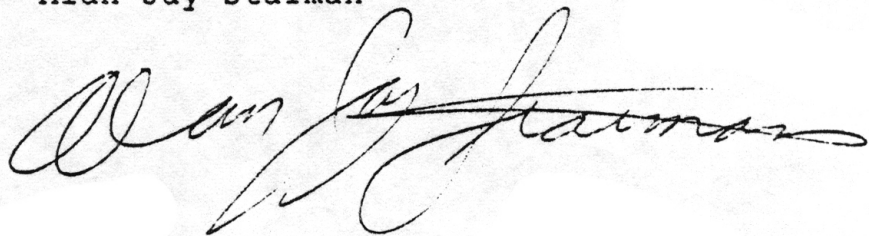


MADISON UNIVERSITY
STUDENT GROTTTO
QUARTERLY JOURNAL
JANUARY 1988



Here we are at last again, The MUSG journal for 1988, and its time for the state of the grotto address from your president. After two years its time for me to step down but I know the grotto will be in capable hands. We have had an up and down year as far as gaining new members. We seem to have a main group of five "Hard Core" cavers and a few others who occasionally show up to go on trips. Not bad but not the best ether. In the last few weeks we seem to have finally established some good relationship with the outing club and have planned a joint trip with them to Sinnit-Thorn. We have finally, with the invaluable aid of the Bridgewater Tac Team, gotten permission to enter Devil's Hole and Sites Pit. Things have been going well in so far as trips made. We have had MUSG members at three of the Butler weekends, trips to Pig Hole down at Va. Tech., trips to Sites Pit, Sinnit-Thorn, My Cave and many others. We will be co-hosting the NCRC Cave Rescue training class here. I have the pleasure to congratulate Mike Artz in becoming the first MUSG member to become a BCCS member. I hope to have several MUSGers at the next Butler Weekends. Well, that's all I have to say except thanks for all the support I have been given in my five years here and two years as president; I could not have done it without you all.

Alan Jay Staiman

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Alan Jay Staiman". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first and last names being more prominent than the middle name.

Where have the MUSGers Been this Year?

Crossroads Cave (several times)

Glade (all too often)

3-D Maze (enough)

Mad Steer

Lyle's Pit (dropped in once or twice)

Round Hill

My (and Not My) Cave

Sinnit-Thorn (just to spend the night indoors)

Pig Hole (a wonderful example of cave modification: it has a back door)

Butler (two real trips and one gumby visit)

Sites (a wonderful place for you to test newly rigged Gibbs sets)

Hamilton (of course)

Devil's Hole (fun for all)

and let us not forget...Breathing, with the new three mile walk to the entrance.

We met with the understanding that the purpose of the trip was to introduce two new people to the fine world of caving. When those didn't show, the plans were changed. Randy, Greg and I decided that if we were to get up to go caving, then caving we will go. We set out for the much bad-mouthed 3-D Maze.

Having already explored the section immediately to the right of the entrance, we decided to explore the main section. With the first crawl quickly negotiated, we were in new territory. At first I had trouble orienting myself to the map. That was quickly remedied and as promised, I placed the register in the de facto Register Room ... I hope.

After an extensive romp through the maze section we tried to find the stream section. That proved to be very little trouble. The drop from the 80 to 89 foot level was truly amazing. I looked down, and there were three rocks, piled one atop the other, making a perfect step. It is remarkable how the cave broke down like that. Hearing the roaring trickle of the stream, I knew we were on the right track, or about to tread water. The stream was running at a low level, and the sump didn't appear too deep, although I didn't give it a try.

With that section conquered, we decided to give The Rift a whirl. A long stare at the deep dark abyss with our jaws dragging the floor was sufficient to convince us that we would need more than a couple of pieces of webbing to get down and up. I guess that will have to, or at least better climbers.

All in all, the trip was quite enjoyable until it was time to eat and Greg tried to haggle over prices with the hired help where we stopped for supper. What an embarrassing way to end an otherwise great afternoon.

