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BAD GUYS WEAR RED HELMETS (SMOKEY CAVERN CHRONICLES PT. 2)

John Neack and myself were considered bad guys on this cave trip because we were going to push some virgin leads in Smokey Caverns and not do any surveying.

As we entered the cave our first project was to place some bolts so we wouldn't get soaked from the waterfall. The previous trip went into the cave during a dry spell and there was no water running. It had been raining steady all day for John and I and the water was running strong. When we got to the wall where we were going to place the bolts we thought long and hard about the idea of damaging our non-renewable resources and felt there had to be a better solution. We tried a rig which would keep us from getting wet but upon closer inspection we found it would probably also make us dead. We ended up rigging the rope the same way they did on the previous trip with a modification which allowed only a small water shower at the end of the drop. We felt this was the best solution because we weren't harming the cave with bolts and if we did get soaked the entrance was not far from the drop.

The rig worked fine and we didn't even get wet. Once down John showed me the higher leads in the big room which were explored on the first trip. We then proceeded to the lower leads where Howard says he saw walking passage. I'm not quite sure what Howard's definition of walking passage is unless maybe he was talking about a cave cricket walking. Anyhow, we started in on a hands and knee crawl

which got smaller and smaller and smaller. We found an eight point deer antler in this passage so named it "8 Point Buck Passage". The lead finally ended in a sub-human hole. As we backed out we checked leads to the right and left of "8 Point Buck Passage". We weren't so fortunate in the side leads to be able to crawl on our hands and knees, it was all belly crawling on fist sized rocks and intermittent sand. Once and awhile we came to a 'dwarf canyon' which is a passage three foot high and one foot wide. We checked many leads of this nature. Every time we came to a lead John would say 'Another Macho Crawl' and that's how the whole day went. The only lead we found that didn't die out looped back around the big room and came out at the base of the waterfall.

Frustrated because we didn't find anything significant (happy Howard) and tired because we had been doing macho crawls all day we decided to flee the cave. The water was flowing stronger than ever but with our good rigging job we stayed relatively dry. Before we left John showed me the passage they surveyed on the first trip. Now that's walking passage, Howard. We walked around a little and found a big fat bat. I mean this bat was fat! We named him Jerry Garcia Bat.

Well, our big virgin scoop trip in the lower levels of Smokey didn't turn out quite like we had hoped but we did explore some leads which needed to be checked. The accompanying map is of the first (and only) survey of Smokey Caverns. Total horizontal distance: about 700 feet.

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