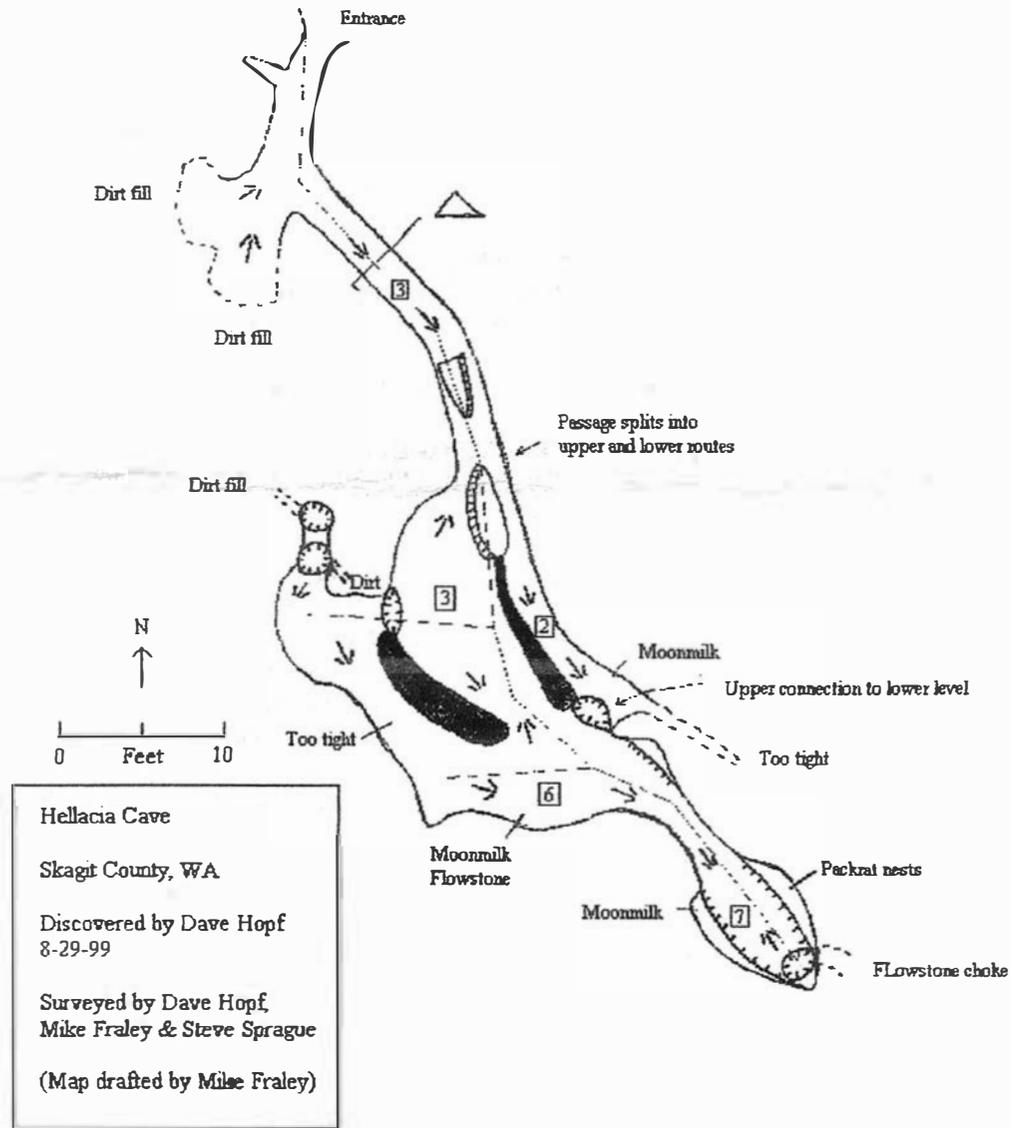




Cascade Caver

Newsletter of the Cascade Grotto of the National Speleological Society

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Cascade Caver

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All material to be published, subscription requests, renewals, address changes, and exchange publications should be sent to the Grotto address.

