

BATS

NEWS

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Features

BATS News

February 2004

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Excerpt

FROM the Editor

This issue marks the appearance of the BATS News after a long absence. My apologies to all for being so tardy. Both Mike and I got busy and things kind of slipped away from us. But now we're back. By the way, the cover of the September 2003 issue won an honorable mention in the 2004 Michigan Convention Newsletter Salon. Congrats to Mike (art director) and Sarah Richards (cover photo) for the honor.

Calendar

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| AUG 20-22 | BATS 10th Anniversary Camp Out & Cave-In, contact Joe Shepherd |
| SEP 3-6 | Old Timers Reunion, Dailey, WV |
| SEP 24-26 | Fall VAR Meeting, Camp Kidd, Parsons, WV, http://var.karstsports.com |
| SEP 17-19 | V-BATS to Whiteside Mountain, NC |
| OCT 9 | Mock Rescue at Catawba Murder Hole, contact NCRC |
| OCT 16 | Bridge Day, New River Gorge, Fayetteville, WV |
| JUL 4-8 | NSS Convention 2005, Huntsville, Alabama, http://www.nss2005.com ,
Contact: Jim Hall, jimehall2@cs.com , 256-772-9829 or Charles Lundquist,
lundquc@email.uah.edu , 256-824-2684 |

ONGOING EVENTS

Vertical Practice at TinY's house every Tuesday evening except the 2nd Tuesday
when practice will be held the following Thursday

BATS FEBRUARY MEETING Minutes

PRESENT: Evelyn Bradshaw, Ken Hornung, Nikki Bennett, Russell Loynes, Allan Weberg, Bart Mix, Chris Reasonover, Sarah Pearce, Michael Conner, Meredith Johnson, Kelsea Johnson, Dave Johnston, Sean Foster, Seth Lake, Amanda Freund

MEMBERSHIP: Dues are due (\$15 for non-NSS, \$10 for NSS). Pay up if you haven't.

TRIP REPORTS: Chris led the Crystal Caverns Conservation Trip on January 10th, Meredith talked about the Grand Caverns Survey Trip.

ELECTIONS: Bart reported the election results: President—TinY Manke, Vice President—Raymond Herlong, Secretary—Nikki Bennett, Treasurer—Chris Reasonover, Delegate—at-Large—Allan Weberg

PANCAKE BREAKFAST: The pancake breakfast at Fall VAR brought in \$232.00.

V-BATS: TinY has been pretty busy lately, and Allan has been assisting V-BATS practices. Check your e-mail before you come out to vertical practice, TinY will e-mail if there's a change in the schedule.

“The secret of endurance in cave exploring is to relax. Rest every muscle you can every chance you get.”

–Roger Brucker

“You see, war is serious business, caving is not—not business that is.”

–Richard “Red” Watson

MY FIRST CAVE

By MICHAEL CONNER

A caver's first cave trip is a memorable one. Since my first cave trip was just over a month ago, I still have a very clear memory of what it was like. When I think back on that first trip to Glade Cave in Augusta County, Virginia, the words excitement and exhilaration barely begin to describe my memories. I keep wondering when I can go again! When I first started dating Sarah Pearce, she talked constantly about this sport called caving. Naturally, I was curious to learn as much about it as I could. My interest in the geology and conservation of caves was fueled by hearing Sarah and her mom, Susi, continually talking about caving. I was fascinated, and eagerly looked forward to venturing into a cave for myself. After a few months of persistently asking Sarah about when I could go caving, a trip was finally planned for January. Talk about anticipation—months of asking about caving didn't even compare to actually knowing the date and then having to wait. All of that waiting was definitely worth it. Our long-awaited trip consisted of Sarah Pearce, her



artwork by Michael Young

friend, Sarah, my friends, Dane and Rodie, and me. Once we were gathered outside the cave, we loaded on our gear. I would never have imagined that strapping on a skating helmet with a Wal-Mart headlamp duct-taped to it could be so much fun. Everyone in our group was new to caving except for Sarah. She led us through a cave that had become very familiar to her. As we all followed Sarah into the cavern, the darkness settled in and our lights became our only connection to the outside world that waited above us. The thing that struck me the most about Glade Cave was surely the excessive amount of mud that covers just about everything. We cavers were even coated in mud within a few minutes. It was a rush to know that I was exploring an area of planet Earth that very few people have been privy to seeing with their own eyes. And that rush was

heightened by knowing that a hint of danger lurked around every corner. It soon became clear to me why people become hooked on caving. Exploring Glade Cave that day in January won a place for caving in my list of personal obsessions. Since Glade, I have also explored Kee Cave with Sarah, Susi, and fellow cavers Earl Sutor and his fiancée, Cheryl. Perhaps what I loved the most about Kee Cave was the abundance of crawling passages and tight squeezes. A good challenge like that is always fun for me. Since Kee Cave, I have joined the NSS and look forward to joining BATS in the days to come. Caving should be classified an obsession rather than a sport. With my third cave trip planned at the end of February (a return to Glade), I am more than ever obsessed with exploring the great speleological unknown.



