



Caving can be an interesting and sometimes mirthful experience. "Caveman" Tim Kipp (12th-geological science), above, pauses while shimmying down the 18 inch wide entrance pipe to cave J-4 in Pleasant Gap. At left, Kipp smiles after completing his wriggling journey. Below, Kipp and Steve Carson (12th-business logistics), cross a quarry to the entrance of the cave. Both Carson and Kipp are members of the Nittany Grotto Club.

Spelunking, or how to 'cave' with small comforts

By BERNADETTE EYLER
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

What images do you conjure up when you think of caving? Laurel Caverns? Penn's Cave? Commercial caves where you pay a fee to walk into a big, open room complete with bright, multi-colored lights and a Cub Scout Troop?

Naive as it may be, that was my image of caving. So when two friends, Tim Kipp (12th-geological science) and Steve Carson (12th-business logistics) asked me to go caving, I agreed wholeheartedly.

They had decided to take me to a cave called J-4 in Pleasant Gap. Since Tim is the vice chairman of the Nittany Grotto, the Penn State chapter of the National Speleological Society, we had no problem gaining access to the cave.

However, my enthusiasm began to wane when Tim and Steve picked me up last Tuesday evening equipped with hard hats, work gloves, mud-caked coversalls and work boots.

"What do we need all this stuff for?" I asked. I didn't remember any Cub Scouts wearing hard hats in Laurel Caverns.

"We're in for some serious caving," Tim answered.

As soon we reached the cave, Tim tossed me a pair of mud-caked coversalls, and Steve crowned me with a hard hat. Not really sure that I wanted to go through with it, I pulled on the coversalls and contemplated backing out.

"It's really hot out here; why are we putting on all these clothes?" I asked.

"It's only going to be around 50 degrees inside the cave. Besides, there won't be any room for us to get dressed once we're inside," Steve explained.

His explanation only served to further dispel my Laurel Caverns image of caving and heighten my interest.

While Tim packed a knapsack with extra supplies, Steve filled the carbide

lamps with calcium carbide and water, which react to produce acetylene gas. The gas is then ignited and the lamp attached to the front of the hard hat to provide light.

Finally, we were all set. As we crossed the littered quarry leading to the cave, Tim pointed to an 18-inch wide sewer pipe jutting out high up on the quarry wall.

"There's the entrance," Tim said with a note of pride in his voice.

"The entrance?" I asked in disbelief. A sewer pipe was the furthest thing from the entrance of Laurel Caverns as I could imagine.

Tim went on to explain, "About six years ago, the quarry owners, afraid of being sued by injured trespassers, had the Grotto to lock it or they'd dynamite it shut. So we cemented in a sewer pipe with a lock and gate inside."

We climbed up the steep cliff leading to the sewer pipe. Once on the ledge outside the entrance, Steve lit the carbide lamps, and we crawled our way through the next corridor.

"J-4 is a good novice cave because it

gives you a little bit of everything: climbing, crawling and nice scenery," he said. "More than 2,000 people have explored this cave and nobody's ever gotten hurt."

He was beginning to sound like a Laurel Caverns tour guide — I half expected a Cub Scout to pop out any minute. He went on to explain the differences among formations, pointing out examples of each.

"The ones that point down are stalactites; the ones pointing up are stalagmites. Up there are soda straws, very thin stalactites. That's a column, formed when a stalactite and a stalagmite join. Those flat, hanging formations are draperies."

Over the years, Tim said, some of the more distinct formations and infamous

climbs and crawl spaces had been christened: the Wedding Cake, a large, sculptured stalagmite; Goliath, a huge column complete with drapery decor; the Birth Canal, a long, thin crawl space; and the Funnel, an 80-foot deep chimney.

After an hour, we rested and refilled the lamps with water. Tim cautioned me that at the very end of the cave there were difficult spots, the first of which involved crossing a pit to a narrow ledge on the other side.

I approached the drop off and looked down. It was too dark to see the bottom of the pit. I kicked a stone over the edge as a test; it seemed like an eternity until I heard it hit bottom. Gulping in an effort to calm my jumpy stomach, I took a deep breath and leaped across the pit.