GROTTO MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the Cascade Grotto is \$15.00 per year. Subscription to the *Cascade Caver* is free to regular members. Membership for each additional family member is \$2.00 per year. Subscription to the *Cascade Caver* is \$15.00 per year. Subscription via email is \$11.00 per year.

GROTTO ADDRESS

Cascade Grotto; P.O. Box 345, Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043-0345. This post office box should be used for both the grotto and for the *Cascade Caver*.

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MEETINGS

Regular grotto meetings are held monthly at 7:00pm on the third Friday of each month at the Mountlake Terrace Public Library, 23300 58th Ave. W. Please see the map on the back cover of this issue.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Please notify Mike Fraley at (360) 424-7297 of any upcoming trips.

July 21 Grotto meeting 7:00 p.m.
Mountlake Terrace Library
July 22 Cave Ride Trip
This will be a one-day trip with plans to do some vertical caving in Hell Hole and some non-vertical caving in Cascade.
Contact: Jon McGinnis 206-246-7388
or Aaron Stavens 253-946-3431
12-20 Cave Ridge
Jon & Julie McGinnis (206) 246-7388
August 18 Grotto meeting 7:00 p.m.
Mountlake Terrace Library
September 2-4 Papoose Cave get together
Jennifer Dorman,
IDcaver@micron.net
September 15 Grotto meeting 7:00 p.m.
Mountlake Terrace Library

COVER: Hellacia Cave, discovered 8-29-99. The trip report that chronicles the series of trips that lead to its discovery starts on page 11.

Regional Meet – Trout Lake

The 2000 NCA Regional was a success this year with 28 members representing 5 grottos in attendance. New Regional officers were elected although they are unratified at the time of publication. The new officers are as follows:

Chairman: Larry McTigue (Cascade)
Vice-Chair: Nick Yost (Willamette Valley)
Secretary: Leonard Slack (Cascade)
Treasurer: Jennifer Dorman (Gem State)

The main topic of discussion was when and where to hold the Regional for 2001. Everyone expressed a desire to see a large turn out for 2001. With an emphasis for the need to have the planning settled early.

The regional took in a nice amount in donations, which covered the cost of the accommodations with a small amount left over for the NCA itself. A special thanks to those who contributed above and beyond expectations. We couldn't have done it without you!

There were several trips throughout the 5-day event. Hopefully we will have some trip reports to look forward too in the coming issues of the Cascade Caver. All around a good time caving and camping for everyone.

Jon McGinnis, Chairman, Cascade Grotto

Time to Renew Your Membership!!

Better late than never. It's time to get caught up on the annual dues for 2000. Please send in dues and any information changes as soon as possible. Regular or Associate membership with a mailed copy of the Cascade Caver is \$15.00. Regular or Associate membership with an E-mailed copy of the Cascade Caver is \$11.00. Additional Household members are an additional \$2.00 each.

If you have any questions regarding your membership dues please feel free to contact: Julie McGinnis, Secretary/Treasurer
206-246-7388 or mcginnis@quidnunc.net

Ridge Walking Near Concrete

By Dave Hopf

Friday April 23, 1999

In preparation for a grotto ridge-walking trip to the Concrete area, I chartered a 2-seater Piper Cub airplane in order to photograph potential cave sites on the most inaccessible (East) side of the mountain.

We made several North/South passes over the mountain as I photographed the various cliffs and ledges. At the time the mountain was covered with over 20 feet of snow that contrasted the brecciated cliffs. While I was unable to observe any obvious caves, I did notice a large area on one of the cliffs where the snow was melted and below was streaked with mud. I managed to get at least one decent photograph of this area with my inadequate camera.

Careful study of an enlargement of this photograph did not reveal any obvious caves but did convey karst-like impressions. It was apparently a complex of resurgences issuing from the rocks and it was difficult to determine anything more from the picture except that it was a place worth investigating. I called this area the "Airplane Lead" for lack of a better name.