The morning was a cool one as Dave Schantz and Mark met me behind the ol' Burruss Hall. The day's original plan was to take a romp through Breathing Cave, but that was changed to Crossroads. Having never been to either, I didn't care which we went to, as long as we went. Several minutes later we found ourselves in the parking lot at the Bridgewater Rescue Squad to meet the fourth and final member of the group. Jeff "just call me Grady" Good was ready and rarin' to go caving, and soon we were on our way to Bath County, and Crossroads.

The ride to Bath was rather uneventful albeit quite scenic, with Dave giving the fifty cent tour of the Caves of Bath County, until about one mile from Aqua. Dave was explaining to Mark and myself that Aqua Cave was just up the road. Jeff suddenly came to life; something looked familiar. Dave slowed down, and turned the car around. Jeff was saying that there was a house that looked like the one where you get permission to go into Clark's Cave. A mile back, there it was, a white frame house, the name Grady Clark on the mailbox. This was quite exciting to me. I had never heard of Clark's Cave, but now I know where it is.

Soon our destination was within smelling distance. Everyone, well maybe just me, got excited at the prospect of another new cave. Of course at this stage they're all new. After a quick job of parking on Dave's part, we were outside, and with the neighbors looking on changing into caving attire. Two guys, who turned out to be from Charlottesville, parked behind us as we were heading into the cave.

The entrance to the cave is at the bottom of a rather large sink. A quick scramble through the opening deposits you on top of a large mound of breakdown, in a large room. Dave found what he thought to be a new passage. It looked like a good squeeze, so I followed. After about thirty feet, the passage turned up. The turn was too tight for Dave, so we backed up, and rejoined the others. Our final destination turned out to be the maze, but along the way, we took in the sights including a balcony with a view of a spectacular formation. Near the Wells, we split up and tried a couple of short free climbs. The highlight for me was when a handhold broke off and landed in my lap. "That's not supposed to happen", I thought. Not having fallen, I climbed the rest of the way.

The maze was much fun for Dave as he played cat and mouse with us. A lamp would speed by, and we knew the hunt was on. After a few short minutes, Dave would invariably wind up behind us. We spent a while climbing around the maze and generally having a good time. Just when the fun had begun, it was time to head toward the entrance.

Back by the road with his thumb held high, Stan Slater reviewed the small town stares he had received from his former neighbors. Old friends were no easier to find than new jobs in the village he had returned to after seven years away at school, and longer than that lost to the earth.

Traffic toward the capital was heavy, and soon a blue Volkswagen swung out of the fast lane and beeped impatiently from the shoulder ahead. Stan approached the opening passenger door and found a familiar face. 'Jean,' he realized, seeing that the business uniform of the records office had been replaced by worn Levis and a loose sweater awash in the brown cascade of her hair. 'Thanks for picking me up. I sure am surprised to see you.'

'Saturday shopping spree,' she smiled, shifting cityward. 'Want to come along?' Stan told her that first he would have to find gainful employment. 'Not much of a place for that,' Jean commented. 'I think there are more jobs in Holbridge than up there. You know they have four thousand homeless vagrants?'

This struck home with Stan. 'Where did they come from? I thought unemployment was under five percent....' He became lost in calculation. 'Can't we take care of however many people have to declare bankruptcy? This sounds like the Great Depression.'

'There aren't any jobs there. All the farmers and the Vietnam veterans went but the factories closed down and they hardly pay their salespeople enough to get by on. I can take you back to Holbridge later before the job listings get put away.' She put her hand reassuringly over his. 'I'll even buy you lunch, if you carry some parcels I'm going to pick up.' Stan could feel his viscera warming to the idea, and he settled back to enjoy the scenery.

Somehow it was dark when they finished and returned to Holbridge. Stan carried her hefty packages into a cheerful second floor apartment and picked up a newspaper. 'Hey, there's an ad in here for a cavern tour guide. I know all about caves.'

