A man wearing a yellow helmet with a headlamp, a white t-shirt with a red and blue logo, and dark pants is standing in a narrow, dimly lit cave passage. The rock walls are textured and yellowish-brown. The man is smiling and looking towards the camera.

BIRMINGHAM GROTTO
NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2015
VOLUME 45 NUMBER 1

BGN Calendar Details at meeting and on egrouop

Jan 13, 2015	2 nd Tues Grotto Meeting 7pm, Ruffner Mtn Nature Center, 1214 81st St. S. 35206 www.ruffnermountain.org
Jan 17	Vertical practice, Palisades Park David & Edna Caudle's 50 th wedding anniversary reception, Palisades Park
Jan 24	O'Shaughnessy vertical trip
Jan 31	Grotto trip to Blowing Saltpeter horizontal trip
Jan 31	Deadline to submit caving related photos for possible use on cover of 2015 Members Manual. Email rowland7840@bellsouth.net
Feb 10	2 nd Tues Grotto Meeting 7pm, Ruffner Mtn Nature Center, 1214 81st St. S. 35206 www.ruffnermountain.org
Feb 21	SERA Winter Business Meeting, Sewanee, TN Community Center. http://caves.org/grotto/sewaneemountaingrotto/
Feb 27	Grotto Getaway, Paint Rock River Resort. Details at meeting and on egrouop.
Feb 27-Mar 1	Cave Cavort 2015, Williston, FL. http://www.cavort.rivercitygrotto.com/
May 8-10	2015 SERA, hosted by East Tennessee Grotto at East Fork Stables, Jamestown, TN.. For more info: www.sera2015.subworks.com Early registration deadline: March 8
July 13-1	2015 NSS Convention, Waynesville, MO. More info: nss2015.caves.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 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. 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. The subscription rate is \$15.00 per year. The Birmingham Grotto will exchange publications with other NSS Grottos. Exchange newsletters should be sent to:

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

Articles, Trip Reports, Graphics, Poetry, and any other speleo-related material should be sent to the Editors via the email address given. Submissions via email should be directed to: editor@bhamgrotto.org. The deadline for publication is the 27th of the month; however, the Newsletter is limited to 12 pages per month and material may be held for future issues.

Birmingham On-Line!
Find us on Facebook,
CaveChat or
www.bhamgrotto.org

More About Caves and Caving

National Speleological Society

The Birmingham Grotto recommends that all grotto members consider joining 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. Find out more at <http://www.scci.org/>

**Birmingham
Grotto Officers**

President
Alan Cook, NSS 34617
Vice-President
Ray Merrill, NSS 5 63940
(205) 478-7701
Secretary
Bradley Jones, NSS 63915
nss63915@ gmail.com
Treasurer & Member List
Lindsey Bean, NSS 65520
lindseyb1024@ yahoo.com
205-913-1650
Immediate Past President
(Executive Committee Member)
Fennigan Spencer, NSS 61677

On the cover...

Newly re-elected Grotto VP Ray Merrill in Malone Cave
Photo by newly re-elected Grotto Secretary Bradley Jones

Newsletter Staff

Editors
Dave Howell, NSS13926 FE
& Valerie Howell, NSS 18128
vdshowell@ yahoo.com
(205) 591-5127

Proofreaders
Scott Fee, NSS 19797 LF
scottfee@ bellsouth.net
Jimmy Sims, NSS 30238
donnaatch@ charter.net

Archivist
David Caudle, NSS 13995 FE
olecaveman@ gmail.com

Conservation
David McRae, NSS 51358
dirtydavesmcræ@ gmail.com

Webmaster
Jeff Harrod, NSS 37101
webmaster@ bhamgrotto.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

December 9, 2014

Visitors

NA

Minutes

November 11, 2014 Meeting Minutes were accepted with the following corrections.

Motion was made at November meeting that 50% of Grotto fundraising monies, up to \$500, to go toward a discretionary fund that will be used by the Executive Committee as needed for grotto events. Scott Fee reminded the group that we had discussed that this would exclude annual auction funds (this was not noted accurately in last month's meeting minutes).