It took forever for the snow to melt and several trips were canceled in succession. One dreary Sunday on the 6th of June we tried the road in and ran into heavy snow several miles away from the trailhead.

Finally Jerry Thompson and David Ek were able to hike across the snow to Windy Creek Cave on July 10th.

Saturday July 24, 1999

This was the first trip I made this year. Scott Davis had never been to Windy Creek Cave and I wanted to give him the tour. Steve Sprague and David Ek were also present. David Ek had

managed to finagle a key to the Elk Gate from Crown Pacific and we were able to enjoy the luxury of driving half way in before the snow became too deep.

Most noteworthy of this trip was the near whiteout conditions that combined with featureless snow that obliterated the roads and landmarks. I considered myself a veteran of the area but even with a GPS, we promptly went the wrong way and got lost on the wrong hilltop. This was the first time I had brought a GPS here and had neglected to program it with our course. David Ek also had a GPS. Visibility was less than 200 feet and although the GPS had told us that we were going in the wrong direction, it wasn't much good at helping us find our trail. Finally in desperation we plunged down the hillside in the direction of Windy Creek Cave and by sheer luck found a logging road that eventually lead us back on track. Returning from the cave the conditions were so bad that we got lost again and didn't even know it. This time we were able to get unlost by religiously following the GPS track, a 'breadcrumb' trail that it records whenever it is operating. All of us agreed that without our GPS we would have spent the night on that mountain.

Saturday July 31, 1999

The next trip was the first concerted effort to locate the Airplane lead. But nobody wanted to come! I convinced my two sons Jeremy & David to come with me. At the last moment Richard Lee our teenage neighbor came along too. I took considerable effort in programming the GPS with landmarks and karst features to guide us to the site. There were no trails and the terrain was barely traversable. I knew we were in for an ordeal. I plotted the course starting from the cliffs that began 1/2 mile south of the mountain and ran around the east side and across the saddle on the north and finally connected to the end of the logging road on the west side.

We relied heavily upon the GPS to stay on course but it often had trouble getting a fix due to the steep mountains blocking the satellites. The terrain was horrible no matter where we were. It is incredibly steep here. There were steep snowfields everywhere that made crossing dangerous. Where there wasn't snow, there were devil's club and nettle thickets and you had no choice but to grab onto anything that would keep you from sliding down the mountainside.

Out of necessity we developed a system of traverse using a 70' hand line and an ice axe. A person tethered to the hand line would travel to a strategic position and anchor. Then the rest would follow using the hand line for assistance and safety. The system worked well and allowed us to make remarkable progress over some of the most rugged backcountry I have ever seen. The worst area to cross was a sizeable thicket of what looked to be scrub alder bushes. The long and slender branches swept down the mountain before curving up to branch out. This created many awkward moments as we struggled through the branches on steep hillside trying to make our way through with our backpacks. You would probably have to experience this yourself to appreciate it.

As we emerged from the tangle of alder bushes we found ourselves at the base of a very large scree slope consisting of large blocks of conglomerate rock that had fallen down from the cliffs above. Occasionally we saw what looked to be limestone, but not enough to generate interest.

I determined that the Airplane lead was probably at the base of the cliffs to our right behind a patch of old growth trees that lined the base of the scree slope. In other words we approached too high and were at the top of the cliffs instead of the bottom. We were also running out of time and were getting tired.

We ascended the scree slope at an angle near the trees, heading up to a saddle that I had never seen before on the north end of the mountain.

Not too far up we heard the sound of falling water nearby in the woods. I saved the position on the GPS as a possible cave lead. It turned out that this was the location of Un-named Cave 'A' that was found many years earlier.

Right at the saddle we found a huge log that we sat on as we took a much-needed break.

We had a good idea where we were and decided to head down to the Windy Creek Trail in order to return to our vehicle. I hadn't taken 50 steps when I slipped on ice and severely ripped open my arm on a sharp rock. It was such a minor fall and I was amazed at the damage. Fortunately it didn't bleed much and didn't even hurt that badly so we put a gauze pad secured with electrical tape and walked out without further incident.

