

THE CASCADE CAVER

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COMING EVENTS

Monday    December 14, 1964

Regular Meeting, 8 P.M.  
W. Van Yorks', 4834-90th S E  
Mercer Island, Washington  
(see map on back page)

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NEW MT. ST. HELENS CAVES    by Jan Utterstrom

Location:    Approximately Sec 32, T8N R5E, Nt St Helens Quadrangle

A few weeks ago, a friend on mine and I returned to Mt St Helens to try to find another cave. We walked north of the new area for approximately one mile. We found only slight indications of caves. I decided to return to the Mt St Helens Trail and follow that lava flow south.

We parked the car in the woods near where the clearing starts. I noticed a lava upheaval in the middle of the slash. I realized that the area was probably explored but you know that special feeling that makes one look at even the slightest possibility.

We did find a sand clogged cave. It had been found before because we found footprints in the sand. But, the shape and direction of the cave were promising. We took a general bearing on the direction, crossed the logging road, and started searching the new flow. We edged towards the base of the hill as we thought that in pre-lava times it would have been a likely spot for a ravine. The main flow of lava would follow this and possibly a gas tube would form.

Weather that idea was correct or not, we did find a lot of signs; small crawl tubes, large block sinks, and finally in a good sized sink we found an opening.

(Please realize that from here on we are relying on generalizations and memory, not a very good source of base measurements.)

The hole was formed by a single slab having dropped from the top, flat, to a horizontal position, where, as all the other slabs lie at angles hinged at the top, this opening appeared to be the only one in the sink. The entrance is roughly five feet high and ten feet wide. After crouching down slightly and stepping down a few broken slabs, one may stand erect on a solid floor. The size of the tube here is about six or seven feet high,

NEW MT. ST. HELENS CAVES (continued)

Ten or fifteen feet from the entrance the floor, which has gradually sloped, suddenly drops off about five or more feet. A dripping pile enables one to gain the floor without risking a jump. The floor is quite jagged. On the main floor one can look back the way he came and see a tube slightly smaller, running under the floor of the entrance tube.

Turning around again, we headed south. About ten feet or more from the drop-off, a tube appears to continue in the same direction and on the same level as the entrance tube.

From here on the tube dropped at a very noticeable angle, going deeper, I judge, than the lava horizon on the surface. The tube is there about twelve feet in diameter. While the roof sometimes lowers and raises, the floor at all times is extremely jagged, although not loose. The cave then bends to the right. On the left side as we toured the cavern, a slight breakdown, or as I would rather call it, the side is fractured, while the roof remains intact.

After the corner we descended more noticeably and the roof immediately lowers to 18". We crawled a distance of eight feet over the jagged floor. The roof then immediately rises to its original height of about nine feet now. We were standing in a room. There is a slight breakdown in the center, i.e. three foot slabs dropped here and there on the floor. To the left is another tube and apparently a crawlway.

As you look across the room one would see that here you could easily mistake your way, as the crawlway we came in is hardly noticeable.

We continued following the main tube coming to small rooms and then the original tube and so on. The cave gets bigger in places, rather the tube size does, besides the rooms, and then narrows to at the very least eight feet high and twelve feet wide.

The tube continues southerly and drops sharply at times. There are minor breakdowns here and there at odd intervals.

Pacing it out with good average steps we descended 200 paces before turning back. Our main lights were low and time was short. We had stopped at a sharp grade. Our lights penetrated thirty feet or more, illuminating the tube floor and walls. It seemed to continue uninterrupted. It's hard to turn back.

Please note that the chamber with the tube to the left coming in is very deceiving when going out. The room looks the same as the rest of the rooms (in poor lighting). If one holds a match near the left tube the air current is clearly visible, to the surface evidently. Until further investigation is completed, it might be a good observation.

I should like to call this Spider Cave, providing it is of suitable size.

In Lava Flow

PAIR FIND HUGE CAVE WEST OF ABERDEEN by Lee Ester

Sometime when you're out riding and think you've run out of places to explore, you might try roaming the Snake river plains southwest of Aberdeen.

An Idaho State college geology student and an Aberdeen school teacher did that a few weeks ago and came across a spectacular and apparently hitherto unexplored ice cave in the lava flow about 25 miles from Aberdeen.

The cave's co-discoverers, David Fortsch, 510 East Willard, and Perry Fenstermaker, Aberdeen, have dubbed their discovery "Liar's Cave."

Why that name? Fortsch explains:

"Nobody ever believes us when we tell them what it's like."

To help convince their friends and to satisfy the curiosity of fellow-splunkers, Fortsch and Fenstermaker have been bumping over the desert almost every week end since running onto the cave.

With them, besides the curious, goes at least three coils of rope, a gasoline lantern, stout boots and warm jackets to withstand the well-below-freezing cold.

The discovery came about almost by accident. Last month, Fortsch and Fenstermaker were exploring fissures in the lava flow and with some 120 feet of rope had let themselves down into what seemed to be the deepest hole in the area. They were preparing to return to the top when Fortsch dropped his flashlight into an opening about three feet in diameter.

Determined to retrieve it, he climbed down. Before him opened "Liar's Cave" — impressive for its weird and massive formations and striking for its unexpectedness under the sagebrush and jack-rabbit desert.

Last week end, the two guides took a party of six into the cave. They found the first descent by rope no mean task. The first 45 feet or so is a matter of walking backward and downward hanging onto the rope. Part way down is a ledge and beyond that the descent takes the mountain climber's technique of rappelling — looping the rope between the legs and over

one shoulder, grasping the secure end with the right hand and feeding the slack with the left.

The second stage of the descent is 10 feet down the opening where Fortsch dropped his flashlight. This also takes rope, anchored in this case by a rod driven into snow-ice.

At the bottom of this tube, the spelunker enters the cavern—an underground world of ice crystal formations, ice stalactites and stalagmites, a massive ice formation dubbed "The Queen's Throne" and an ice floor which the discoverers believe has frozen, melted and re-frozen many times, burying sizable rocks of which only a small part is visible.

Possibly the most dazzling effect in the cave is provided by the ice crystals at the opening of the main chamber which rough estimates put at 360 feet long, 40 feet from floor to ceiling at its highest point and about 30 feet wide. The crystals are delicate arrangements of ice in hexagonal spirals — almost unbelievable for their beauty and fragility. The crystals apparently are formed when the moisture-laden air from the outside strikes the cooler air of the cave.

About one-third the way from the entrance are stalagmites of pure ice, the tallest about 16 feet. At the far end of the cave is a group of massive chunks of solid ice formed by water dripping from the ceiling and roughly in the shape of a chair.

Almost covering the solid rock walls are ice filigrees and icicles of an endless variety of sizes and shapes. Two ice falls, extending from floor to ceiling, add to the spectacle. Its discoverers estimate the floor of the cave is about 90 feet below the surface.

Fenstermaker, a long-time cave explorer, estimates there are at least 20 unexplored caves in the lava flow where he and Fortsch found "Liar's cave." As if to back up his statement, the group last week end found another hole several hundred feet from "Liar's cave." Fenstermaker started to descend into that one but abandoned the attempt because the job appeared too difficult to tackle as nightfall approached.

In case you'd like to try exploring the area, it is about 25 miles west of Highway 39 on North Pleasant Valley Road which turns west about four miles south of Aberdeen.

This word of caution: Don't try it without guides or without proper equipment and don't try to take the desert ride in a car with less than six inches clearance.

(This article on the discovery of Crystal Ice Cave, Idaho, supplied courtesy of  
Jim Papadakis