Officer Elections 2015

President: Alan Cook

Vice President: Ray Merrill

Secretary: Bradley Jones

Treasurer: Lindsey Bean

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Lindsey Bean Provided Report for November 2014

Beginning Balance: \$4328.47

Income:

Dues \$233.59

Grotto shirts \$52.00

Total Income: +\$289.59

Expenses:

Printing 2 Months \$62.94

Food TAG \$100.00

PO Box Renewal \$146.00

Total Expenses: -\$308.94

Ending Balance: \$4,301.12

Still Unpaid 2014 Auction
\$146 (Magz)

Announcements

12/13/14 – Moses Tomb Weekend Campout

12/31/14 – New Year's Party possibly at David McRae's?

02/27/15 – Paint Rock Getaway Weekend

02/27/15 – Florida Cave Cavort Weekend Event

You may choose if you wish to begin receiving electronic copy of the monthly newsletter via email pdf instead of a paper copy via snail mail or at the meeting. By opting for this you should get your copy moments before those at the meeting* and will also save the grotto some money on printing and postage. If interested please let Valerie Howell or Lindsey Bean know

Wanting to join or renew your grotto membership? If so you can send payment to PayPal account, bhamgrotto@gmail.com. You may also still mail in check to P.O. Box 59607, Birmingham, AL 35259 or hand deliver to the treasurer, Lindsey Bean, at the next meeting. \$15 Single | \$20 Family. Add \$1 if paying by PayPal to cover convenience fees. Once paid you will receive or continue

receiving the award winning newsletter and access to the yahoo group for latest date on caving trips.

Old Business

Bryant Mountain Gating project is complete! Thanks to all that came out and made this a success.

Grotto TShirts are in and if you haven't received yours yet reach out to Fennigan Spencer or come to the next meeting. Also if you need to pay for your shirt please reach out to Lindsey Bean or send PayPal payment to bhamgrotto@gmail.com

Lindsey Bean is having a few last minute items being reviewed so that we may soon renew our nonprofit status.

New Business

01/17/15 – David Caudle and Edna Caudle will be celebrating their 50th Wedding Anniversary at Palisades from 11-3PM. There will also be some rope practice same day at same place.

02/21/15 – SERA Winter Business Meeting

Survey Class - There are some new members interested in learning about surveying and we are looking for someone to possibly head this up.

Grotto Trips

12/12/14 - Moses Tomb Weekend which will also be December Grotto Trip

Trip Reports

Judy Ranelli, Dave and Valerie Howell, Tim Harris, Juan Santiago, Raine Barnes, Jennifer Potts, Ray Merrill, and Fennigan Spencer visited Blue Springs Cave for the November Grotto Trip.

Judy Ranelli visited Mrs. Millers with Tim Harris, Juan Santiago, Ray Merrill, and Mark Ostrander.

Ray Merrill visited Byers with Mark Ostrander and Mark Byess, Kennamer with Tim Harris and Juan Santiago.

Donna Cobb participated in the cleanup at Howards Waterfall.

Jeff Harrod visited Iron Hoop and Jess Elliot with Dave and Twee McRae, Daniel and Martha Wood, Chris Garrison and Chris Teasley.

Dave McRae visited Graves with Twee McRae, Randall Donaldson and Shiori Ito.

Mark Grace visited Kennamer with Teresa Barnett.

Alan Cook and Cassie Perry hiked part of the AT in Helen, GA.

Ty Conway and Bradley Jones headed to a promising area with 2 and or possibly more qualifiers. One will be known as Buck Skull Cave and the other AFU Hole. We have not yet seen the bottom of AFU Hole and will check it out after we have ridgewalked this area a bit more thoroughly.

Program

Dirty Santa and Christmas Party.

Respectfully submitted,

Ray Merrill while Bradley and Brandon were MIA somewhere on Benton MacKaye.

