

Carroll Cave Survey

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By Chad McCain

ML2 Upper Level

This was the first time I had ever been in Carroll cave and the weekend started Friday night when I met Tony Schmitt and Bob Lerch at the camp site at the entrance. Later that night, Dan Lamping, Joe Sikorski, Derik Holtman and Josh Hafner showed up. After getting the cave history and project history we crashed, got up in the morning and started into the cave by 9:30 a.m.

Dan went in first and I followed him down the pit and he took me to Thunder Falls since it was close and I had never seen it in person. Once we were back at the pit, everyone else was down and we took off down Carroll River to our objective, which was in the Mountain Room. Right off the bat I learned that this fork of the cave was endless deep soft clay which was the result of decades of relentless traffic, stomping through the passage way. There was a lot of flagging tape and many reflectors which showed the easiest route through the breakdown sections.

Once we hit the water barrier, I forget the name, I was soaked for the rest of the trip. This was apparently a section that stopped upstream exploration from the original entrance in the 50's or 60's. From here it was a short trip to the Lunch Room where I was told the Turnpike came out at, a route we would take on the way back. Quite a bit of water was pouring out of the ceiling at this time. Dan mentioned they were camping out here once and there was no water flowing, then all the sudden it started pouring in like it was now.

We continued the route downstream through the treacherous mud. I saw numerous blind fish and a couple grotto salamanders. Both were a first for me. Eventually we got to the entrance to the Turnpike, then a massive dome with water pouring in, then the Mountain Room. I took my first photo of the Mountain Room at 1:16 p.m. so it took us at least 3 hours to get there. Immediately, near the continuation of the stream heading to the entrance, we started finding dozens of bat corpses everywhere. A fine layer of mud was up about 5 or 6 feet from the current water level so we surmised there was a flood event, the bats were trapped for days and starved to death before they could get out of the cave to feed.

We changed clothes, set up a lunch area, then began looking for objectives. We went to the OG Survey which was apparently the ML survey or passage from the original map. At this point, we brought the ladder up that we found several hundred yards upstream before the room. We used this ladder to check out some upper level leads. One of which was marked as a lead at a waterfall.

This lead ended up being a rise pool with a tight joint slot above it. We then set the ladder up elsewhere and I climbed up into an upper level ceiling passage. I found this to have no signs of a current survey so Joe Sikorski, Tony Schmitt and I set up and started surveying what we called the U survey. After the trip we found out this was the original ML2 Upper Level. There were two short left crawling passages that ended after 2 to 3 shots each and were all crawling and ended in what appeared to be an old rubble fill or collapse of some kind.

Continuing down the passage we found an old rusting can, probably pork and beans or Vienna sausages. Immediately where the cave turned hard left, was a small passage on the right where Derik Holtman ended up sticking his head up to from the lower level. He was apparently in a dome that he and Bob were mapping. We continued on and found a signature from T.K. Jones 1-6-67 in the mud floor by the wall above a station I set. We found another signature, partially wiped out but the date said 4-20-58.

Survey continued anywhere from 3-4 feet tall and eventually ended in a loop where the cave collapsed and sealed itself off where there were a couple belly crawls. Joe wrapped up the plot line and gave me the book to finish the sketch since there was no reason for him to go on into the torture that I just went through setting stations.

In the end we got about 420 feet of survey in this upper level before we packed up our gear, completely covered in clay, and headed back to the Mountain Room. Once we returned, Bob was there waiting and he said the other three were off surveying another lead. Dan showed up while we were all making a hot meal and he talked about what they were mapping. Once we were done eating, we packed up and waited, and waited for Josh and Derik to return. Once they finally showed up, Bob, Tony and I took off to head to the entrance as Josh was going to cook a hot meal.

When we got through the Mountain Room I looked up in awe at the large dome complex with an obvious lead in the ceiling that I would love to bolt climb. It was 7:00 p.m. when we left the Mountain Room and it was 7:30 when we reached the Turnpike that Bob had talked us into taking. I climbed up first and waited for 3-4 minutes for Bob and Tony before I went ahead and took off through the crawlway. The passage was a lot of formations, breakdown and clay but overall it wasn't too bad.

The route was fairly straight forward and I eventually stopped for a couple minutes until I saw Tony coming up behind me. I continued on until I hit a larger room and I waited for quite a while until both of them showed up. We continued on through the "douche" which was a wet crawl for about 10 feet, before eventually popping out in the lunch room. This relaxed trip only took 30 minutes and I could have easily done it in 20 minutes or less. After that, we were back to the entrance a short while later and I was climbing the ladder around 9:10 or so. Using the Turnpike allowed for a 2 hour return to the entrance.

After I was topside, I came out to a nice cool overcast evening darkness, got cleaned up while Bob and Tony climbed out. What a workout that ladder is I must say! After about 45 minutes to an hour later, the rest of the crew came up and Tony cooked dinner. Everyone broke out their food, I was convinced to stay and not drive home then I crashed out around midnight.

This trip was truly such a pleasure, getting to map in this large cave with the guys who have poured their lives into remapping this monstrous cave in great detail. I definitely plan on going back as this was quite the treat.