

Exploring the Deep Caves of Tony Grove, Utah Year 2005

During the beginning of the 2005 calendar year, the Tony Grove Cave Project gained national notoriety with the release of a Bountiful newspaper article and a NSS News feature article. The Bountiful Examiner newspaper printed what we thought would be unrecognized article on the local residents Ryan and Dave Shurtz's role in discovery of Utah's new deepest cave. The article's link was quickly spread nationally through the Cave Diggers forum. Several months later Dave Shurtz published his accounts in Main Drain Cave in the April issue of NSS News. The once quiet caving area is now commonly known among organized cavers throughout the United States.

Due to the area's new attention, the project's preseason activities focused on improving safety. Brandon Kowallis created a Vertical Training Checklist to guide his students in learning the needed techniques to help out with the project. To improve conditions in Main Drain Cave, the project established a prodeal with PMI to help defer the cost of the 1200 ft of new rope. Other retail discounts were established through Hansen Mountaineering for the additional needed bolting supplies. Rescue caches containing food, a stove, emergency blankets, heat packs, and basic vertical rescue equipment were placed in Main Drain Cave.

During the summer season mapping occurred in several "small" caves. To aid in the effort, Brandon Kowallis led a cave mapping workshop to get new cavers the know-how in mapping caves. Over the season, 10 small caves were mapped. Brandon and Vern Bowden together produced 18 maps for most all of the small caves surveyed in 2005 and previous years.

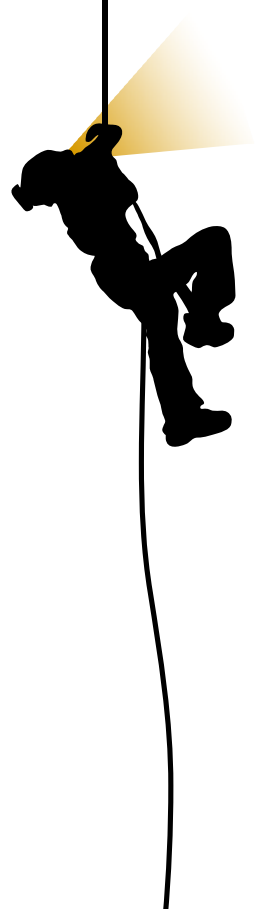
The heavy snowpack of 2005 created large concern and delays in the exploration efforts in Main Drain Cave. The initial trips started in mid-July with the entrance pit still heavily coated with ice and snow. At the end of July, the first trip to the bottom of the cave discovered the 2004 depth record's 45-ft pit completely full of water and back flowing down the passage with waist deep water. By mid-August, the bottom push resumed with a crew of 6 cavers with about a dozen more begging to come along. Following the main lead, we found a large room where two streams flowed into a 15-ft diameter pool. The survey ended at the edge of this 25 to 30 foot deep pool. A new depth record of 1227 ft was reached.



Main Drain Cave's Terminal Sump at 1227 ft depth
© 2005 Brandon Kowallis

With no other downstream leads, the project's participation waned. All of the remaining leads continue upstream. However, the first upstream mapped lead led to a large breakdown room with 3 converging waterfalls.

Dave Shurtz led several other survey trips to clean up the leads in the middle depth of the cave. After several trips Dave is close to completing the survey of the upper section of the cave. These upper leads have shortened the 450-ft vertical gap between Lucifers Lair Cave and Main Drain Cave to 300 ft.



In the end, the 2005 season's surveying progress was 4,755 ft of new survey bringing the total project's survey length to 14,300 ft (2.7 miles) in 19 caves. The survey in the 10 smaller caves totaled 2,005 ft. New survey in Main Drain Cave contributed 2,750 ft bringing its total length to 7760 ft (1.72 miles) and a depth of 1,227 ft. Main Drain Cave is now the 4th longest cave in Utah and the 9th deepest in the United States!

Future efforts will soon need to resort to more technical approaches to create breakthroughs. A winter trip is being planned to Main Drain Cave to see if the terminal sumps may drain as the surface water is locked in ice and snow. Main Drain Cave has many promising aid climbs. If bypasses aren't found to the ending sumps in Main Drain Cave, diving may be required to continue. The area contains good digging potential with many decent blowing, surface and in-cave leads. Hopefully, these increased efforts will supply years of additional discoveries.

Need & Use of the Grant

The Tony Grove Cave Survey would use this \$250 grant to help supply the shared project expenses. These shared resources greatly benefit the various NSS members from the Timpanogos Grotto, Wasatch Grotto, Bear River Grotto, Salt Lake Grotto, and Color Country Grotto. In 2005, shared project costs included rope, bolts, biners, and rescue caches.

More Info

<http://www.caves.org/grotto/timgrotto/TonyGrove.html>



Polygamys End at 460 ft depth
© 2005 Brandon Kowallis