Malone and Related Tales

Bradley Jones (NSS 63155)

I have spent some time locating and exploring some of the known caves on the Springville Quad. There was one cave however, known as Malone, that is not known to have been visited since a Huntsville Grotto report back in 1965. One reason there may be no history of anyone else visiting could be because the reported location was substantially off, 1000'+, causing most anyone looking for it to give up quickly. Also the area is quite difficult to access even if you know someone in the area. I now know 5 landowners surrounding the cave however it is still not the easiest of caves to get to. Below are some of my journal entries of the event as it unfolds.

01/03/14

Initial exploration of the area began when I found out after meeting Jennifer Potts. I found that her family lived in an area I had been wanting to explore so she and I made an attempt to locate some known caves in her stomping grounds. While waiting for Jennifer to arrive I found out Big Canoe Bridge Cave was not where I had previously thought. I showed her what I found when she arrived and then we headed off to locate some of the others. Jennifer spotted Valley Overlook and we pushed all we could of this cave until discovering a sleeping raccoon blocking what appeared to be a crawl in the back of the upper passage. I found out on a later visit that the blocked lead quickly terminates. We then located the Quarry Cave which was a wet cave that barely appeared to be a qualifier. What was interesting however was the remains of a rope going under a rock following the path of the water exiting the cave. No luck lifting the rock to see if there was a lower lead underneath us and this will have to be checked further at a later date. The next cave, the largest of all in this general area, was Malone. We checked the reported elevation and no promising signs of any karst in this area. I was slightly disappointed but still happy we were able to find the ones we did.

Not long after this I ran into an old friend of mine who also happens to live on top of the mountain. He told me he had stumbled upon a cave 6 years ago. He described it and gave me general whereabouts. My first thoughts were that he had discovered something new however.....

03/02/14

Mike and I met up about 1PM to begin our ridgewalk. The area he showed me on map appeared to be very close to Valley Overlook however his description was something slightly different than the cave Jennifer and I recently visited. He told me his find was close to some old homesteads west of where we had previously explored. Malone is described as having a 27' pit so I started to wonder if this was the same cave however Malone was reported to be atop the mountain at or right below the sandstone. We looked for a couple of hours with no luck but did find some nice karst features at a lower elevation. One of these finds required a handline which I tied and pushed to the bitter end. Unfortunately it wasn't a qualifier but even so this would have been a bonus as this wasn't what he was wanting to show me. Mike was bummed as he had been to this cave twice before but had always descended the mountain instead of ascending as we had. Foiled again!

03/08/14

Mike was so disappointed that we were unable to easily relocate

the cave and told me that he and his nephew, who had just attempted to climb Everest, would tromp all over the mountain until they found it. Turns out though that his nephew wouldn't be arriving until later that day so he asked if I wanted to give it another go with him early morning. I must add that in 2010 I was given the trail name, vapor, because a friend of mine from Georgia said on one of our backpacking trips that one minute you would see me on the trail and the next minute I was gone. I think I have slowed down a bit since then which is likely because I am always seeing things that I had never noticed before when quickly moving through the forest. I learned today though that Mike, who was 15 years older than me, was in far better shape or perhaps it's just because this mountain is his playground. Yeah, I'll go with that last assumption, ha!

I met at his place 6am at his place. From there we took mountain bikes along the ridge until we came to a trail down the mountain. He showed me a nice 80'+ waterfall that was one of like 7 drops down the mountain which I would like to check further at some point. Got back on bikes and followed the trail down the mountain until we got to the point where we had to travel by foot. In no time we were back to where we were on our last attempt. Unfortunately results were nearly the same and we were about to give up until Mike headed back up the mountain and hollered that he had found it. The cave was in an odd spot near a pine thicket not far from the homestead like he remembered. Both of us were excited to finally be here. I stuck my head in and found the 30' drop he had described. Looked like this would be pushing the limits of my handline so I decided I would head back on a future trip to push. No biggie as Mike had another lead nearby so we headed off to give it a look. Met the landowner who lead us through a couple of his gates required to access the cave. Mr. Tucker said his nephews had poked inside before but he did not think it had been fully pushed. He had dreams of it being a magnificent cavern. Likely only a select few, if any have ever visited this cave before as the landowner has lived there most of his life. Mike didn't think he could fit so I tied a handline and squeezed in to check it out. Once in it was about a 20' drop. Made it to the bottom which had another 60' or so of passage. Mostly a crack with little passage options. Found 2 bats, some flowstone, and some rimstone dams. This cave is now known as Tucker's Squeeze. If you are somewhat slim and interested in visiting this cave please ask Mr. Tucker rather than jumping his fences and having his attack dogs rip you apart.

