



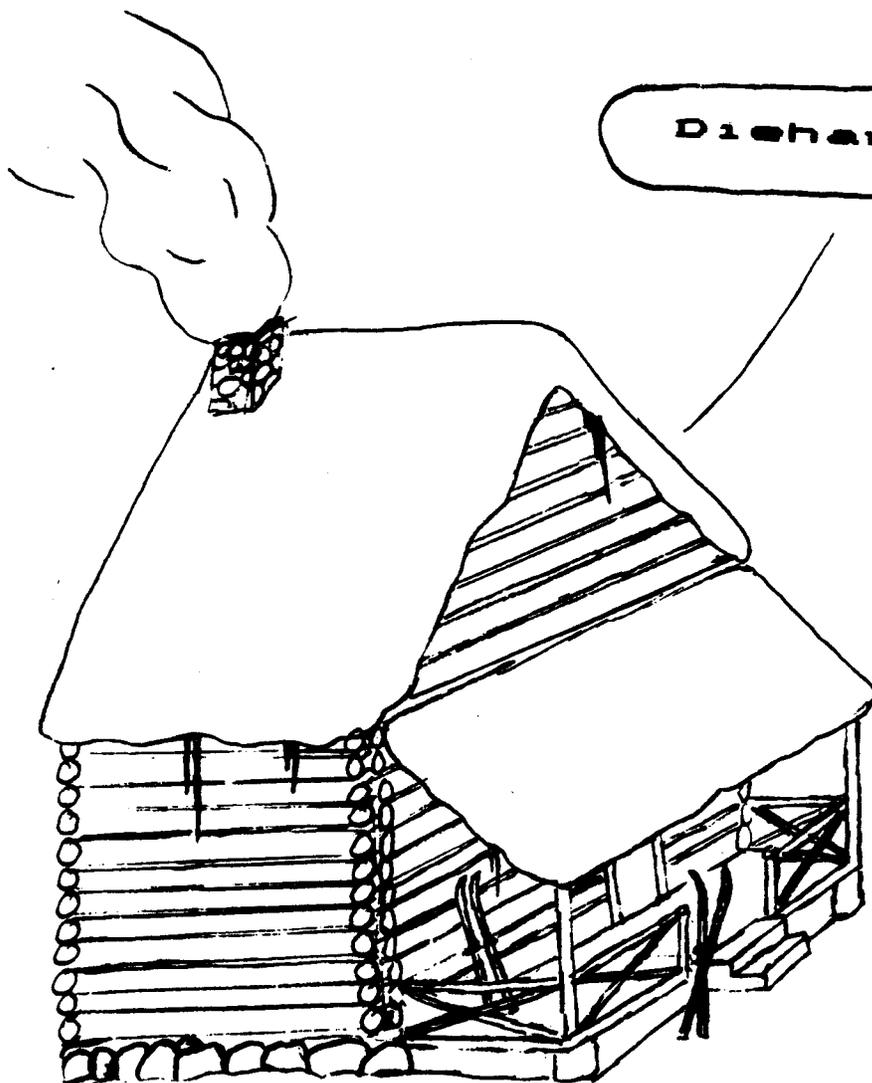
THE ROC CAIRN



March 15, 1988

---RENSSELAER OUTING CLUB, INC.—UNION BOX 26, R.P.I., TROY, NEW YORK---

Week in the Woods/Winter School



Diehards!



Wimps!

WEEK FOR WIMPS IN A CABIN

"Hi, Mom! I'm back!"

"You're alive!"

"of course I'm alive, Mom."

"I was expecting to get a phone call telling me you had inextractably wrapped yourself around a tree with your skis."

"I was in a little more control than that..."

"And you're not permanently frozen?"

"I kept warm- mostly."

"You haven't broken anything, have you? You're calling from the hospital, I can tell."

"MOM! I'm fine."

"Well, you had me worrying."

Far be it from me to instill any doubt in my mother's head about my competence as a skier on Greg's "Week in the Woods" trip. I only fretted about it all of Christmas vacation. What was I, crazy? Sure, I'd skied a lot before, but this time I was skiing with three ROC cross-country skiing leaders. There was no way I had the stamina they did. Or the skill. Or the knowledge of wax skis (another source of worry; after skiing 6 years on waxless, I was convinced I would slip and slide all over). Or the high tech winter wear. What did I have? I had to convince myself I could make it on willpower and dumb luck. Great.