Jean peeked at him over the door of the refrigerator. 'I'm sure you'd be good at that job. Do you like spaghetti?' He nodded and a telephone buzzed. 'Get that for me, dear,' she requested, pointing past his right elbow. Stan spotted the phone and scooped the receiver from its cradle, to watch openmouthed as it sailed elegantly across the room. 'Anybody would think you'd never seen a cordless phone before,' Jean giggled, stretching out on the rug to retrieve it. 'Oh, darn, it got disconnected. I wonder if they'll call back.' She flipped a switch and lay the instrument aside. 'Come here and sit down. I want to find out a lot more about you now that we can relax. Maybe we should order pizza,' she mused. They placed the order eventually and Stan's pride prompted him to pay, although he had to insist. The generous hearted girl showed an infinite consideration for his difficulties, laughing back his inquiry about public housing. 'I like you, Stan, and if I didn't think I could trust you would we be sitting here?' He put the blankets over the couch while her humming wafted in from the bathroom. She emerged in a decidedly short kimono and excellent legs. Stan succumbed to his urge and

followed her to the open bedroom door. The rest of the world suddenly seemed a much less desirable place to stay.

'I've never seen such dirty clothes,' Jean wondered as she pulled Stan's caving outfit from the washer for the second time. 'I can almost believe you were buried in them. My daddy left a suit in the closet that might fit you for the interview. It's a good thing you got those new shoes yesterday, though. Your feet are a lot bigger than his.' Stan finished washing the breakfast dishes and found an impressive three piece suit laid out beside the bed.

The cavern owner, Dickerson, enjoyed training his new tour guides personally. 'This is our magic wand,' he said, displaying a metal box with one button. 'It sends a signal to turn the lights on in the next room and off in the last one. Here's where you meet the tourists. Let them in this door,' he demonstrated, 'and take them into the entrance chamber. First up, the Miniature Cathedral.' He indicated a tiny grotto filled with soda straws and a few helictites, prettily lit in blue and purple behind a wooden railing. 'We usually turn on the lights before leading people into any room,' he confided as they stepped through an arch. The next room was lit dimly from the last, and Stan peered around suspiciously for low hanging features. 'Do you know what this is?,' Dickerson asked elementarily.

'It's a group of large stalactites on a common base, with smaller ones growing on top of them,' Stan observed. 'No, it's the Silver Fountain!,' his tutor exclaimed as the lights smashed on. The formation reflected dazzling whiteness, and hidden bulbs sent light out through some gaps and transparent portions. Rubbing his eyes, Stan agreed that the name was well given.

Since the facility did all its business on weekends in the off season, Stan had several days to investigate his student status. Bypassing the offices, he started his search in the geology labs. 'Cave club?,' the students asked quizzically. 'We've got enough rocks without crawling around underground.' One suggested that he check the department field trip schedule. The secretary seemed displeased to see him again but gave him the name of the professor who led cave trips, Dr. Mahtan. Unfortunately, he had already left school for the day.

Entering the building the next morning, Stan started to walk past a student in a wheelchair, then turned to look again. The occupant was missing her right foot, and had no left leg below the hip. Though her features had been torn by time and untold torment, he felt a flash of recognition. 'Isn't your name Katy?,' he inquired.

'No, I go by Trina,' she answered. 'Who told you it was Katy?' Stan recalled the occasion. 'My roommate, Tom. He introduced us seven or eight years ago.'

The paraplegic asked apprehensively, 'Is your name Stan? Stan Slater?' He nodded and she sank back in shock. 'Oh, my God, it's really you. They really brought you back.'

continued next issue
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8:00 came early Saturday morning, but I managed to get up in time for Alan to zip us off to Mingo to explore My Cave. The ride was not as long as I had expected, and was quite scenic as an added bennie... no charge.

A few hundred feet from the parking spot from the entrance to the cave, at Oil Drum Falls, we saw where PSC was camping while doing their survey of Simmon's Mingo. One person was very helpful, and told us exactly where we could find the entrance to the cave. After thanking the guy from PSC, we sped off for a rapid change of clothes so we could get the trip started.

Right where we were told, we found a cave entrance. Alan crawled in first, with me hot on his heels. The entry was a climb of about 12 feet. The entry opened into a long room with about a ten foot ceiling. Immediately to the right was a fairly deep 18 inch wide fissure that ran almost the entire length of the room. There were at least three pits of 40 to 60 feet in depth. In two trips to this entrance, we could get no further than the room. We had no climbing gear, so a descent, as well as the necessary, ascent was out of the question.