MALONE continued on page 4



(Bradley Jones)

MALONE continued from page 3

05/05/14

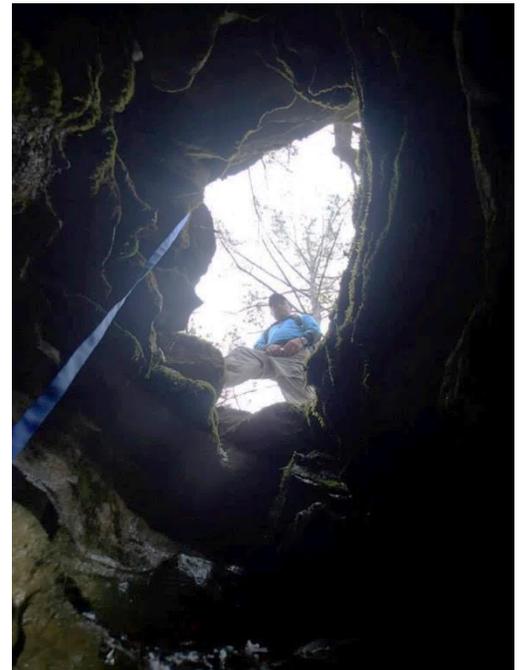
I decided to head back and check what I now believed to be Malone after Turkey Season. Ray Merrill told me he was in so he met me a little after 6AM at my house and then we were off. After a quick breakfast at Hardees and then headed to bottom of the mountain to start our journey. Quickly discovered the woods had been recently clearcut and as such didn't realize it but we were right up on Quarry cave which was now at the edge of the clearcut. The dirt road from here was no longer there or hidden under the debris so we bushwhacked same elevation above to Valley Overlook Cave and from there to Malone. Tied my 30' handline off to the water pipe only to find that it didn't reach bottom. Untied and then Ray rigged his rope, gave me a quick check on ropework and then he bottomed cave. He did a quick check to see if it appeared to go or not to determine whether I needed to join him and found that it was worthwhile so on this day I get my first taste of vertical. That's right Bradley gets vertical with the thought of seeing something so few have was more than enough to motivate me. 5 bars in the rack and I couldn't move. Remedied that and then the pipe was in the way, making it more difficult than it should be, but Ray had me use a QAS for safety so I had to trust the equipment and wiggle around the pipe. The drop was nothing once I maneuvered under the pipe so I was down in no time. The cave wasn't half the length originally reported on the survey but wow at the formations. The room at the end of the cave, which was approximately 20'x10', had a small skylight at top. We did not attempt freeclimbing or checking for it once we exited as the woods were now overgrow with poison ivy and had other obligations later in the day so we headed back. We did not observe any bats in the cave but did see loads of cave salamanders. We also found a jawbone of an unidentified critter in one of the crawls and in the entrance room we checked where all the water exited the room but couldn't find any going passage that we could fit in. With our faces to the floor looking for leads we discovered a possum that had fallen to its death in the bottom of the pit. We climbed out of the cave and headed back. On our bushwhack out we found some empty explosive boxes and am pretty sure we heard some in the distance. Perhaps it was our imagination? We left quickly and I don't advise anyone checking this area without first making some acquaintances with those that live there. I still have another visit planned as my next search will be for School Cave as I already have landowner access and just have to make time to check it out. More to come soon and if I am lucky I will stumble upon another unknown on my next visit.