So when my flight was cancelled from Boston to Albany during a big snowstorm, I had mixed feelings. This misfortune was the last chance of saving me from what I was sure would be complete exhaustion by the end of the week. However, I found another flight, and the next thing I know, Henry, Greg, and I were on our way to Lake Willoughby, Vermont to meet up with Tom. I had to get through it now.

The first day we got going at "the crack of noon". (yes, that rumor/joke is true) We started out skiing around Beaver Pond on a hiking trail that was a lot of bumps and rocks and curves and trees. That was quickly canned in favor of skiing up the woods road to a trail that led into open fields. (I think they must have been corn fields- I don't know about anyone else, but these nasty chopped off stalks kept grabbing my skis) We eventually ended up skiing across Lake Willoughby. Up until then, I had felt pretty good. I wasn't trying to keep up with their faster paces- I couldn't- they'd stop to let me catch up. When we got to the lake, though, I was feeling a little tired, and we all got water on the bottom of our skis which reduced our glide considerably. After that, I got more and more tired, and trudged most of the way back to the cabin, thinking I'd never make it through an entire week of that.

That night, Greg sledged down from the outhouse, crashing through the door and ripping two of the hinges off. This was to start a long line of things going wrong. I managed to tip over the drain bucket

to the sink, creating a small flood on the floor (nifty humidifier). Henry threw a log into the stove only to have the elbow of the stovepipe fall off; a substitute coffee can, much smoke, and many repairs later, the thing was finally in one piece again. Greg set the oven mitt on fire and didn't realize it was still burning until Henry looked up from his 2000 piece jigsaw puzzle (yup, he finished it) to see smoke filling the porch. I think the beaver(?) outside who sounded constipated was really laughing at us.

Monday, no one was too excited about skiing (my still sore muscles rejoiced) and we went sledding instead, where we decided there should be a unit of measurement named after Henry to measure the time it takes to injure ones' self on a trip (this was after his nose and sled connected, giving him a bloody nose) By the end of the week, everyone had a unit of measurement named after them. Tuesday we went skiing again up a hill, but not very far- only until we ran out of trail. That night we stayed up until 4 a.m. so we consequently didn't get going until late on Wednesday. We went into town to get Coleman fuel and a new stove elbow, and we went hot-tubbing (and you thought we were roughing it). Tom left that night in his quest for an apartment, and Greg, Henry, and I headed back to the cabin.

Thursday and Friday could quite possibly have been the laziest two days of my entire life. It was decided it was just too cold out (as we laughed about the people in the real Winter School), so Henry finished his puzzle while Greg and I did our best imitation of sloths. Saturday we packed up and cleared out, stopping in Bennington at Greg's house on the way and getting back to Troy about 9:30 that night.

So for all my worrying about exhaustion and stamina, we skied all of two days. I survived, and I had a great time, and because of it I think I'll try out some new ROC activities (without so much worrying!). As many a wise ROC person has said before, "It was a good trip!"

-Jennifer Dann

Great Moments in Rock Climbing History



Rock climber Gorp's fall stimulates the invention of the seat harness.

CAVING IN WINTER AND SPRING

Caves generally don't hibernate in winter. Cavers... well that's another story.

ROC caving is alive and well this winter and spring, so out of bed you two season cavers!

It seems ironic that winter caving elicits such responses as 'It's freezing out,' and 'It's too cold for caving.' Mountaineering and ice climbing have a following despite exposure to gusty winter winds and frigid temperatures. How can anyone complain about spending a few hours in the toasty 54 degree protection of a cave?

For us true four season cavers, while we wait out the snores and whines of the others, there's plenty of caving to be done. And we'll get to see the delicate ice stalactites decorating the winter entrances. Look for upcoming trips to Spider and others.

So far this season we've done trips for the four seasoners, to Church, Caboose and Schoharie, as well as a trip for two seasoners, a tour of the Helderberg Plateau (the cave rich area in Schoharie County) with Thom Engel. Thom is the editor of the 'Northeastern Caver', the newsletter of the Northeastern Regional Organization of the National Speleological Society. He took us around to numerous cave entrances and spring sites, teaching us about the geology of the area and entertaining us with cave lore. He also pointed out many places where he suspects there is undiscovered cave passage, BIG passage. So anyone who can't reach me at home, try calling into holes just around the bend from the old oak tree. More trips of this sort would be great in the future!