Saturday August 21, 1999

The next trip to the Concrete area was three weeks later and was supposed to be a grotto trip but no one showed up. I don't know why, maybe there were better ways to spend a summer Saturday than bushwhacking across backcountry. I had my younger son, David, with me.

Our plan was to start at the north end of the cliff base and work our way to the airplane lead. This was a really bad plan. Even though it was a nice day, the vegetation was loaded with precipitation from the day before and we were thoroughly drenched by the time we hiked to the cliffs. We also were not prepared for the hordes of frantically hungry biting bugs of all sorts that weren't present earlier. We had brought no bug repellent and the bugs ate us alive. They were constantly biting us and if we stopped, they swarmed over us. We could not think or reconnoiter and were completely distracted by them at every moment. There were thickets of Devil's Club that grew over our heads. To make matters worse David forgot to bring his gloves. I decided not to wear mine out of some bizarre sense of fair play. Biting bugs will do that to you.



Devil's Club specimen, taken from one of the countless thickets in the Concrete area.

I kept inhaling a type of bug that caused me to puke or at least try. The terrain was insanely steep making it extremely difficult to follow the base of the cliff. Luckily there was lots of devil's club to hold on to. Other areas were covered with lush vegetation that broke off when grabbed in desperation. We kept finding ourselves running out of passage 20 feet up the side of the cliff. We would have to backtrack and go low to get back to the cliff only to find ourselves out of passage again. Under these conditions each backtrack was overwhelming. We explored about 500 feet of cliff before we both wussed out. A week later I was still removing devil's club thorns from my hands.

Saturday August 28, 1999

I finally was able to coerce 2 of my caving buddies, Larry McTigue and Mike Fraley to join me on my search for the Airplane lead. This time I brought lots of bug spray and wore shorts, thinking that they would be more comfortable - after all I had bug spray, right? It turned out that the bugs were so desperate that they ate right

through the spray. Worse yet what little effect the bug spray had wore off in less than five minutes time and I was out of a 4 oz. bottle of Deet Plus before the hike was half over. Once again I was driven to distraction by the biting bugs, only this time they also had access to my bare legs.

I did a fair job of programming the GPS with waypoints so that we could better navigate, and on our way to attempt to gain access to the south end of the cliffs, we crossed the area where the falling water could be heard.

So we diverted in order to investigate the cause of the falling water. We immediately found 4 pretty limestone pits about 12 feet deep, with a small stream flowing into each one. There were plenty of promising digging leads there and the 2 northern pits were connected with a small window passage. On the side of the southernmost pit was a second pit about 8 feet deep. We rigged the pit and I descended it to investigate. I found a large amount of dirt and detritus that had been carried into the pit creating a collapse hazard, and I also saw that the floor of the pit was breakdown that mostly filled a passage heading down. I tried to remove some of the limestone blocks and heard some of them continue to roll down into the blocked passage, which was encouraging enough for me to rate this as a highly potential excavation site. However the collapse hazard of the mud banks on the perimeter was enough for me to exit the cave while I could. I estimate that 3 or 4 cubic yards of dirt would have to be pulled from the pit before it would be safe to explore further.

Later Mike Fraley determined from the description that these pits matched the description of Un-named Cave 'A', which is said to be 2 small waterfall pits joined by a window passage containing a small cave. It may be that this cave collapsed and created the 2 additional pits to the south, I don't know. But since the cave is no longer there we have been calling them the Waterfall Pits.

As we continued on towards the Airplane lead we ran into the steep treacherous hillside above the cliffs. While I knew we needed to continue south to where the cliffs diminish, it was impossible to make any plans whatsoever due to the voracious attacking bugs. We found passage to the north and we all took it without saying a word. It provided relief from the bugs and treacherous hillside and brought us across unexplored karst. In particular we found a huge sink that had recently unplugged itself revealing passage under collapsing topsoil. Rather than dig it out, we decided to wait for another year and let Mother Nature wash it out for us.