L: Mike standing by an Interesting Karst Feature – IKF

Below: It didn't go

(Bradley Jones)



Thanks

I want to congratulate the Birmingham Grotto for their participation in the multiple philanthropic endeavors you participated in last year. In September I visited several philanthropic agencies in Birmingham and the surrounding areas that support those less privileged than us. What I saw inspired me to ask my friends for help and to give our support to those less fortunate. The first drive we collected clothing for Pathways, a daytime shelter for woman and children. I pulled up in front of the facility with a Cube full of items. I loaded them into a laundry cart and rolled it in. The workers there were so happy and literally giddy when they saw the overflowing cart. I wish you could have all been there to see it. Then in November we collected a shopping cart full of food for Hope House located in Oneonta. At that time I found out that there was a shortage of food for the needy in the County. Finally in December everyone filled a huge box with toys to be donated to underprivileged children in Birmingham. Again they were so grateful. So thank you all for indulging my passion and I hope I inspired all of you to keep giving. You have all truly made a difference in the lives of others.

=Moe\

Review: Fenix HL55
Judy Ranelli (NSS 49720)

I wanted to write a quick caving lamp review of my latest light, the Fenix HL55. However I find myself adding backstory so it won't be quick (but will get there)...

I've been caving for around 15 years and I've used many different lights, from a TAG-Light with battery belt (similar in size to a Wheat lamp) to a carbide cap lamp, and several Petzls in the mix.

My light for most of the past several years was a Princeton Tec Apex which I modded to a brighter LED. I really liked the Apex except for the questionable reliability. (link to mod for those curious: <http://www.candlepowerforums.com/vb/showthread.php...>). I also added clear silicone around certain parts of the case to help with waterproofness. It looked rough but did the job. The light served me well for a few years but started getting more and more unreliable. I gave my Apex to a friend who used it for awhile until it quit entirely. She sent it in for warranty and, despite my having modded it, Princeton Tec happily sent her a brand new one which she is still using. So, props to Princeton Tec for their lifetime warranty.

I wanted to try something with more lumens but not a lot of \$\$\$\$. After reading some recommendations on candlepowerforums I bought the Spark ST6-500cw. I have had the Spark for a couple of years, during which I didn't do much caving. Originally I chose the Spark because it takes CR123a batteries, instead of having to use rechargeable 18650s. With the infrequency of my caving at the time, it seemed better to me to just use the occasional couple of CR123a's when I wanted to cave. Earlier this year, during the last few trips I used it on I was a bit frustrated with the lack of flood. A couple of friends had bought and were pleased with the Fenix HL-55, and it was on sale for \$60, *and* it too uses CR123a's if wanted. Early October I ordered one. Ironically when I got the HL55, I started using it as a headlamp in camp and around the house, and pondered whether or not to take it in a cave. My thoughts were that I would keep it for other uses and get a Zebralight flood, and take the rechargeable battery plunge. However, my grotto went to Blue Spring cave on Saturday and I decided to give the Fenix a try.

In cave I wore the Fenix on top of the Spark in the front of my helmet. The HL55 is wider, and comes with a headband I duct taped to the helmet. Both together were of negligible weight. Weight is important to me because I have had my share of heavy lamp heads and neck aches etc. from the Tag-Light days. Most of the time I had the Fenix on as my lamp, only using the Spark to see if I could better illuminate a place with them both running together. I don't have example shots or technical terms to describe how caving with the HL-55 was, except to use the phrase a friend used to describe his: "It's plenty light for the type of caving I intend to do". The trip to Blue Spring included borehole breakdown climbs and tight crawls in tunnels, some hands and knees, some tighter, with a bit of belly crawls. Whether walking in the borehole, or scooting thru the crawls I had all the light I wanted for my uses. The HL-55 has four brightness levels plus a 900-lumen burst level. I found the very lowest level quite useful, esp. when we were taking a breather or I wanted to talk to someone but not be in complete dark. I'll call that level 1, and I'll call the burst setting level 5. Most of the time in cave I used level 2 for smaller spaces and level 3 for the borehole. To light something up I used level 4, and rarely used level 5 for anything except curiosity to see how well it lit up something. I had plenty of battery time for our 8 hour trip.