VTS - Vertical Technique Seminars - are being held every Thursday night from 7 to 10 in the Armory. This is a chance for cavers at all levels of experience to practice knot tying, rigging, rappelling and SRT (Single Rope Technique) - prusiking and, best of all, mechanical ascending. Come put together a mechanical system to practice on, using Gibbs, Jumars etc. We can rig a continuous 300 ft. rope for practice climbing up long drops. Try changing from descending to ascending gear on rope, or passing over a knot. Rig an SRT challenge and I'll try it.

Spring West Virginia will leave on Friday March 25, bound for the big and beautiful caves of W.Va. Special attractions include a trip to Scott Hollow cave, a recently discovered cave with over 10 miles of huge passage. Cars will return at different times between Tuesday and the end of break.

So wake up you two season cavers and smell the mud!

Kim Roffman

[Editor's Note: Carl Stevens is a friend of mine from high school and is currently a PCV, Peace Corps Volunteer, in Ecuador, South America. He wrote me this last summer about his attempt at climbing Mount Chimborazo in the Andes. I enjoyed the story and hope that you will also.]

CHIMBORAZO

After spending a week in Quito at the All Volunteer Conference, a friend of mine and I headed down to Guaranda, and on Tuesday the 7th of July, we took a cab up to the refugio on Chimborazo - the mountain which if climbed takes you the farthest away from the center of the earth and closest to the sun. I figured the climb was going to be a big challenge for me being a coastal boy (the refugio is a 5000 meters), not ever having climbed a mountain in Ecuador before and having done my last mountaineering in the U.S. in Alaska during the 8th grade, plus this was to be my first time using crampons. To top it all off, I got to spend 5 days with all my Sierra (the mountains part of Ecuador) PCV buddies - a number of whom climb every weekend - and they were all negative. "Your first mountain . . . Chimborazo? You are fucked; you'll never do it!" Well the truth is, I don't and didn't want to climb any mountains. I can find much more enjoyable ways to spend my time and money. Consider this: 5 hours in a bus and 1 hour in a taxi to climb a big, cold, snow and ice covered mountain or 4 hours in a bus to the beach which is often full of pleasant looking Colombians in Bikinis. Do you get my point? So, I decided to go on the trip because this friend, Pete, a PCV, has, as you called it, peak fever big time.

He tried climbing it last year, but the trip - which he basically allowed to be planned by these supposed experts he was climbing with - was a disaster. No one died, but it was really poor planning. For example, many people - most people - climb the mountain without ropes. It isn't a dangerous climb. It's high; it's long; and it's steep, but there are no real tricky parts and no crevasses. They had 2 ropes, extra carabiners, and ice screws. They put their crampons on in the refugio - about 4 hours before they were necessary. They were taking Vallium so they could sleep. It goes on and on. So now Pete was ready; he had a Knoll's course for the cold weather, altitude, and climbing experience; he had climbed other mountains, and he had one try on Chimborazo. He also had no one to go with so I said "Sure, I'll go."

The only part I was worried about was the altitude. Here I am at 200 meters. I had read all about altitude related fatal diseases, and they did not make me happy. However, I decided that I'd be in Quito for 7 days, Guaranda for 1 and at the refugio for a half-day, so it would be OK.

Well, it wasn't. I felt good at the refugio, and I felt good for the first 4 hours of the climb, but then I just couldn't catch up my breathing. I felt really tired and was yawning a lot - definite

lack of oxygen. So at about the 2/3 mark I headed back down.

It was a good thing I turned around when I did. I wasn't really tired, and the walk down turned out to be more tiring and more dangerous than the walk up. It took about 4 hours to climb up and 3.5 to get back down.

Then I just waited. At 2 pm they were all back. I had been able to watch practically the entire descent.

It turns out they all made it to the 1st summit - about 40 meters lower than the top - and were too tired to go further. Pete - also from the coast - but who had spent a week in Cuena at 4000 meters before our week in Quito - was really beat - but he had made it . . . although I'm sure he wished he could have completed the trip.

