

Cavers find the Rewards of Labor in Virgin Cave

Months after Howard and I had used the entrance of Rainshelter Cave to wait out a thundershower, Jacques Ramey led several of us to this same cave, not knowing we had stumbled upon it already that summer.

Howard and I remembered nothing remarkable about this little hole in the ground, nor anything to recommend it for a return in the future. Still, we scuddled down in, "just for the record". Surprisingly enough, down below in the breakdown, there was a good wind issuing from a hole four inches tall by maybe fifteen inches wide. The top of the hole was flat, the bottom mud-covered breakdown. Since we'd all come a long way for this, and because I'm a digging fool, I started digging with a rock at the mud.

I dug for about 20-25 minutes then was relieved by Mark Suer. As I looked at a possible rock excavation with Mark G. and Big Bird, Mark S. dug on. After a half/hour he called me to say he thought I should give it a try. It was still a bit small, but with just a little more scraping, and the removal of everything I was wearing but my clothes I managed to JAM my body inward inch by (painfull) inch. It quickly became easier and after 10 feet, I oozed into a breakdown room perched above a canyon passage - WALKING.

Screaming back through the hole I got through to H. Kalnitz who waisted no time cramming himself through. We did a nice climb down unstable rock (now a 12 foot ladder pitch) and ran down whats now rather blandly known as the 'A survey'.

As exciting as this first time in was (we'd found the huge leads everywhere) it ended soon. Soon after a push trip with Jeff, Mary Gratch, Pete Miller, and I pushed from the A survey down through some lovely crawls and climbs (Marys nasty little switchback) to the Cairn Hall, named for all the survey stations there, and beyond to the needle passage. We were so fired up over the height of the passage, Pete cried "Oh, God" at least a hundred

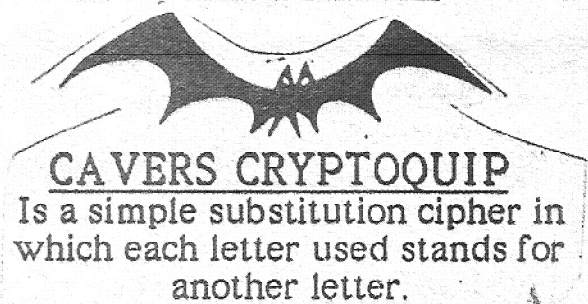
times. But he cried the hardest and loudest when he found the millions of gypsum hairs just below the first waterfall. None of us had ever seen anything like that in a Rockcastle or Jackson county cave.

But the adventure on that trip didn't stop there. Pete and I climbed the waterfalls right in the water - So refreshing ! Many people since have made these climbs - something to remember. On a much later trip Jeff and Mark S., Howard and I were in a group crawling over breakdown into a room filled with thousands of tabular gypsum rosettes. It seemed the cave had more subtle formations then we could believe: fine pearls, flowstone, rimstone, all shapes of stalagmites, tites, Gypsum hair, snow, antlers, rosettes, blood all over.

Such a fine cave to discover! And challenging too: crawls - some very tight, good climbs + scary climbs (I'm thinking of the corner in the Wall room), waterfall climbs, and worst of all, walking

Rainshelter was to me as much as an adventure as most larger caves I've been, losing none of the excitement of caving for its modest length.

John Neack NSS 25989



Clue X=E

RBX AOLXD EOZ O JORCDOG OZ O

KOFXD AXKOCZX BX OGEOMZ

"LJXOQXQ QWCYB"

Answer to Decembers CryptoQuip:
The reason many cavers enjoy the olympics is because they truly understand "the thrill of agony and the victory of de-feet"