I haven't tested its waterproofness yet, so I can't speak to that. But I am pleased with this headlamp, and especially for the price - \$60.

Link to Fenix HL-55: <http://www.fenix-store.com/fenix-hl55-led-headlamp/>
 Link to Spark ST6-500cw: <http://www.sbflashlights.com/Spark-ST6-500CW-p106.html>

Trip Report 2014
Fenn Spencer (NSS 61677)

We went to the edge
 Stared and looked down
 Into a heaven we found
 Nestled in the mountains
 With a creek at the foot
 Up the hill begging breath
 Looking for cold blowing
 Ropes in tow
 Gear snacks and water
 Protein and poly pro
 Pads, helmets, and packs they ain't light
 Three sources just to be right
 Down the hole we go
 Ledges will disappear
 Caverns burst open
 Ceiling of dome
 Wormholes to unknown
 Muddy caverns delight
 In water freezing
 Falls flowing
 Crystals hanging from walls
 Where bottom seems to fall
 Up
 From our underground
 We feel life
 While avoiding death
 Hot dog and beer at the entrance
 Warm air and reality
 Camp fires and spiritually
 Of mamma nature and her fold
 Stories upon stories told
 Of the men and women cavers
 Even the nay Sayers scoff
 Discovering that character stays
 When the mud is washed off.....

FTBAS 12.26.14



Shout Out! 2014 Accomplishments Birmingham Grotto



Ruffner Mountain Quarry graffiti removal



Bryant Mountain Cave gate installation



Caving trip to Tumbling Rock Cave for Sierra Club
All images by Bradley Jones, used with permission.



Caving trip to Howard's Waterfall Cave for Venturing Crew 216

- 01/11/14 - Birmingham Grotto led Sierra Club on Tumbling Rock trip
- 01/14/14 - Birmingham Grotto donated \$100 to Black Warrior Riverkeeper
- 01/20/14 - Birmingham Grotto Quarry graffiti cleanup at Ruffner Mountain
- 03/11/14 - Birmingham Grotto donated \$500 to 2014 NSS Convention
- 04/03/14 - Birmingham Grotto lent a hand to Over the Edge Event at Galleria Towers
- 04/05/14 - Birmingham Grotto rebuilt two pavilion roofs at NSS headquarters with \$3112.12 in materials also donated by the grotto
- 04/05/14 - Birmingham Grotto added seven new caves to the Alabama Cave Survey for 2013/2014
- 04/08/14 - Birmingham Grotto donated \$100 toward logistics so that CaveSim could be shown at the 2014 NSS Convention
- 04/08/14 - Birmingham Grotto donated a \$100 brick at NSS Headquarters
- 04/22/14 - Birmingham Grotto cleaned up Trussville Caverns on Earth Day

- 05/13/14 - Birmingham Grotto made \$2000 donation to SCCI
- 05/17/14 - Birmingham Grotto led Troop 915 on Sinking Cove trip
- 06/13/14 - Birmingham Grotto cleaned up Sinking Cove Site
- 07/18/14 - Birmingham Grotto members won Cave Ballad and had photos accepted at 2014 NSS Convention
- 08/22/14 - Birmingham Grotto cleaned up Big Canoe Creek
- 09/09/14 - Birmingham Grotto donated to Pathways
- 09/12/14 - Birmingham Grotto lent a hand to Over the Edge Event at Federal One for Cystic Fibrosis
- 09/20/14 - Birmingham Grotto TAG Fall Cave-In work weekend
- 09/27/14 - Birmingham Grotto led Troop 514 on Tumbling Rock trip
- 10/04/14 - Birmingham Grotto cleaned up Kenamer Preserve
- 10/14/14 - Birmingham Grotto helped with United Way Fundraiser
- 10/25/14 - Birmingham Grotto led Venturing Crew 216 on Howard's Waterfall
- 11/01/14 - Birmingham Grotto gated Bryant Mountain Cave
- 11/11/14 - Birmingham Grotto donated food to Hopehouse