However, the worst was yet to come.

To enter the Formation Room at the end of the cave, we had to crawl through a very tight tunnel, another of the "difficult spots." Difficult wasn't the word. As I looked at the small opening, I thought the biblical camel would have an easier time getting through the eye of a needle.

Too proud to even think of backing out now, I fought off a wave of claustrophobia and followed Tim.

"You have to lie on your side and let your left arm drag behind you," Tim directed. "Just keep inching your way up until you come to the bend. Now, lower your left shoulder, turn your head and lift your right shoulder out. Try to push yourself with your feet."

Slowly, I twisted and squirmed my way up the slanted tunnel. Drops of sweat rolled down my face. I used every ounce of strength to inch my way through. Finally, I emerged.

"I feel like I played the part of the baby in a children's movie," I gasped.

I plopped down on a flat rock and scanned the Formation Room, filled

with hundreds of unique formations to dazzle anyone determined enough to crawl through the entrance.

Too soon, Tim stood up. "Ready to go?" he asked.

"I'm not too wild about facing that tunnel again, but I guess I have no choice," I answered.

The most difficult climb was near the end of our four hour journey. A narrow ledge lead up to two walls surrounding a massive rock, slanted at about a 70 degree angle. It was studded with several stalagmites, giving it the appearance of a rooster's comb.

Tim scaled it with amazing ease and called directions from the plateau above. Facing the rock, I straddled the gap between the walls. Teetering to keep my balance, I leaned forward to grab the lowest stalagmite and pull myself to the right of the ledge. Breezed against the rock and the wall, I took a deep breath to relax.

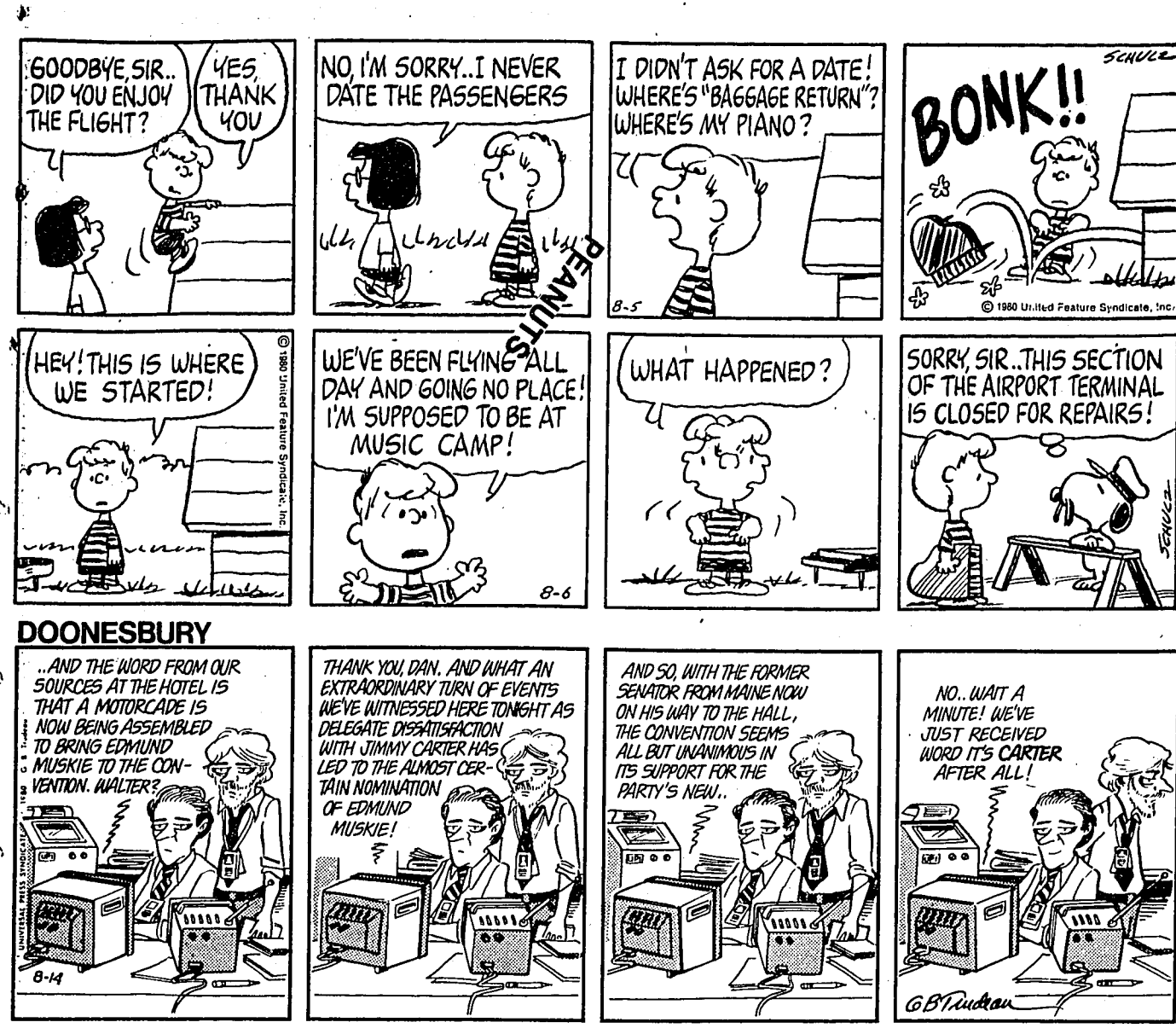
All of a sudden, I began to slip down the muddy wall. Panic swept over me. "Push against the rock to brace yourself," Steve shouted from below.