Not wanting to let this be a major setback we decided to try the Elk River Entrance. The hike around the hill and necessary reconnaissance took nearly an hour, but we did find the entrance along with the Black Hole Entrance. Sliding down the 45 foot long, steep grade of the entrance, the scale of the entry room immediately hits you. This sucker was huge. According to PSC, the dimensions of the room are 40 x 300, but it sure seems bigger than that. The room has a few rather large boulders strewn about, the largest of which must be on the order of 30 tons. At the end of the room is a fairly steep but certainly muddy incline that leads to a passageway with several soda straws and much abused helactites. This passage narrows down to a near crawl, which then opens into a room where the roar of water can be heard. Like the other end of the passage, this one consists of a steep muddy incline. In fact this incline disappeared into the dark. Neither of our lights could reach the bottom of the incline. Fortunately, Alan saw the imprint left of a rope in the mud floor. We decided not to try the climb into the dark abyss. It wasn't until much later in the day that one of the PSC'ers told us that the incline develops into an 85 foot drop to the stream passageway.

We never got to the stream level from either end, but next time we're taking ropes and the whole nine yards, and we're going to see the stream passage, as well as the rest of the cave, including the Broken Nothing section.

The day's highlight consisted of meeting a deer on the railroad tracks across from the Elk River Entrance. That in and of itself is not such a big deal, but considering it was Bow season, it did become a big deal. A very quick and relatively close look at the surrounding trees failed to turn up any

hunters, but I didn't feel safe until the deer was out of sight.

On the way back, we stopped to eat at Thompson's. Alan complained that while the interior had been improved, the service had suffered severely. We learned that the Gendarme had fallen at Seneca Rocks. The people that saw it said that it was fortunate that it fell on a Thursday, because on the weekends there are often people climbing on top of the rock.

Words from the Dark

The sun never rises deep in the earth...
A silent land of quiet rebirth.

The stars never show when night falls...
Only his footsteps echo in the black halls.

Mud squashes softly under his feet...
Each new passage and room his to greet.

Dust rises with each pace...
A look of wonder etched upon his face.

His carbide flame shatters the eternal night...
Bringing color to a land devoid of light.

His eyes behold sights never seen before...
When he passes on they will be found no more.

A cave is beauty power and grace...
A truly wonderful and special place.

Formations rise in delicate ways...
Patterns of how the earth plays.

Flowstone walls, rimstone pools...
Calcite and water are the earth's sculpting tools.

Into the deepest grotto he will go...
When to return no one will know...

On the day his body will die...
Always in the cave his spirit will lie.

Alan Jay Staiman
1988

Vertical Caving at JMU? Yes, incredible as it sounds, it is true. Having conquered the wilds of Lyle's Pit, Jeff Good, Alan Staiman, and I decided to tackle Sites Cave near Thorn Springs Campground. Not knowing exactly where to find the cave, we decided to ask the first person we saw outside of Grant and Edna's. The guy was very helpful, but insisted that we might have trouble finding the cave. So, armed with the best directions we could get, we trod off to find the cave.

After many unsuccessful attempts at locating the cave we were successful. The drop in was pretty neat, although watching Alan make the log over the entrance bounce was not too comforting.

At the bottom of the first drop is a steep mud slope, followed by another drop of about 30 feet, followed by a second, but much less steep mud slope.

The first drop was a blast with the walk down the first slope and the following drop not nearly as fun, but when rappelling is new it's all fun.

Having reached the bottom of the pit, and entered the main room - at least we think that was the main room - we decided to romp around. The humidity is pretty high, and the floor is muddy. At the bottom of, and in line with the entrance pit are several large logs covered in a white bacteria or fungus. It really sticks out in the cave. The walls were pretty well covered with bats, which occasionally woke up to tell us we were not exactly welcome in their house.

The main room appears to be on the order of 200 feet long, and runs perpendicular to the entrance pit. The floor slopes away from the entrance, which is probably caused by the rather large pieces of break down on the floor.

We only spent about an hour exploring the room and one passages in the cave, before we decided that we should think about leaving. Now came the fun part.

As we had only two sets of ascenders and three people it was obvious that we would have to send one person out, then relay that set of ascenders to the third person at the bottom. That part went smoothly enough. Alan went first. Then Jeff climbed up the first pitch, and tied himself in, to act as a relay station to send the ascenders to me at the bottom. That worked pretty well.