News & Notes

Dave Howell

*** It is not only the dawn of a new month, but of a new year, an exciting time: 2015 stretches out ahead of us like a highway to the horizon. Where will it lead us? January was named for the Roman god Janus, whose double-faced image appeared as way markers along Roman roads, thus the beginning of a new year is a time for looking not only forward to what the coming year might bring, but also back at what the previous year brought us. Or maybe Janus simply didn't know whether he was coming or going. Whatever, the Birmingham Grotto offers its best wishes for 2015 to all members, friends and colleagues – may your lights illuminate virgin walking passage, deep pits, and new leads. Happy New Year!

*** Some good news came down the pike last month: the SOUTHEASTERN CAVE CONSERVANCY (SCCi) has acquired STEPHENS GAP CAVE. This is indeed good news in that Stephens Gap, one of TAG's classic pits and certainly one of its most beautiful, has been seeing increased traffic of late, most of which is non-cavers who know of the place by notations on on-line maps, guides, etc. Perhaps SCCi ownership will provide at least a measure of protection for this unique cave with its side-by-side vertical and horizontal entrances. (Efforts to persuade on-line map and guidebook services to delete cave entrances from their maps, or better, to not show them in the first place, might also help.) Further info about SCCi policy regarding caver access to Stephens Gap will be forthcoming soon.

*** Funny how the most trivial events can trigger bigger ones. A canoe run on the Cahaba River was proposed the day after Christmas when it was observed that water levels were particularly favorable; Valerie and I were going to go, but ended up missing it because of a dead battery that morning. After we bought a new battery, Valerie said she'd like to stop by World Market to see what was marked down, and while there we ran into APRIL RUETHEMANN, aka "Stella," a former Birmingham caver who now heads the Marathon, Florida outpost of the Grotto, in Birmingham for the holidays. (We got to meet her parents, too.) So good to see her again! Valerie's shopping trip turned out to be a very nice consolation prize for having missed the canoe trip.

*** An interesting factoid concerning one of our members: ANGELA MORGAN was first in line to buy a ticket to see *The Interview* when it opened at The Edge here in Birmingham. "It's important to resist censorship," she commented (or words to that effect). Bravo, Angela, on standing up for freedom! And congratulations on encountering none of the retaliatory measures promised by North Korea's dictator Kim Jong Un if the film was shown in American theaters. I guess the arm of the North Korean secret police isn't quite long enough to reach as far as Birmingham. (Of course in fairness, North Korea denies any involvement in the hacking of Sony Pictures, producers of *The Interview*; could it be that they're telling the truth and this whole

brouhaha was manufactured by Sony to increase ticket sales to the film? Ah, the pleasures of conspiracy theories!) (And by the way, those contrails left by high-flying jets? Are actually chemicals being sprayed over the US to keep the populace quiescent and compliant! Yes!)

*** Guess you know that next month will bring the GROTTO GETAWAY (formerly known as the Guntersville Getaway), one of the Grotto's premier annual events. For our members who have joined us in the past year and have not yet experienced a Getaway, this event is a Grotto party with a cave trip attached (as opposed to the Sinking Cove Campout, which is a cave trip with a party attached). The Getaway will be held at the PAINT ROCK VALLEY LODGE & RETREAT in Estill Fork, Alabama the weekend of February 27-28, and will as usual feature a group meal (always delicious); a Saturday cave trip (a ridgewalk or an in-cave trip, your choice); and the Saturday night Grotto auction. Donations of auction goods are solicited, and they don't have to be cave-related, we'll gratefully auction anything, so cast an eye at the contents of that attic, basement, or storage room. This is your opportunity to get rid of that stuffed moose that never quite fit in with your living room decor, or that guillotine you've been using as a cigar cutter, or that 10 volume set of *Caves of Delaware* – all donations are appreciated, and you will have done your part to raise money for the Grotto. See you at the Getaway!

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

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED