

HISTOPLASMOSIS AND SPELUNKING

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The June, 1965 CAVALIER CAVER, published by the University of Virginia Grotto, includes a 9-page book review of Sweany, Henry C. 1960. Histoplasmosis. Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Illinois, 538 pp. The reviewer is Warren P. Brown, D.C. (chiropractic), editor of the CAVALIER CAVER.

On the basis of Dr. Sweany's book, Brown reaches a conclusion that seems to differ from the concepts of most authorities on the subject: he feels that histoplasmosis "does not present a considerable threat to the spelunker".

Conversations with Dr. Sweany, Dr. Michael Furcolow and other contributors to Dr. Sweany's book - and a rereading of the book itself - lead me to conclude that Brown has misinterpreted the book, one section of which specifically discusses several spelean epidemics of histoplasmosis.

FURTHERMORE, DR. SWEANY'S BOOK, IN THE INTEREST OF SPACE, NECESSARILY IS FAR FROM A COMPLETE EVALUATION OF SPELEAN HISTOPLASMOSIS. It does not, for example, include the famous outbreak at Rocky Comfort Cave, Arkansas which first centered attention on this problem. Cavers can readily refer to this epidemic through my atricle in NSS Bulletin 11, p. 28, written just before "Cave Sickness" at Rocky Comfort Cave was proven to be histoplasmosis. My article Medical Hazards to Cave Explorers in the June 1958 GP Magazine is a later summary, but a bit out of date because of subsequent reports of sporadic cases in other American caves. A great deal of pertinent information is readily available. Brown is way off in saying that "(1) the subject is relatively new and material is limited; (2) a more complete study than is found in the reference could be obtained only with difficulty and would be superfluous;".

Brown at least implies that it is not worth taking precautions against histoplasmosis in caves. I am not going to speak for the parts of the world where virtually every spelunker gets histo, usually sooner rather than later. In caving in the United States, however, data accumulated to date strongly indicates that taking precautions against stirring up dust in caves in regions of histoplasmosis endemnicity is very worthwhile - and that an occasional case is to be expected despite all caution.

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