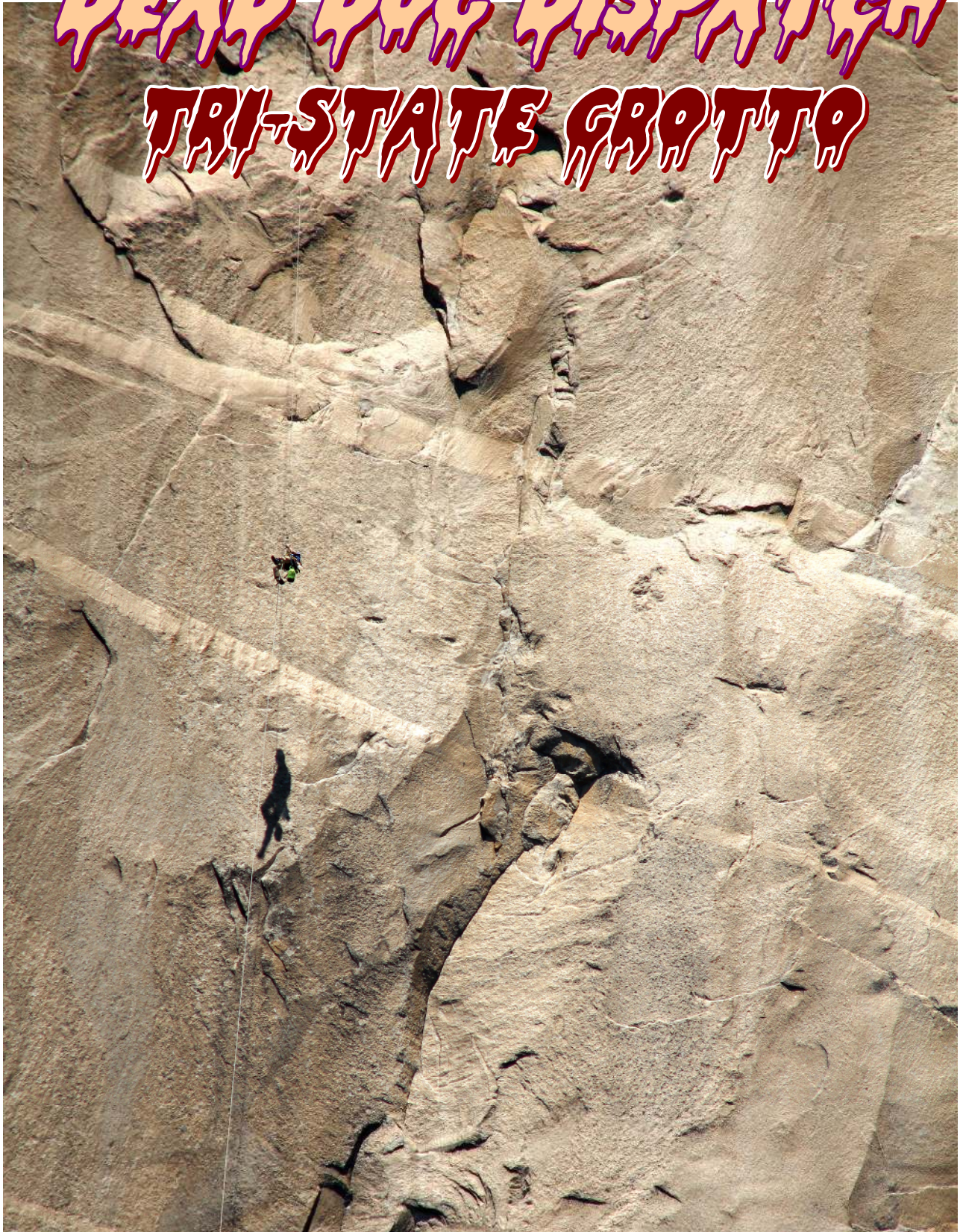


# DEAD DOG DISPATCH TRI-STATE GROTTO



**NIKKI FOX RAPPELS THE 2650 FOOT ROCK CALLED EL  
CAPITAN IN YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK**

**VOL. #30**

**ISS. #11**

**NOV**

**2015**

**#139**





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All material for inclusion in the **DEAD DOG DISPATCH** must be sent to the EDITOR NO BY THE **25<sup>TH</sup>** OF EACH MONTH.