Supposedly we had arranged for a taxi to come and get us at 3 pm, but the guy didn't show that day nor the next morning. At 10 am we decided to walk out to the highway and try and stop a bus (usually not a problem). It was a really nice walk for most of the way. The terrain at the mountain was like a volcanic desert: lots of sand, little volcanic rocks and volcanic dust. When we were a half-hour walk from the highway a sand storm blew up (my first one of those). We had to walk with our hands on the sides of our heads to keep the sand out of our ears and eyes. (We would have been screwed without our glasses.)

About 12:30, we were at the road and 10 minutes later on a bus; that part worked well. After reorganizing, dropping off gear and showering, we left for Santo Domingo.

-Carl Stevens

Winter School 88 - Revenge of the Backpacking Stoves

The date was January 9th and once again I was ready to venture into the Wilderness of the Adirondack High Peaks Region. The initial group consisted of Steve Brown, Eric Markowitz and myself. Glen Koste and Paul Schantz hoped to join us on Wednesday after Paul got back from Arizona. Our destination was the John's Brook Valley area near the John's Brook Lodge.

Our gear was packed up on Saturday afternoon. Eric and I purchased our group food and we had a fun time putting it all into zip-lock bags. We each packed our personal gear on our frame packs and stuffed in the group gear and food. Steve arrived from Ohio around 4 P.M. and missed the food packaging. Eric and I went to the Latham Diner for supper, which was our last regular meal for a few days. We met Steve up at the amateur radio club's building and gave him his share of the group gear.

The next morning Eric and I woke up at 7 am. and picked up Steve at his apartment. We stuffed our packs, snowshoes, ice axes, mouse boots, and foam pads into the trunk of Eric's car and put my pack in the ski rack on the roof. After a tasty breakfast at Carl

R's cafe in Glen Falls, we drove north on Route 87 to exit 30. A gear store called the Mountaineer was our next stop and I purchased a water bottle insulator.

Our hike in to our base camp area began at a parking area called the Garden. The yellow marked trail we followed went up a valley along John's Brook and we hardly noticed the slight uphill trend of the trail. The Great Range came into view as we neared John's Brook Lodge, although we could not see Mount Marcy, which is the highest peak in the Adirondacks. We arrived at a camping area about an hour before sunset and set up the VE-24 dome tent. The snow-cover wasn't as deep as in past winters and the depth was only 8 or 10 inches in the vicinity of our camp.

The sun went down and we prepared a spot on a huge flat rock for our backpacking stoves. The stoves didn't work as well as usual and we had to settle for luke warm cups of soup and hot chocolate. The one-pot main course of stroganoff noodles, canned ham, and peas was well cooked and very tasty. After we finished eating we used snow to clean up our bowls and the pot which we had cooked the main course in. We took a walk up to John's Brook Lodge after our cleanup. There were some skiers staying at Grace and Winter Camps, which are two winterized cabins that can be rented from the Adirondack Mountain Club. It was a sparkling evening since the sky was perfectly clear and we could see many stars. The clear skies also meant it was going to get cold and after our walk we decided it was too cold to stand around. We took off our bulky wool and pile layers and got settled into our warm sleeping bags, which were rated at -20^oF.

I was the first one up Monday morning (and every morning thereafter) and I started up the stove after I finished the morning ritual called the yellowing of the snow. Eric got out of the tent in a few minutes and we examined the little thermometer attached to my parka. The temperature hadn't dropped much since we had gone to sleep and the present reading was a balmy -6^oF. The cold didn't seem to bother the SR stove we used, which was not the XGK we had used to cook supper. The pump on the XGK was leaking and as a result no pressure was developed, which explained the luke warm soup we had eaten the night before. Our breakfast of oatmeal with brown sugar and raisins, hot chocolate, and hot jello was plenty hot and tasty. We packed up our trail food, clothing, water, and crampons into our daypacks.

Our dayhike up Big Slide Mountain went very smoothly. Steve did manage to drop his wind pants somewhere along the trail on the way up. The weather was very pleasant that day with sunshine and temperatures in the lower twenties. There was a good breeze on the summit, but that isn't unusual. I was really disappointed that my camera didn't work due to the failure of the batteries. At least the view from the summit rock of the Great Range was very good. We had a lunch break near the summit where the wind was less and then we returned to camp. We did find the lost wind pants near a log which Steve had stepped over and jarred the wind pants out of his parka's pocket.

