Basarabs, sat in ruins until in the mid 15th century it was noticed by Vlad Țepeș, who, realizing the potential of its location and site, ordered it fixed up for his use. After a few years there he was besieged by forces of the Ottoman Empire; although impregnable to invasion, the castle was by the same token resistant to escape in the event of long term siege. Vlad's wife, Jusztna Szilagyj, judging the situation hopeless, jumped from the battlements into the river some 300 feet below, saying she would rather rot and be food for the fishes than to be taken by the Turks. Defying the odds, Vlad did manage to escape, and lived until 1476 when his habit of alienating his allies and undermining their authority resulted in his betrayal, capture and beheading by the Turks. It is said his head was displayed for all to see in Constantinople (now Istanbul). Following Vlad's departure, Poienari Castle was used by various military commanders until the first part of the 16th century, when it was again abandoned and left to fall to ruin. In 1888 an earthquake following an extended period of rain caused about 1/3 of the north side of the castle where the slope is most precipitous to collapse into the Argeș River. In more recent years the ruins were somewhat stabilized and improved, and are now administered as a tourist attraction. In the 1970s, the US TV show *The Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew Mysteries* featured exterior views of Poienari in the episode titled "The Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew Meet Dracula." However, this episode showed the heroes driving up to Poienari's gate for a rock concert; this is not possible, there is no road up there, one must approach the castle on foot.

The ruins consist of the south perimeter walls and 2 turrets, a few interior rooms open to the sky, and the castle keep/watchtower whose 3 floors, originally structured with wood, are long gone. The views are breathtaking: south into the Argeș Valley all the way to the village of Arefu 9 miles away, and to the northwest up the gorge into the ruggedness of the Carpathians with the road below curving upward to disappear in the verdure and reappear higher up. In the distance a dramatic bridge spans the gorge.

Poienari is open for public tours at the rate of 20,000 lei (about \$0.75) per person. Getting there can be a challenge, however: there are bus tours to Poienari from Bucharest, but these are expensive, about \$75/person. An alternative is to take a regular bus to the city of Curtea de Argeș, then a minibus to the town of Arefu, the closest settlement to the castle. It is a long walk from Arefu to Poienari, but if you tell the driver that's where you're going, he'll drop you off as close as possible. After all that you still must climb 1,480 steps from the road along the river to the castle. (Probably all those steps are the reason for Poienari's repeated abandonments, the rulers and military commanders occupying the castle got tired of the long, tiring climb!)

My personal opinion is that the effort required to visit Poienari is well worth it, the castle ruins are fascinating, and the Romanian countryside and woods on the way to it, as well as the views from the battlements, are gorgeous. When we were there during the Birmingham Grotto trip of 2004 we visited the castle in early evening, and were privileged to experience the full moon rising over Dracula's castle. Funny thing, though: ever since then I've had trouble with sunlight and churches, my body doesn't seem to age, and my diet has become, shall we say, quite specialized.



Bat part of Bestiary Series by @pinel.marcelo

News & Notes

by

Dave Howell

*** Another October has rolled around. That sounds like "ho-hum," but it's not that way at all. On one hand, the turning of months is a repetitive process, so it can be easy to take it for granted. But on the other, each month is unique, utterly unlike every other months in a plethora of ways. One thing that traditionally happens in October is the opening of the James D. Martin-Skyline Wildlife Management Area gates on the 1st. Another is Halloween, which of course comes on the 31st. Both of these events are discussed below, along with discussions of things that might contribute to this October's uniqueness. Read on:

*** Yes, October 1st is when the Skyline WMA gates open for the season. This is for hunting season, but to cavers it means the formal beginning of RIDGEWALKING SEASON. Here is the rundown of 2024-25 hunting season dates:

Turkey (dawn til 1:00 pm only):
March 25-26, 31; April 1-May 8
Deer: Archery: October 15-February 10

Guns: November 14-20, 25-26;
December 1-4; January 5-8, 12-15, 26-29.

A couple of things to note about the above: usually the WMA gates

close May 1, but because turkey season goes until May 8, I presume the gates will stay open longer than usual. Also, this year's WMA rules state that open alcoholic beverages are allowed only in designated campgrounds; previously alcohol has been prohibited anywhere in the WMA, so I guess the Fish & Game Commission has finally stepped into the 20th century. (No, that's not a typo.) Note that the month of February is completely free of gun days - only archery until the 10th - so this is peak ridgewalking season. Have at 'em!

And now, my annual litany of cautions: Do not hunt by this schedule. The above is only to let cavers know when folks are likely to be shooting in the woods. If you're hunting game rather than caves, consult the official state schedule, which is a good bit more complicated than the above. Always wear hunters' orange, even if it's not a gun day; this will make you more visible not only to hunters, but also to your caving buddies. Besides - shock! - folks have been known to hunt when they're not supposed to. Don't wear white, you can be mistaken for a whitetail deer. That sounds stupid, but it really can happen, especially with hunters who are drinking. (Some of them drink? Another shock!) Try not to stray onto private land. This is easy to do, and once you're off WMA land the

rules are different. With the above in mind, have fun, don't forget to report your finds to the Alabama Cave Survey, and above all, be safe out there!

*** As always, the 31st of this month brings HALLOWEEN, which is on a Thursday this year. Which means most trick or treating and Halloween parties will be on the following Saturday, November 2. Regarding our Grotto Halloween party, as of this writing no venue for it has been found, thus no date set. Consult the Grotto egroups for updated info.

*** I hear that ALAN CAMP won first place at Oldtimers' Reunion (OTR) for blind(folded) assembly of a carbide lamp. Congratulations, Alan! Now - are you gonna go caving with that carbide as your primary light source, or what?

*** The low levels of area rivers, creeks and waterways has been noted and applauded by BRADLEY JONES, one of the Grotto's foremost ridgewalkers, as conducive to in-cave push trips this fall and winter. You're right, Bradley, barring any last minute deluges, in-cave water levels should be low. Good - I just hate drowning like rats in a flooding stream passage. Ruins the whole day.



Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

P.O. Box 59607

Birmingham, AL 35259

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