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\*\*\* The cover photo this month was a Courtesy  
 Photo furnished by Nikki Fox at El Cap in Yosemite  
 National Park.

\*\*\*\* Don't forget, the **JONES QUARRY BOOKLET** is  
**STILL** available at a reasonable price **\$6.00**. If you don't have  
 it in your library, then YOU MUST GET IT. It is PACKED  
 with info about the QUARRY, the CAVE, the INDIAN  
 BONES, and of course the **MAP!** If you are interested in  
 purchasing the BOOKLET, contact **BOB BENNETT 304-**  
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**WE NEED EVERYONE TO KEEP THINKING ABOUT  
 VOLUNTEERING FOR AN OPEN POSITION. WE  
 STILL NEED SOMEONE FOR THE FOLLOWING  
 POSITIONS: PROGRAM CHAIR  
 PLEASE GIVE IT SOME THOUGHT. WE NEED YOUR  
 SUPPORT!**



# CAVE IN EVENTS

## 2015

\*\*\*\*\* CAVE BUCKS \*\*\*\*\*

CAVE BUCKS is a voluntary donation for cave purchases. The money is collected at each monthly meeting and sent to the Conservancy of choice. The money **SHOULD NEVER** be kept past the week it is collected.

Month of October --- ----- **\$23.00**

TOTAL TO DATE: ----- **\$6019.50**

**The money was sent to SCCI.  
Keep It Coming!**

## WEBSITE & CAVING LINKS

Tri-State Grotto ----- [www.tristategrotto.net/](http://www.tristategrotto.net/)  
VAR ----- [www.varegion.org/](http://www.varegion.org/)  
NSS ----- [www.caves.org/](http://www.caves.org/)  
NSS Convention 2015 ----- <http://nss2015.caves.org>  
OTR ----- [www.otr.org/](http://www.otr.org/)  
MAR ----- [www.caves.org/region/mar/](http://www.caves.org/region/mar/)  
WVCC ----- [www.wvcc.net/](http://www.wvcc.net/)  
Andy Celmer ----- [www.tristategrotto.net/Andy/](http://www.tristategrotto.net/Andy/)  
Bob's Web Site ----- [www.tristategrotto.net/Bob/](http://www.tristategrotto.net/Bob/)  
Jerry's Cave Web Site -----  
----- <http://www.caves.org/member/jerry/>  
Vitas Eidukevicius ----- [www.tristategrotto.net/Vitas/](http://www.tristategrotto.net/Vitas/)  
David Hackley's Web Site -----  
----- <http://s180.photobucket.com/albums/x307/clearsig/>  
Bob Gulden ----- [www.caverbob.com/home.htm/](http://www.caverbob.com/home.htm/)  
Rock Climbing Knots Friction -----  
[www.chockstone.org/TechTips/prusik.htm#Bachman/](http://www.chockstone.org/TechTips/prusik.htm#Bachman/)  
Tri-State Grotto MySpace -----  
----- [www.myspace.com/tristategrotto/](http://www.myspace.com/tristategrotto/)  
Animated Knots by Grog ----- [www.animatedknots.com/](http://www.animatedknots.com/)  
White Nose Syndrome -----  
<http://www.caves.org/grotto/dcg/wns-notice-to-cavers.pdf>  
WV Caver ----- <http://wvcaver.speleo.us>  
WNS -----  
<http://www.caves.org/WNS/WNS%20Info.htm/>  
Containment Procedures -----  
<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/whitenosemessage.html/>  
Crystal Grottoes Caverns -----  
[www.crystalgrottoescaverns.com](http://www.crystalgrottoescaverns.com)

