

# M C G NEWS

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## CAVING IN VIRGINIA

*by Pete Hollings*

A seat sale at Air Canada meant that I was able to scrape together enough money to head down to Ohio and meet up with Mike and Andrea Futrell. From Ohio we drove out to Virginia to do a little caving. Before leaving Saskatoon I'd been told to bring some slides along as the viewing facilities at the Bat Ranch (basically an open house for cavers in the area) were distinctly "non-average". This was to be proved true when within a few hours of arriving in Virginia I found myself sitting in a hot tub under the stars, drinking Old Peculiar and watching slides. When a trip starts like this you know it is going to be good !

My first introduction to the caves of the area was a 12 hr survey trip into a 'secret' cave that the Futrell's have been mapping for a while now. Complications with landowners mean that Mike and Andrea have asked me not to say anything about the trip, suffice it to say that it was a very impressive start to the weekend. The trip was made more notable by the recovery of a film that had been lost some 8 months earlier but proved to be undamaged.

With only a couple of hours sleep behind us the next day was not overly productive, with most of the time being spent cleaning and repairing gear, as well as doing a few odd jobs around the Bat Ranch in lieu of rent. All of this was generously lubricated with more Old Peculiar as well as numerous long breaks to swap tales and watch videos of a recent expedition to China. This included the groups visit to one cave where coffins had been stacked in the entrance over the past few hundred years.

A days rest and another evening in the hot tub (the MCG really should think about building one !) saw us all in fine shape for another days caving. The plan was to visit Raspberry Hollow Cave, this had been mapped in 1961 and the survey indicated a number of unexplored leads.

Unfortunately, the landowner had been unwell and preferred not to be troubled by cavers so the cave was never fully explored. As new owners had taken over the property on his death it was time to revisit the cave.

Our first attempt to get permission to enter the cave was thwarted when the owner was not home, so instead I was taken on a quick tour of the area including numerous sinkholes, some of which looked as though they could be opened up with relatively little digging. This done we returned to Raspberry Hollow and were able to get permission to enter the cave.

A stooping entrance leads to a 40 ft freehanging pitch into an impressive chamber. As Mike wanted to make a more accurate survey of the cave we spent quite a while poking about in the numerous leads off this area, producing a survey that bore very little in common with the seventies version ! With the upper area mapped we headed further into the cave along some meandering passage around 3m wide and 6-7m tall until we encountered the stream. At this point the cave became a little less pleasant, as the passage degenerates into a wet belly crawl. We surveyed a little further until a point where the way on was blocked by gravel washed in by recent floods.

As we had little desire to dig through this into the canyon passage beyond we returned to a draughting lead we had noticed earlier and began trundling some large rocks out of the way. Digging is certainly a lot easier when you can rely on gravity to remove the spoil! Eventually Mike was able to crawl beneath some 'hanging death' leaving Andrea and me on the other side to dig him out if necessary. Andrea has long ago established a 20 minute 'leash' on Mike in these situations and sure enough he was back in about that long, having bypassed the crawl and dropped back into the main trunk passage, opening a dryer and flood safe route into the cave. As it was getting late we decided to call it a day and returned to the Bat Ranch for a final soak in the hot tub before driving back to Ohio the next day.

All in all the caving was well worth the ten hours of flying time and six hours of driving time required to get there, the presence of a hot tub, a case of OP and friends to share them with made everything just about perfect!