Mike Fraley had come up with a good idea - He brought a bug bonnet - which was a sack made of mosquito netting that you placed over your head and pulled the drawstring. I was getting weary of inhaling bugs and was willing to try anything.

On the way back we had a nice break on a high knoll that caught some breeze and kept the bugs away. We re-explored the karst on top of the cliffs above Windy Creek Cave and headed back.

Saturday September 4, 1999

The next weekend - Labor Day Weekend - we were faced with conflicting agendas. Larry went to Trout Lake, Mike Fraley wanted to cave rather than ridge walk, I was determined to locate the Airplane lead, and Steve Sprague wanted to locate survey markers near the Windy Creek Cave.

It all worked out for all of us - Mike and Steve would explore Windy Creek Cave and look for survey markers while I did a solo hike across the backside of The Concrete area in search of my elusive Airplane lead.

My first plan was to continue the hike where we turned back the week before, but when I came to the narrow logging road that went to the top of The Concrete area, I had an instant change in plan. Instead I would hike up to the pass on the

south end of the mountain and descend down northeast at an angle to reach the Airplane lead. After I had explained my plan to Steve and Mike we agreed to use whistle signals to communicate and we would try to rejoin at around 3:00pm. As usual, plans always seem to crumble when put to the test on this mountain.

We parted and I headed up to the south pass. I had been there before and knew it was awfully steep, but traversable. This time I was well prepared. I had 2 liters of soda, high energy food, bug spray, long pants, heavy leather gloves, a brand new bug bonnet (Thanks, Mike!), a well programmed GPS, spare batteries, an ice axe, a 70' hand line, Mini-mag flashlight, maps, compass, writing instruments, camera, a very loud whistle, and change of socks and shirt. I was determined to find the Airplane lead once and for all and I had a good idea what I was in for in order to find it.

I wanted to hike solo because I knew it was the most efficient way to travel across this rugged mountainside. I had been up here so many times this year that I had begun to acclimate to the harsh conditions.

When I reached the saddle I scratched an arrow in the gravel road indicating direction of travel and started down into the green jungle of hostile vegetation.

The ice axe was my friend, even though there was no snow or ice left except in small shaded patches. On the steep hillside it made a great walking stick and usually could snag enough soil and roots to arrest a fall or assist in a precarious position. It was particularly useful in traversing the countless rotting logs and tree trunks - some of which were 5 feet in diameter. It also has proven to be a useful digging tool when investigating leads.

My first obstacle was an unexpected 80' sloping cliff blocking my decent. I had no choice but to tie my 70-foot hand line to a bush and use it to climb down the cliff. It wasn't really a risky

maneuver but I knew I would probably never see that rope again.

When I arrived at the supposed site of the Airplane lead, the terrain had totally changed. I was on gently sloping land riddled with bogs and small streams. There was no sign of the cliffs and I wasn't sure how to go about finding something this illusive. Thanks to the bug bonnet I was able to think without becoming distracted by the bugs.

I decided to ascend up the other side of the valley and try to get a better view of the cliffs. The path was fairly easy and I made good progress by continuing north without losing too much altitude. I eventually reached a position on the hillside that presented a clear unobstructed view of the karst area and I paused to take some photos. However I could not see anything that looked like the airplane lead.

By now the valley between my viewpoint and the karst area had deepened greatly. Since the Airplane lead was nowhere to be found, I had to make my way back to rejoin my friends. I'm guessing it was around 1:00 and I figured that I could make my way across the valley and hike the base of the cliffs to Windy Creek Cave to join my friends. I would take a lot longer to attempt to hike back the way I came in.

Everything was going pretty well - the bugs were manageable and I felt that I was holding up very well under the adverse conditions. The weather was mostly overcast and cool but the physical exertion I was going through made it feel hot and muggy.

The climb up from the creek to the base of the cliffs was much steeper and longer than I expected. I climbed and climbed, resting behind enormous old growth trees that provided a tiny patch of level ground between the trunk and the hillside. I don't know how such big trees can grow on such steep land.