NOV 1 ---- DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME ENDS  
NOV 3 ---- ELECTION DAY  
NOV 4 ---- Indian River Cave - 6:30 pm - TSG Wed caving -  
see John  
NOV 5 ---- Molers Cave - 7:30 pm - Scientific trip for  
geologists  
NOV 6 ---- Donaldson Cave - 10:00 am - trip for geologists  
NOV 7 ---- Mystic Cave - See Bob  
NOV 8 ---- Jones Quarry Cave - Marni Epstein - 8:45 am  
NOV 10 -- 15 minute segment about Tanglefoot Cave on MPT  
- 7:30 pm  
NOV 11 ---- VETERAN'S DAY  
NOV 11 ---- TSG MEETING - 7PM - Nomination of  
Grotto officers  
NOV 14 ---- SADIE HAWKINS DAY  
NOV 14 ---- Poor Farm Cave - Pocahontas Co - see Bob  
NOV 14 ---- WVCC Banquet - 7pm  
NOV 18 ---- Donaldson Cave - TSG Wed caving - 6pm - see  
John or Tom  
NOV 21 --- Crew 22 Caving Trip to Indian River & Whittings  
Neck - 10am - see Tom or Bob  
NOV 26 ---- THANKSGIVING DAY  
NOV 27 ---- BLACK FRIDAY  
DEC 1 ---- Replay of 15 minute segment on Tanglefoot Cave  
on MPT - 7:30 pm  
DEC 5 ---- Crew 966 caving trip to Whittings Neck & Indian  
River - see Tom or Bob  
DEC 9 ---- TSG meeting - Elections - 7pm  
DEC 12 --- Annual TSG Christmas Celebration - 7pm  
DEC 13 --- Holiday caving  
DEC 22 ---- WINTER SOLSTICE  
DEC 24 ---- CHRISTMAS EVE  
DEC 25 ---- CHRISTMAS DAY  
DEC 31 ---- NEW YEAR'S EVE

## 2016

JAN 1 ---- NEW YEAR'S DAY  
JAN 13 --- TSG meeting - 7pm  
JAN 18 --- Martin Luther King Jr Day  
JAN 24 --- TSG Birthday  
JAN 29-31 --- Carter Caves Winter Adventure Weekend  
FEB 2 ---- -Ground Hog Day  
FEB 9 ---- Fat Tuesday  
FEB 10 --- TSG Meeting - 7pm  
FEB 14 --- VALENTINE'S DAY  
FEB 15 --- President's Day  
APR 22-24 --- Spring VAR - Endless Caverns  
JUL 17-23 --- NSS Convention - Ely, NV

**DEAD DOG DISPATCH**

**V.#30**

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## **GROTTO BIRTHDAYS**

### **MONTH OF NOVEMBER**

Mary Bowen, Brooks Brogan, Pat Cronin, Nikki Fox, Tom Griffin, Arthur Hanson Jr, Christal Hanson, Terry McClanathan, John Scrivener

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

## **TRIP REPORTS**

### **El Capitan Expedition 2015 Second Time's the Charm by Nikki Fox**

The world of rope is a diverse one. It only took me one look at stunning photos of underground pits to yearn to be there, to be doing the same thing. The adventure of the rappel has taken me to the big pits of Mexico, tandem rappels and climbs with the flags at West Virginia's Bridge Day, the sporting, wet pull-down trips of TAG, into the wonderful, muddy West Virginia vertical project caves and many more on-rope adventures.

There's a certain feeling of freedom and accomplishment that one experiences having the fate of your life in your own hands. An unspoken. Known unto those who choose to trust the gear; trust in thyself.

As a part of my vertical mission, I've always been interested in mastering all aspects of rope. As I've stated above, this has included long rappels and multi-drop caves; along with more specific skills like bolting, aide climbing, rigging in all kinds of situations, etc. But the long-rappel beast, known as

El Capitan in California's Yosemite National Park, remained illusive.

It was back in 2010 when Chris Coates and I had planned to conquer the 2,650-foot rappel, known lovingly as "El Cap," with the eXtreme Rappel (XTR) team. Unfortunately, the expedition went sour and was cancelled only days before. Chris and I had devoted six months to training for the big event with hiking, backpacking and a trip to Mexico bouncing the big pits, which included Sótano de la Golondrinas (1,250 feet) and Hoya de las GuaGuas (668 feet.)

We got the phone call informing us of the expedition cancellation back in 2010, while in Colorado en route to driving to California, where we were getting acclimated to high elevations. We decided to still drive out to Yosemite. Once there, some of the team members, including the two of us, decided to backpack to the top of the rock and look at the rappel spot. Once there, looking out from the top of the legendary landmark, my heart was shattered.

It was five years later when we got the opportunity to return to El Cap with XTR.

Like before, Chris and I devoted time towards training with backpacking trips and climbing rope. We chose to drive out there again. And also, as before, we spent time at 10,000 feet in Colorado to get acclimated to higher elevations. We hiked, caved and camped for three nights and three days to prepare our bodies for the elevation of El Cap — at 7,553 feet.

