

HOTBOX HORROR HELLHOLE by Howard Kalnitz

I stood there looking up at Dennis's head peering over the lip of the pit. The waterfall falling into the pit next to me was making a lot of noise, and I couldn't hear what he was shouting.

"WHAT?" I yelled back
"DOES IT GO?" He shouted, loud enough for me to hear.

I crouched down and looked around again. Nothing on this side - I went over to the other side of the pit - trying to stay away from the waterfall pounding down. I could see a small passage, but it was going to have to be dug. A good lead, 'cause the water coming down beside me had to get to Artesian Well Cave somehow, but one for another day.

"NOTHING GOING" I yelled to Dennis.

His head disappeared - oh well, I guess I'll have to get out of this pit by my self. It was a small pit, about 12 feet, but it belled and there was no way to climb out. I rigged with 1 jumar and started hopping out. At the edge, Dennis's hand grabbed my pack, and helped me over the edge.

Mike started to coil up the rope. I figured it was about 20 feet shorter than when we had started in. We only knew about 3 drops in the cave, and only brought 3 ropes. After we found this fourth drop, I went to the bottom of the third rope and cut it at the bottom, only leaving enough for the drop rigged. Oh well- my contribution to this cave. Good thing we brought Tennessee-sized ropes

for a Kentucky sized cave (we brought 3 ropes over 150ft. and the longest drop in the cave was 40ft).

Mike finished coiling up the rope and we started out. This was all new passage we found at the bottom of the third drop. A large canyon with a good sized spring. Lots of flow and decorations. In one side passage, we found the largest cave pearls I have ever seen. A nest of golf ball or larger sized ones. All brownish except for 3 white ones in the middle! I listened to Dennis saying his favorite words over and over - Jeezy Pete, Gah and No Way. Big list for a southern Ohio boy.

We got back to the bottom of the third drop and poked around till we found how the water dropped to this level. It had been raining out and the cave was in high water. The creeks outside were higher than I had ever seen. Good day to be doing one of these top down caves!

We started up the third drop. This is the one we had to bolt on the way in - no natural anchors anywhere around. I realized (too late of course) that when I cut the rope at the bottom I had not left enough to get a foot gibb on the rope. So I hopped around trying to get that damn little pin in the gibb when it was at ..oh..about shoulder level. Dennis and Mike laughed and threw rocks.

We cleared this pit and moved on to the second pit, the largest of the cave at about 40 feet. Nice drop, but getting over the lip sucked. Overhanging leading to

a rock. I cursed and thrashed for a couple of minutes. I was carrying the rope and its weight (now soaking wet from rigging the fourth drop) was keeping me into the rock.

I finally got over the edge and shouted to Mike;
"Come on up, I had no problems!" I lied

He came up making it look easy. Then came the part I was dreading - The canyon crawl. This baby was slick as snot, a strange width, and deep enough that if anything fell into it, it was history (including your own bad self). We went slowly, with Mike saying how he couldn't believe it was only 200 feet, the whole damn time.

We got to the bottom of the entrance pit, and I did the smartest thing that I had done all day. I gave the rope I was carrying to Mike. Then Dennis went up and managed to knock the rope pad off the lip on the way. I stood in the waterfall at the bottom of this pit for 10 minutes till I was able to flip it back on. And the canyon crawl had just dried me out - oh well. At least I washed the mud off.

On top we talked about returning to dig the crawl. We'll be back.

