

TRIP REPORTS:

Sheriffs' Pit

reported by Howard Kalnitz

NSS 20678

Sheriffs' Pit was first discovered by Bob Dobbs last year. He descended into the sinkhole, scrambled through the breakdown, and found himself on top of the first drop. After he rigged a rope and started down, he found that the rope was too short, and ascended back-up.

He passed the information along to Ron Crawford, and a few weeks later, after descending nearby Cathedral Cave we visited it. We rigged the first drop and Dennis Englert and I went down. We hit bottom about 80 ft later. The bottom of the pit quickly pinched. However, up on the wall we found a lead. I climbed up, and went down the short passage to find another 20ft drop. Not having enough rope, I headed back.

Instead of freeclimbing back down I had Dennis pass me the rope, I rigged and jumped out of the upper passage. Wrong move - I pendulumed across the larger pit and smashed against the opposite wall. After Dennis asked if I was all right, he started laughing. And there I was hung up with no rocks in reach. And it didn't get any better. When Bob turned back, he made the right choice. The pit started as a steep muddy slope, broke over a sharp ledge, and dropped against a wall. At first ascending was no problem. When it broke over the edge, the problems started. Getting over the edge was a real pain. Then right into the mud. We kept falling and getting covered with mud. It was too steep to walk, but a little to shallow to ascend. Dennis and I decided not to do it again.

The next trip John Neack and I returned with bolting gear. We placed two bolts at the top for an anchor and, at the

break, we placed another for a rebelay. Now we were cooking. If you could move over a rebelay, you could do this pit.

We moved onto the second drop (the rebelay placed the rope right at the upper ledge). At the bottom we found two passages, one leading to a small room with breakdown, the other leading to a large room with a high lead. No way out. Oh Well. We surveyed our way out. On the way out we scouted a small hole on the other side of the sink. It led to a room with a pit between a few rocks. Then John, Michael, and Matt Hayden and I dropped the last pit. It was a beautiful pit, that led to the upper lead John and I had seen.

We had hoped to punch through the shale that seems to stop all pits dead at 120ft deep. Unfortunately we stopped right at the 120 ft level. We're still looking for the one that goes to China.