The next major event occurred on Tuesday morning. The alternate pump for the XGK decided to leak and the ring seals SR mini pump died so the pump would not develop any pressure. Breakfast was therefore

cooked on a wood fire which Steve built and kept going. Having pieces of bark and ashes in ones hot chocolate isn't too good, but it is better than no breakfast. By the time we finished eating breakfast, I decided today was a good day to hike out to Keene Valley for stove parts and a new stove.

We packed our daypacks again and excluded the crampons which wouldn't be needed for this hike. The weather was very good once again and the sun warmed the temperature up into the 30's. We kept up a brisk walking pace on the way out and stopped a couple of times to drink our boiled, ashy water or to eat the various trail foods we had each brought. We purchased a new MSR Wisperlite stove with a new fuel bottle and also a new mini pump for the 8R. The new 8R pump was tried out in the parking lot of the Mountaineer and the stove produced a surging flame, so the new pump was perhaps working too well. At least we know the Wisperlite would work smoothly.

The walk back into camp was very pleasant as the temperature was picking up. The Wisperlite stove worked well when we tried it at camp and the soup that evening was very hot. I guess we learned the need for backup pumps and extra stove parts. We were fortunate we were only three miles from the cars and could complete a stove purchasing trip easily in a day.

The next day was Wednesday and the weather was still warm. The Wisperlite had no trouble boiling water for breakfast and for trail drinking water, although it took a while to get 1.5 quarts boiling. The package said it could boil a quart in 4 minutes, but these were not test conditions. The day hike we completed was to Upper and Lower Wolf Jaw Mountains, which are part of the Great Range which ends as Mount Marcy. There were a few icy sections on each mountain which we had a tough time scrambling up with ice axes and Sherpa snowshoes. The views from either summit were not good since a light snow was falling and there was a lot of blowing snow. The temperature was becoming more winter like as we progressed and was down to 8°F by the time we reached the summit rock of Lower Wolf Jaw.

We arrived back at camp just as the sun was setting and put on some warmer clothing. The Wisperlite did a good job cooking supper, although slower at boiling water than the previous morning due to the lower air temperature now present. We finished dinner which consisted of cup of soups, hot chocolate, shrimp and rice, and instant chocolate pudding. Then it was off to our sleeping bags after a short walk under the clear night sky.

The next morning I got up a few minutes earlier than usual. My feet were cold at the bottom of the sleeping bag which was near the opening of the door we left open for ventilation. I threw on my sweaters, pile jacket, pile pants and polarguard booties and ventured out into the morning. After a few minutes, I realized it had become very cold overnight and I proceeded to look at the thermometer. The fluid had shrunk down off the scale and we estimated the temperature to be a little below -25°F. I then knew why my feet had been cold. Starting the stove was interesting since I had to put the fuel bottle between my pile jacket and sweater layers to warm up the fuel and seals. The instructions for the stove said impurities come out of the fuel at -15°F and clog the fuel line. At -25°F the o-rings can freeze and lead to a fuel bottle which is unable to hold pressure.

The warming worked as the stove smoothly boiled our water, although very slowly.

I decided we should hike out to our car on this day. The temperature was too cold to enjoy a day hike and it would be just as cold the next night. We packed up our gear while we waited for the drinking water to boil and we used a roll and stuff technique on the tent which was coated on the inside with frost. Our packs were loaded by 11 am. and we hiked out fairly quickly since our packs were much lighter than when we hiked in. We met Paul and Glen shortly after we began walking. They were going to stay a couple of nights at Orebed leanto and dayhike up Saddleback and Gothics. We chatted and then wished them luck as we continued out. After signing out on the trail register and quickly packing the car, we headed back to Troy. Winter School had been strange this year and was a trip I will never forget.

-Shawn McDonald

It's a Good Thing that the Cave was Straight

The trip started off late but smoothly. Three cars of cavers left the Armory at about 7:30 pm with Kim driving the lead, Stacey the middle, and me the third car. We were headed for Schoharie Cave.

As usual, by about fifteen minutes into the drive, I had forgotten the directions which Kim had told me, and I was relying on being able to follow Stacey's car. Things went well though and everyone made it to our first stop, a caving bookstore, where we were supposed to pick up some more people. Kim got out of her car and went inside, and a couple of minutes later, she came back out with about ten other people. They got into their cars and started them.