BEYOND
The DEEP

THE DEADLY DESCENT INTO THE
WORLD'S MOST TREACHEROUS CAVE

WILLIAM STONE AND BARBARA AM ENDE
WITH MONTE PAULSEN

This excerpt from *Beyond the Deep* is reprinted with permission. The vertical drops described here are three to six-hundred meters below the San Agustín Entrance of the Huautla Cave System in Mexico.

The Bowl Hole Series continued below the dramatic One-Ten with an equally harrowing sixty-meter shaft. The rebelay required each caver to unthread and rethread his or her rappel rack several times while traveling down and up the nylon highway. So while the mid-drop attachments provided a measure of added security for the experienced cavers, they also provided a dangerous obstacle—and therefore an additional opportunity to make a mistake—for divers Jim, Steve, and Kenny, who were still fairly new to the art of rappelling and frogging in the dark.

The procedure was also new to Angel Soto Porrua. Angel had climbed many of the world's major peaks, and had topped Mexico's Mount Popocatepetl some 300 times. He was a star gymnast—at fifty years old, Angel still enjoyed showing off for the other cavers by cranking out one-arm pull-ups—and an accomplished cave diver. But despite his high-altitude climbing skills and his superior fitness, Angel was, like the other divers, relatively new to racks, rebelay, and the finer points of traveling on rope underground.

On March 14, Angel had successfully negotiated some fifteen rebelay before reaching the sixty-meter shaft. He racked in at the top, care-

fully lowered his heavy duffel below him until it drew taut against his harness, then unclipped his Cow's Tail—a stiff, foot-long rope with a carabiner at the end that, when covered with mud, looks much like its namesake. He rappelled smoothly for nearly fifteen meters, and adjusted his stance as he approached the first rebelay. There he clipped the carabiner at the end of his Cow's Tail into a small metal hanger attached to the bolt in the wall. With his weight temporarily suspended from the short Cow's Tail, he unthreaded his rack from the upper line leading to the bolt, rethreaded it on the lower line leading down, unclipped the Cow's Tail, and started down the shaft.

But he was unable to descend. He'd neglected to steer his hanging duffel clear on the way down, and now the tether was hung up and over the line coming from the pitch above. He looked up in dismay. His tether went up and over the loop of rope, and the pack now hung in front of his eyes, counterbalancing his own weight. He tried to push the duffel up with one arm, but it was useless. He was stuck. Grumbling to himself, he put his ascenders on the line and began to work his way back up. Back at the rebelay, he clipped his Cow's Tail safety line into the hanger, and then swung the duffel free. It dangled below him like a forty-pound sausage.

"Okay," he muttered to himself. "Now get back on rappel, and get on with it."

He put away his ascenders and had begun to rethread his rap-

**"Are you okay?"
Barbara yelled up
again. "Angel?"
"Am I okay?"
Angel mumbled to
himself. "What is
with those women?"**

pel rack when a few drops from the waterfall above landed directly on his carbide headlamp. The water extinguished the flame. He reached up and struck the piezo ignitor, but nothing happened. Again. Nothing. The tip was too wet too light. Again. So he switched on his backup electric. Out poured a dim, amber glow. He'd failed to replace the batteries after his last trip. He could barely see his own hand. He shook his head. Barbara was waiting for him at the base of the drop; maybe she'd have spare batteries with her.

"Are you okay?" she shouted up.

Angel took this as a prompt. He'd been moving slowly and he knew it. He thought he was being told to hurry up—by a woman! This grated his Latin sense of dignity. He'd summited several of the world's highest mountains; and had dived many of Mexico's deepest caves. And now he was being told to hurry along, like a child. Told by a *gringa*, no less. A woman who, he admitted to himself, was more proficient at this style of rope work than he.

"Ahh," he groped for the words in English, "Ah, please, give me...more minutes. The rebelay. Is a problem."