The equipment made it to me, and I began the task of tying the Gibbs to me. No problem... or so I thought. Half way up the first ascent my foot loop disappeared. Not a good sign. I had to improvise and overcome by inchworming the rest of the way up to the mid way point. It was a little tough, but I did it. Once there, Jeff helped me tie a proper knot so that wouldn't happen

again.

Jeff was getting cold, I was quite warm, so Jeff made the climb out the rest of the way. It was dark out, and quite cold. Jeff was greeted by Alan, who had turned his garbage bag into a Turkish Steam Bath. I always knew there was something wrong with that guy. Jeff was impressed with Alan's display of common sense. Meanwhile I was getting ready to do my climb. This time there were no hitches, and I pretty much made quick work of the ascent.

We quickly wrapped the rope and got out of there. It was awfully cold, and we were getting cold.

Another successful MUSG trip for the club, and a real learning experience for me.

The first genuine hard core cave trip since my joining the club was to be an overnight trip to Sinnit with Jeff Good, Alan Staiman, Lisa Holz, Yoli Gelago, Jeff Aery, and myself. We planned to meet at the Bridgewater Rescue Squad at 7:00 Saturday morning. After the introduction of unfamiliar faces, we were off for an overnight in the Sinnit-Thorn system.

We reached the owner's house with a few minutes to spare on our 9:00 deadline. The lady who owns the cave nearly talked Jeff Good's ears off, but he didn't seem to mind. It was pretty cold out so we changed our clothes as quickly as possible. Once inside the cave, it took nearly 25 minutes to regain feeling in frozen toes. We had originally decided to make two trips to sherpa the gear in, but a last minute rethink on Jeff's part changed that to a partial two part trip. Jeff and I carried all of our things plus some of others' equipment, while Yoli, Jeff and Alan decided to make it a two part affair.

The map makes the trip in look easy enough, but after about 30 minutes, it became clear that the map was very misleading. A closer look at the map revealed that it was published in August of 1948. Not exactly the latest. No wonder there was more to the cave than was indicated on the map.

The passages leading to the main room are very dry, which is probably the reason that you can cut through the dust with a chain saw. We ended up resorting to dust masks after twenty or so minutes of coughing. Those of us carrying big heavy packs had the added bonus of spending the better part of the trip crawling on our hands and knees through low, tight passages. This, plus not knowing our way through the cave made the initial trip in nearly two hours. One side note: the bridge shown on the map is not the natural bridge I was looking for. It is a board over a fissure.

Most of the entry is horizontal. The only exception being the silo, which is supposed to be sixty feet vertical. That may be true but the passage itself is a good deal longer than that, as the shaft is far from vertical. The rock is slightly slick, but there are more than enough hand and foot holds and everyone climbed up and down it as though they had been doing so all of their lives. The top of the silo bends left, and opens into the main room. The room is very large (300 x 60) and has a fairly healthy bat population. The cave is supposed to be one of the few remaining homes of the Virginia Long-Eared Bat, but we only saw two or three. Perhaps the remaining ones are on the ceiling of the main room.

The humidity in the main room is high enough so that the dust level is somewhat lower, but the least little stir causes a good deal of dust to be kicked up. After just a few minutes in the open everything was covered in a layer of dirt. This was especially annoying in the case of cooking and eating utensils left out.

There is a good deal of large breakdown in the main room. Some of the pieces the size of large rooms. There is a passageway, opposite the side you enter from running nearly half the length of the main room. On one end of this passageway is a sump which serves as the connection to Thorn Mountain. The opposite end of the passage ends on a ledge about 30 feet above the floor of the main room.

After a few minutes of fooling around in the main room, Alan, Yoli, and Jeff Aery left for the vehicles to retrieve the rest of their gear. Jeff, Lisa, and I decided to save Carbide and Electricity and try to take a snooze. Alan insured us that he planned to return within 2-1/2 hours. It was 2:30. Those of us that stayed behind shivered for 2-1/2 hours.

With thirty seconds to spare, the trio appeared with a wild tale about Alan driving to Thorn Springs, Yoli hanging on for dear life, and Jeff "heaving grits" in the back of Alan's truck. And we thought we had it rough.