Because I was the last car to pull into the single lane driveway, I backed out onto the road to let the other cars out. I didn't know which way we were headed, so I guessed that we'd be continuing in the same direction that we had been travelling before we stopped. I pointed my car in that direction and parked on the side of the road to wait for everyone else.

Looking out the back window of my car, I watched as the rest of the cars turned around in the parking area at the end of the driveway and filed toward the road with the new additions to the fleet leading the procession. The first car went to the right as it pulled onto the road. "Great," I said to Kevin Dumont, my only passenger, "I had a fifty-fifty chance of guessing the right direction, and I missed." Just as I pulled across the road to turn around, the next two cars turned left out of the driveway and headed toward me. "Aargh," I screamed inside my head, and I turned the car back around to the original direction.

After the first two cars went by, I pulled out onto the road and began to follow them. Because the two lead cars were not in the original party, I checked in my rear-view mirror to make sure that

everything was OK. Yes, the other cars were following us, and things were going smoothly once again. At the next tee in the road, we went left. Some cars were coming down the road that we had just turned onto, and the driver behind me would have had to wait for them to go by before being able to make the turn, so it didn't strike me as odd that the other cars weren't right behind us anymore. After about a mile though, I began to wonder why they hadn't caught up to us yet. A couple of minutes later, the lead cars put on their blinkers and turned left into a parking lot and stopped.

"A pizzeria?" Kevin Asked.

"I don't know why we're stopping here," I replied. "The other cars haven't been behind us since the last intersection. Wouldn't it be funny if we followed the wrong people, and these people are just going out for pizza?"

I looked down the road to see if the others had caught up to us, while the people in the other two cars unloaded and headed into the pizzeria. I still thought that things were fine though until they began to seat themselves at one of the tables.

"Hey, why are they sitting down?" I said as my stomach sank.

Kevin's response made me feel even worse, "I don't know; they don't even look like they're dressed for caving."

I hopped out of the car and went inside to find out that no these people were not Kim's friends, and no they were not going caving, and yes they were just going out for pizza.

"Aargh."

Fortunately, however, they did know where the cave was and gave us directions to it. We headed back toward the cave to find the rest of our party waiting for us at the intersection. In another couple of minutes, we were at the cave.

The night was cold enough to numb our fingers as we prepared our caving lamps so it was a special treat when Kim announced that there was a cabin near the cave entrance in which we could don our caving clothes. Everyone piled into the cabin and got ready to spelunk, while Kim made a fire in the stove. I'm sure that Stacey described everyone's feelings when he stated, "Now, this is the way to go caving."

After everyone was ready and Stacey had tried one last time to get Kim, who wasn't feeling too well, to come along, we tromped out into the snow, waved to Kim, and headed down the path toward the cave. I don't know what spurred the thought -- maybe it was that Kevin and I were humming a song which we had just played in our last jazz band concert -- but the scene from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs where the dwarfs are marching off to work while singing Hi Ho Hi Ho popped into my head.

I sensed that the cave was going to be fun from the moment I set eyes on it. Schoharie cave used to be commercial, and whoever owned it during its commercial years had at least a slight sense of humor. At the entrance was a big steel gate, but this was not your ordinary barred gate; it was in the shape of a giant spider web and it had a big spider sitting on it. The gate set the mood, and we went inside.

The cave was long, tall, narrow, and straight with a small stream running along the floor. For those people seeking only the adventure of the Balls Down Crawl type of cave, this cave isn't for

you. However, it has other merits. There were lots of formations, at least compared with the other NY caves which I have been in, and it was interesting just to look around. Still humming jazz tunes, Kevin and I and Jeff took the lead and got away from the rest of the crowd. (By the way, the RPI Jazz Band has another concert this Friday, March 18 at 8:00 PM in the McNeil Room, and it's free.) Being in a small group in a cave is great; we had time to look around and were able to move at any pace we wanted. The water wasn't too deep at first and for the first third or so of the cave I managed to keep my feet fairly dry; however, they slowly got wetter and wetter, and I finally gave in to trudging through the middle of the stream. The water conditions, however, remained fairly mild throughout the cave, and the most adventurous part of the cave came when we had to stoop down to get through a low section and got wet half way up our thighs.