I finally got to a patch of devil's club that extended to the base of the cliff and made my

way through it. I had no idea by now if the airplane lead was to the north or the south, but it was a long torturous journey to Windy Creek Cave and starting to get late. I decided to go north and leave whatever was south of me for another trip.

The cliff immediately presented a small abutment that forced me to climb down into the devil's club to get around it. I tried to stay as close to the cliff as possible even if it meant that I was constantly backtracking and climbing up and down in order not to miss any of the cliffs. By this time I was in sort groove, quietly doing whatever it took to explore the cliffs without being conscious of the present discomforts of the environment.

I soon came upon a small den about 20 feet above the Devils club almost hidden from view by a patch of vegetation. My heart starts pounding. I investigate only to realize that the vegetation is a patch of potent nettles. I'm wearing a short sleeve shirt and it doesn't matter, I rip out the nettles and see more encouragement that this is a cave. Its 3:00pm and I am supposed to be joining my friends. My GPS says that I should be close enough to Windy Creek cave for them to hear my whistle, so I start sounding the whistle every few minutes to no avail.

I used my ice axe to pry down loose blocks of limestone from the entrance and roll them down the hillside where they roll for hundreds of feet while ripping through the devil's club. I pry up more from the floor. Finally I look inside and see a small daylight den with a dirt floor. There was possible passage to the right and also straight back. I see no sign of human or animal activity except for rodent droppings. The dirt is the consistency of composted coffee grounds and would easily betray footprints. I am also satisfied that no bears are in this cave.

My friends don't answer, I was unaware that they had exited the cave early and were far out of range of my whistle. I set up my GPS to take

a long reading on my position while I decide what to do.

I decide that this cave was so hard to reach that it justifies a cautious solo survey. I really don't want to come back to this spot unless there is a real cave here and the only way to know for sure is to explore it further.

Since if something happens, the only way they would find me is with an airplane, I unfold my space blanket and anchor it to the side of the cliff with rocks. I find that most of the silver has fallen off the Mylar, but there is enough left to be effective.

I then get out my mini-mag flashlight and put 4 working butane lighters in my pocket. I didn't realize I had that many with me.

I have to say that adrenalin had kicked in and I was pretty focused by now. The cave was moderately cool and I noticed that it wasn't blowing a lot of air but it didn't matter. The lead to the right was filled in with dirt and could be dug. The lead straight ahead pinched down but I could see that it went somewhere and could be dug out. The dirt on the floor stuck to me like I was covered with glue. I rolled a rock down and heard it keep going.

I pivoted around on my belly and started to head out. To my right I saw some darkness under a wall near the entrance. I dug the soil away with gloved hand, pushing it towards the back of the cave. I shined the light under the wall and saw more passage. I continued digging until I could fit through and saw tent-like passage sloping uphill to my right. I exited the cave but that wasn't good enough. I needed to at least go in further and sketch the cave. I knew that if I got my friends to this cave and it didn't go, they would not let me live it down.

I took a pen and the backside of a map for sketching and went back in. I had to dig open the passage even more in order to fit through and went up into the fairly spacious triangular passage. The cave was obviously formed by

solution and had a solid ceiling. At the top of the triangular passage I saw leads to my right and the passage continued straight uphill. By now all trace of daylight had vanished.

The passage became tight on the sides, tight enough to present a challenge but not enough to present a risk of entrapment so I decided to go for it. It turned out to be unexpectedly difficult because I had to lie on my side to get through and push with my feet against slick rocks covered with a greasy white mud. My cotton shirt and jeans caught on everything imaginable.

I heard a loud thump that jolted my awareness. When the second thump followed I realized it was my heart beating. I raised my helmetless head and felt something drip onto my head. I managed to look up and was rewarded with the most beautiful moon milk cauliflower and popcorn I had ever seen covered with glistening spheres of water. I realized that it was the first time it had ever been exposed to light.

When I got past the squeeze there was more moon milk to be seen along with an occasional tiny stalactite. To my right was a larger room that seemed to go in several directions.

