
PINE HILL CAVE

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REQUIREMENTS: A very diverse cave with lots of walking and crawling. Areas in the back of the cave require climbing.

NOTE: Yes, this cave does flood. Cars left unattended will most likely be vandalized.

Pine Hill Cave's name comes from the small community nearby and the Pine Hill School above the cave. The school later became a church and is now a residence. Pine Hill is a very popular cave and on a nice weekend can have several groups inside at the same time. The main entrance is a very large, impressive arch twenty feet wide and twenty-five feet high. The other two entrances, Skylight Dome and Hurricane Pit, are currently closed by the landowner over that part of the cave. Be aware that cars left unattended may be vandalized.

Pine Hill Cave became my personal project in 1972. During many visits in prior years, I had always wanted to know how the cave was laid out. The only map I could find was a very sketchy one done by two Texas cavers, one named Costello. I recruited some of my Xenia High School students, all novices, for the adventure, and occasionally I found a few seasoned cavers. Over two years (1972 and 1973), and twenty-eight survey trips, we mapped the cave with Suunto and steel tape techniques I had learned while caving with the Cave Research Foundation (CRF). Back in the "old days" I used a sliderule and trig tables, doing all the data reduction by hand. CRF also helped with a map using a mainframe. Next came scientific calculators, which shortened the time to plotting, but doing the final map was still laborious. In January 2001 I was told that Compass was available on the Internet, and I have done the whole cave again in a matter of weeks and with many refinements that were difficult or nearly impossible before. Many details were added using Photoshop.

From the main entrance at 945 feet above mean sea level (msl), the left or southeast part goes about 2000 feet downstream to a near siphon at 927 feet above msl. The water from Pine Hill Cave flows through Blue Hole Cave and resurges about one mile away at 910 feet above msl before flowing on

to enter Sinks of the Roundstone Cave. From the Register Room, the cave extends upstream with several left side leads to slightly higher passages, all of which end in clay fill. This midsection of the cave passes under a valley and divides at The Forks. The right fork goes north into the Tower Domes section. The left fork follows the main stream west and upstream to the Fountain Room, in a right side canyon, and Skylight Dome. Skylight Dome is reached by going up about thirty feet to the top of the Main Canyon and doubling back to the flat tube often called The Birth Canal. Salamanders and blind crayfish have been seen in the pool at the bottom of Skylight Dome, but most people are caught by the spectacle of the shaft of light so far above. The Upper Levels section is reached through a long stoop walk. One of the passages has a row of three to four foot broomsticks and was labeled The Art Room.

Upstream further in the Main Canyon the floor rises several feet in many small waterfalls. As the passage opens up to thirty-five feet wide by forty feet high you can hear the thunder of the Waterfall, coming from a right side passage. Another four hundred feet west, the cave butts against a valley wall and ends in massive breakdown. Elevation at the top is 1032 feet above msl. In this room is the most massive flowstone in the cave. You may climb the Waterfall and go upstream to the Rain Room, one of several large domes, and crawl on upstream to more breakdown and higher canyons. These end in filled shafts and breakdown. An easier way to the same area is going right from the Campsite and up or on through the Squeeze Dome to a set of canyons and crawls. These all end in breakdown against the same valley wall. Two major virgin cave discoveries were, first, east and north of the Register Room, where, after an easy dig and crawl, we stood up in a forty-foot high meandering canyon and second, a large upper level passage which is beneath the Hurricane Pit area.

The total of surveyed passages is about 5.3 miles. Many domes from forty feet to over one hundred feet tall intersect the cave in every section. From 1500 upstream, it is fun to leave the cave with no lights. I have many great memories of times spent underground in my favorite cave.