To my surprise and relief, it worked. I shimmied up to the next stalagmite and pulled myself over the edge of the cliff to Tim and safety.

Worn out from physical exertion, I looked forward to crawling through the sewer pipe I had at first abhorred. Steve gave me a boost through the second-to-last pipe. To my horror, a pair of swooping bats greeted me at the gate. The encounter only added to my haste to exit the cave.

With a final burst of strength, I pushed my way through the sewer pipe, and emerged into the 50 degree heat covered with mud, completely exhausted and significantly awed by one of Mother Nature's many secret, underground rooms.

Photo by Anita Burger



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Across

1 The Big Red...
2 Kind of or some
3 Star's figure
4 Fiberglass
5 Matur
6 Gram or dram
7 Dressed
8 Articles
9 Zero score in cribbage
10 Chew on
11 Fear
12 Force whirlwinds
13 Secret Service agents
14 Puerto Rico product
15 Lachrymose look
16 Days of August
17 Prefix for chute or medic
18 Title
19 Unpr' calls
20 Quasimodo's creator
21 Red - franks
22 -Havel's chairman's words
23 Creamshaw or blue
24 American tribe
25 Stars on 1910 flag
26 United States
27 Boarding
28 "Charity"
29 "Waterloos"
30 March time
31 Spending money
32 Comes up
33 Marry

Down

1 All preffs
2 Zwill and siben
3 Shakespearean stage direction
4 Church
5 Lubricated
6 "Once - a time..."
7 Not working any more: abbr.
8 Famous
9 Small bits
10 Enlarged
11 Some broadcasters
12 Cobb et al.
13 Title
14 Droplet
15 Word after theatre or movie
16 Cerium-containing
17 Kind of tea
18 Part girl
19 "Do - others..."
20 - amils
21 Comical Bert
22 Examination
23 Words from a Beatles song
24 "Have I" chairman's words
25 Sabari
26 "Sea"
27 Error
28 Short skirt
29 Boat ends
30 Rover's pal
31 In compass mentis
32 Cerium-containing
33 Kind of tea
34 Part girl
35 "Do - others..."
36 Type of sick or service

Crossword by Mike Shenk

Answers in Friday's Collegian classifieds.

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On Thursday, August 14, (and most Thursdays thereafter) Leland Enterprises will be buying the following at the Penn State Sheraton Inn on Pugh Street between the hours of 11 and 5:

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