I slid back down the squeeze and explored the lead to the right. It opened into a small chamber that opened into a larger chamber. I suspected that it was the same large room that I had seen from above.

I crawled in further only to drop my flashlight. It was just clumsiness due to the excitement. I expected to hear it bounce its way out of reach into the depths of the breakdown and fissures, but instead it bridged itself horizontally between two vertical slabs of rock just 12 inches below my hands. Believe me I took real good care to retrieve it without letting it again slip out of reach. I took this incident as my cue to get out of the cave.

Exiting the cave I collected my gear, sounding the whistle intermittently to no avail. I was way out of time now and I knew my friends would be

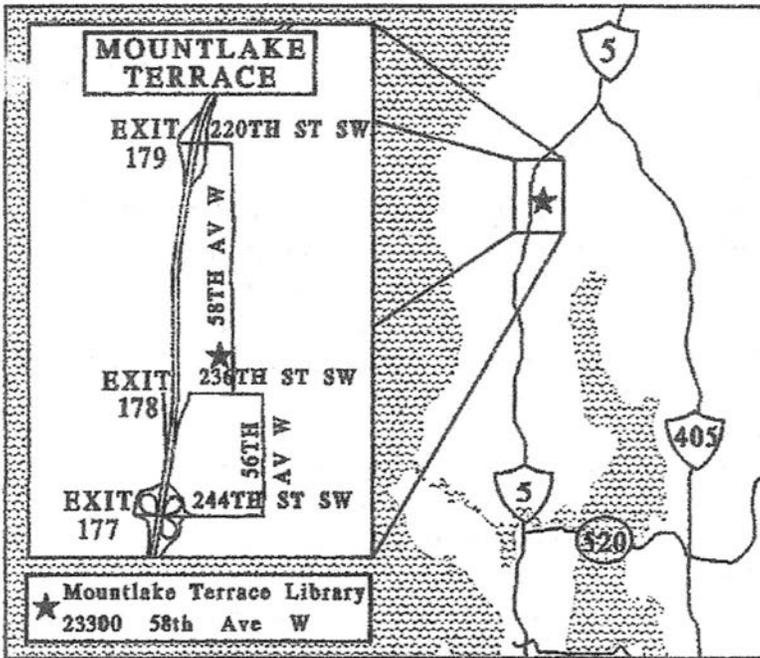
worried. The only way out was the Windy Creek Cave trail, which was more of a course of least resistance across rough mountainside. The GPS indicated that Windy Creek Cave was about a quarter mile away, all of which was extremely steep hillside covered with devil's club and nettles.

By now my arms were electrified from nettle stings to the point of becoming painful. It was more of a nuisance than a concern. Since I knew what I was in for, I actually made pretty good progress and continued to go out of my way to hike the base of the cliff.

A short time later I found another cave. It was a smaller cave, a twisty little wormhole that you had to belly-crawl. It sloped uphill into the mountain, and then turned right. This was as far as I went although I could see it continued for another 20 feet. I was out of time, tired and could not explore any farther.

Eventually I made it to Windy Creek Cave and took a break. I never wanted to hike this route again if I could help it. It would take close to an hour to hike out from Windy Creek Cave, but it was familiar territory.

When I got to the logging road, I tried the whistle again with no results. I kept walking. After I had cleared the bulk of the alder thickets that had overgrown the lower portion of the road, I finally heard a faint whistle. I replied, waited a moment, and gave 2 short bursts, which signaled my friends that I was all right. "I found a cave!" I yelled to them. A short time later I saw Mike's blue 4x4 coming down the road to get me.



The Cascade Grotto meets at 7:00pm on the third Friday of each month at the Mountlake Terrace Public Library, 23300 58th Ave. W.

To get to the Library from the Eastside, take Bothell Way to Ballinger Way. Head North on Ballinger and take a right on 19th Ave. NE (this turns into 56th Ave. W. at the county line). Turn left on 236th then right on 58th Ave. W. Go North 3 blocks.

We look forward to seeing you at one of our meetings.

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