Upon the fourth telling of the wild story, Jeff Good, Lisa Holz, and I set out to do the connection to Thorn, while Alan farted, Yoli complained and Jeff sawed wood.

The connection to Thorn is at the bottom of a fairly steep incline, which was sumped at the time of our visit. There was a Cool-Whip tub and a 2-gallon bucket which we used to bail roughly 10 gallons of water. Also there, is a white set of coveralls, covered with about 5 lbs of mud. We decided that once the water is bailed out, the suit is laid on the mud, and the daring soul was to squirm over the suit. This we did. I was the first to look. It didn't look like something I could do. It looked like my knees were designed backwards and that I would then have to make a thirty foot vertical climb with muddy boots in what looked like an 18 inch fissure. I relinquished my spot to Jeff Good. He looked at the spot a good deal differently than I. He saw a tight crawl, certainly steep but not a climb as I had seen. He crawled out. We invited Lisa to have a look. Singing the Star Spangled Banner, Lisa squeezed into the passage. By the time she got to the "rockets' red glare" she had completely disappeared, and was relaying periodic reports back. This simply would not do. I decided to follow. The angle of the bend in the sump made it a little tough for me to get my legs through, but I was persistent and finally succeeded. The crawl is pretty tight but not uncomfortably so nor did it appear impassable. The only apparent choke point is a squeeze through what appears to be a size 38 rock. Not an easy manoeuvre for those with 41 and 42 chests. In retrospect, I know I should have made it, but I didn't. So there.

While returning to camp we could swear that we could smell beer. Certainly no one had brought beer into the cave. As we drew closer to the camp, the smell became more pronounced. There also seemed to be too many moving headlamps. Then we discovered that

there was a second group in the cave. According to Alan and Yol i, several were drinking while in the camp. Not a very impressive act. They also told us that their group leader had charged them \$2.00 apiece for the trip, and that according to the leader, that was the priced levied by the owner. After a short conversation with the "expedition leader", it became quite apparent that he knew less about the cave than we, and he claimed to have been there several times.

Shortly after the other group had gone, we decided to search for the waterfall. According to Jeff Aery, it was difficult to find, but we were feeling our oats, so we were not discouraged. We began by searching a passage at the base of the Silo. This turned out to be a dead end. We began to follow the main passageway towards the entrance and searching any passageways along that way. Shortly past the base of the Silo, we discovered a dead bat. Evidently, the other group was of the high impact type. This passage also turned out to be quite fruitless. The only remaining passage left to explore was a lead about 1/3 way up the Silo. This ran for about 100 feet, then went into a tight fissure which when pushed turned out to be another dead end. Quite tired and dejected, we turned around and returned to the camp for what would turn out to be a cold night in a cave.

Most of us spent the night none too warm, but did manage to get some sleep. The next morning we packed our things and got ready to leave. The trip out was much easier than the trip in, eventhough some were carrying more gear. The only real excitement came close to the entrance when we discovered that our favorite high impact cavers of the previous night had broken a 2-1/2 foot ice stalagmite near the entrance.

The weekend was culminated by a trip to Bob-a-Rea's. What a treat. Pizza and good friends. Now that's what caving's all about.

Here we are at last again, The MUSG journal for 1988, and its time for the state of the grotto address from your president. After two years its time for me to step down but I know the grotto will be in capable hands. We have had an up and down year as far as gaining new members. We seem to have a main group of five "Hard Core" cavers and a few others who occasionally show up to go on trips. Not bad but the best ether. In the last few weeks we seem to have finally established some good relationship with the outing club and have planned a joint trip with them to Senate-Thorn. We have finally, with the invaluable aid of the Bridgewater Tac Team, gotten permission to enter Devil's Hole and Sties Pit. Things have been going well in so far as trips made. We have had MUSG members at three of the Butler weekends, trips to Pig Hole down at Va. Tech., trips to Sites Pit, Senate-Thorn, My Cave and many others. We will be co-hosting the NCRC Cave Rescue training class here. I have the pleasure to congratulate Mike Artz in becoming the first MUSG member to become a BCCS member. I hope to have several MUSGers at the next Butler Weekends. Well, that's all I have to say except thanks for all the support I have been given in my five years here and two years as president; I could not have done it without you all.

Alan Jay Staiman