The single most spectacular part of the cave was a wide, eighty foot tall, vertical shaft from which water rained down upon us. Looking up, we could not see the ceiling as our lamp light faded in the distance so that the rain seemed to appear from nowhere.

The cave remained fairly straight and with no side passages until it ended in a large room. We waited at the end until everyone gathered, fixed their lamps, and had a chance to poke around in some holes before Kevin and I decided to head back.

At about the half-way point we heard people in front of us, and as we got closer it sounded as if they were singing. I don't think that they heard us coming because as Kevin rounded the next bend a girl in the group screamed. They were outing club members from the University of Connecticut on their first caving trip, and they only carried hand held flashlights with them. We stopped to talk with them for a minute. The girl with whom I spoke kept looking at me in a funny manner, and I was just short of wiping my nose with my sleeve when she asked, "Is that a fire on your head?"

Further down the cave, Kevin noticed thousands of little glistening specks which were grouped in bands along the ceiling. We kept postulating about what they were until we gave in to our curiosity and climbed up on a ledge to get a closer look. They turned out to be pin head sized, perfectly spherical beads of water which were clinging so precariously to the ceiling that a puff of breath would send hundreds of them to the floor below. Of course with the realization of this phenomenon, Kevin and I created artificial rain storms over each others head by blowing at the ceiling.

At the entrance to the cave, while waiting for the rest of the group, we explored a small crack only to find a dead end and an army of Daddy Long-Leg Spiders. If the spiders were anything other than Daddy Long-Legs, I think that it would have been an unpleasant experience.

Shortly, the rest of the group appeared and we went up to the cabin. Some more University of Connecticut students were there when we arrived, and they had kept the fire going. It's amazing how quickly you can get cold in the wintertime when you're wet. In the short distance from the cave to the cabin, my feet got numb, and if we would have had to change out by the cars, the cold would have been

a serious problem. I don't recommend wet caves in the winter unless you have some place warm, as we did, to get out of your wet clothes.

The RPI and University of Connecticut people exchanged bad weather stories about Fall Lake George, and then we headed home. Everyone was interested in eating so we decided to go back to the pizzeria, but we missed a turn and ended up heading back to Troy. We appeased ourselves by saying that it was probably closed anyway and set our new goal as Jake Cramer's. On the way, we dropped some people off at Ricketts Hall in downtown Troy, and in going from Ricketts to Jake's, we forgot to compensate for the one-way streets. The route we ended up taking to the diner was an indescribably long and zigzagged mess. It's a good thing the cave was straight, otherwise we would have been lost forever.

-Kenneth Davis

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"Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons [and daughters] of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."

-Chief Seattle, 1854

THE CAVE

Inside the cave the earth pulses tension, tension - release. The air and the water swirl with the procreative energy of a ceaseless spring. The rock breathes. My mind slows down, responding to the metabolic calm of the hibernating bats. Many of the bats hang in pairs, engaged in constant copulation throughout their hibernation. My body responds, nerves awake, listening, awaiting touch.

Touch comes as pebbles roll under my legs and elbows, and the smooth cold cave skin brushes my slithering body. I breathe in the matchless mixture of gases that the cave has prepared for the moment of my breath. With reverence for the ways of my earth friend, I prepare my own precisely balanced exhalation and, with the appropriate release of tension, send myself outward into the cave.

Promptings of self survival, emanating from the subterranean soul of the earth dodge animatedly around the cave. I am pulled to wildly reach out in all directions as though playing tag with a ghost. I acknowledge that the cave and I understand each other, we were born from equivalence in the womb of the earth.

Crawling and climbing further into the cave, I am introduced to an artistic power, a talent of the earth that I have not met before. Works of a maestro painter, landscapist, engraver, sculptress, expressed in the fourth dimension of infinite change, evolve and temper. In round symmetry and diverse form, the cave mirrors the evolution of the earth in each mandala of life, born so innocently on a bed of rock.

There is never an end to a cave, only a jolting moment when an insolent intruder, sent by habit (my unwanted caretaker), vociferously barks 'time'. The meditation concludes. My muscles twitch, heart beat increases and metabolism returns to speed. I am led by contractions through the passages of recollections and retrospections until I reach the gate of the wind. I am swept up with a howling blast and dismissed on the tail of a whiffling zephyr. I ride until I have emerged safely into the arms of our terrestrial clan, who wait expectantly for the magic.

-K.R.