His awkward English left Barbara wondering if he needed help. She looked at Nancy Pistole, a hauling volunteer from the Cheve project, to see what she thought. Pistole shrugged. A few small rocks tumbled down the shaft, and the two women leapt out of the way. They could see he was in the dark up there, but neither wanted to make the climb unless he really needed help.

Angel's electric died quickly. He rethreaded his rack in the dark, detached his Cow's Tail, and eased back into a rappel position.

"Click."

The loud snap of aluminum against steel riveted his attention. He froze. "Shit!" It couldn't possibly be...

"Click."

...no doubt now. None at all. Amid all the confusion—the hanging duffel, the sputtering carbide, the dead electric—he'd threaded the rappel rack backward. And now, instead of compressing the aluminum brake bars together, his own weight was popping them off the U-shaped steel frame. Two of the five had already unzipped. He didn't have much time.

He grasped the three remaining brake bars with his left hand, and

clenched them in his fist. Tendons leapt out of his wrists. With his right hand, he tried to jam the remaining bars together, to add braking friction. His hand began to shake, as he held his entire body weight, plus that of a forty-pound duffel, on just three bars. If he let go, he'd plummet thirty meters to the rock floor below, and die at the feet of two *gringas*.

"Click."

Three down. This wasn't working. *Got to try something else. Fast.*

Angel slid his right hand over the rack, and gripped it as tight as he could. He then thrust his left arm upward, searching for the loop of rope hanging from the upper pitch. His left hand found it, grasped it, and wrapped it around his wrist a couple times for security.

"Click," snapped the fourth brake bar. With the fifth and final bar unable to provide any friction by itself, the rack was free.

Angel hung in the darkness, swinging gently in the open shaft, connected to life only by a left wrist that was screaming in pain. Had anyone else on the expedition made the same mistake, it would have been fatal. Their last desperate grasp would have been insufficient to answer the

inexorable pull of gravity. But Angel's years of gymnastics—and all those macho one-armed pull-ups—gave him a chance.

"Are you okay?" Barbara yelled up again. "Angel?"

"Am I okay?" Angel mumbled to himself. "What is *with* those women?"

He was unable to lift both his weight and that of the duffel on one arm. So he flung his right hand up to the loop, and pulled himself up to where he could throw his left arm over the rope. With his right hand, he then fished around his harness for an ascender. He couldn't find one, but did find the Cow's Tail. It wasn't ideal, but it would work. He raised the carabiner to his face in the darkness, and stuck it in his mouth to determine which way the gate opened. Then he snapped it into the same loop he was still hanging on to by his left arm. He relaxed cautiously, and let his weight transfer to the Cow's Tail. It held. He then attached his ascenders, and rested in the darkness.

"Angel?" Barb and Nancy yelled up again. "You okay?"

"*Si*," he finally replied, after catching his breath. "*No problema.*"

Fall VAR 2004
September 24-26
Camp Kidd in Tucker County, WV

Featuring:

- Monongahela Grotto's 40th Anniversary party
- Live music and cold refreshments
- Plenty of camping space and hot showers
- Lots of led trips to some of the many nearby caves
- One day caving projects
- For those so inclined: Hiking in the Otter Creek Wilderness, Blackwater Canyon, or Dolly Sods, Mountain biking (bring your own bike), Kayaking in the Dry Fork and Cheat (bring your own kayak), Sightseeing at Blackwater Falls State Park, Canaan Valley State Park, Cathedral State Park—a 133-acre stand of virgin hemlock
- An interesting speaker or two on Saturday night
- SpeleoVenders
- A guidebook that will feature Tucker County caves and caving information
- VAR business meeting (9 A.M. Sunday morning)

For directions and more info go to <http://var.karstsports.com>

Pre-registration Form

Name: _____

Street: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Vegetarian Meal? Yes/No

If registering multiple people, please list their names on a separate sheet with meal preference indicated.

VAR Pre-registration fees (good through September 13, 2004):

Adults (17 and older): \$25 x _____ = \$ _____

Kids (5-16 without guidebook): \$15 x _____ = \$ _____

Kids (5-16 with guidebook): \$19 x _____ = \$ _____

If you're 4 or under you get in free

Total enclosed= \$ _____

After 9/13/04 add \$5 per person

Make check payable to Monongahela Grotto and send to: Fall VAR 20004
c/o Bob Griffith
106 Forest Drive
Morgantown WV 26505