Our plan was to arrive in Yosemite early Wednesday morning, three days before the other advance team, which we were on, members and secure a camping spot at the rock-climbers' campground called "Camp 4." We made it to the campground office at 4 a.m., and got in line as the fifth and sixth person. After waiting for four hours, we were checked in, picked out our campsite and set up our tent and staging area in the Yosemite

Valley floor for the duration of the expedition.



Chris and I spent the next couple of days hiking at 9,000 feet. We found a beautiful granite arch on the northern part of the park called Indian Rock. Everyone on the trail hiked past the side trail, en route to North Dome, and we had this beauty to explore all by ourselves.



(Chris Coates stands under a large granite arch called Indian Rock as Half Dome is seen in the background in Yosemite National Park. Photo by Nikki Fox)

By Friday the other expedition team members started arriving in the park. Permits were obtained, bear canisters rented, last minute shopping done and plans fine tuned for the advance team to hit the trail the next morning. Bright and early Saturday, June 20, 2015, the expedition started by meeting the mules and their handlers at the Lukens Lake parking area on Tioga Road. The 3,000-foot rope was loaded onto one mule and other team gear was packed onto two others. The 11 members, hauling personal gear, hit the 12-mile trail that would take us to the top of El Capitan.

#### Advanced Team Hike In:

Having not fully recovered from an injured knee stemming from a work accident in March, and lugging a 55-pound pack (45 percent of my body weight), it was rather slow going for me. Within the first mile on the trail, the other team members were long gone ahead of my poky pace. Luckily, Chris stayed back with me and we had a rather leisurely speed, with plenty of stops along the way, to our

destination. We even took a swim in Yosemite Creek!

Saturday evening, we arrived exhausted to our first sunset on top of the mammoth rock, El Capitan, where we would call home for the next

week. I wish I could say I enjoyed a nice night sleeping out in the open, but the team had a miserable night fighting off mosquitoes that were attacking our faces sticking out of our sleeping bags. Eventually my fatigue caught up to me and I slipped into slumber, surrendering to the mosquitoes.

#### Day 1:

Sunday we arose to a mellow atmosphere of people milling around the kitchen area eating and planning the day. A marmot was spotted that morning and a team member later found his hiking poles' foam handles gnawed off by the large rodent! By late morning, rigging of the massive 11 mm rope had commenced and once the belay team was assembled at the bottom of the 2,650-foot drop, I lowered the rope using my 21-inch rack. All but two people on the advanced team rappelled off the rock on the first afternoon.



*(Rigging Tree -The main anchor for our rope.  
Photo by Nikki Fox)*

After spending the afternoon near the rope performing safety checks on people and gear, I was last to go off for the day. When I was on rope, going down on the edge line to the staging area called the Diving Board, no waves of excitement rushed over me. I felt nothing . . . no butterflies in my stomach, no faster breathing or increased heart rate. Emptiness. And once standing on the Diving Board, looking out to the massive valley below me, I saw the cars moving slowly like tiny shiny pixels in a slow-motion video.

After changing over to the main line I placed my feet on the 90-degree-angled lip, and sat down into my rack. I slowly let the rope feed through my bars to start my rappel. It was then that I glanced between my legs and looked down the vertical rock face to the tiny trees below. There was still no feeling in my body or my head, and I knew that I should be feeling SOMETHING. So I proclaimed "Holy fuck" aloud,

as trying to fool myself into any kind of emotion. The trickery did not work, so I continued with my task at hand — getting over the lip, and dropping bars on my rack to have the full rope weigh added.

My first rappel, unfortunately, was not as smooth as I wanted it. For some reason, I remembered my number of bars incorrectly for the drop. I had one more on than I needed. A.k.a., I was screwed. I did not have enough strength in me to physically drop a bar once the rope was weighted — the rope was like a steel cable, itself weighting 150 pounds below me, and many more pounds were created by the natural wind belay on the rope. So I jacked rope, which seemed like an eternity. Once I did get going, I was overjoyed and had a great rappel. I experienced minimal thermals — a phenomenon in Yosemite Valley when the sun warms up the valley floor and the hot air rushes up the vertical walls. These gusts create unpredictable conditions and whip around rope and rappellers. After about 10 minutes of unhindered rappel, I landed on solid ground again, taking care to treat my honorary cargo — the first day's bathroom spoils — with care.



(First Rappel -- Looking down from the top of El Capitan, at the beginning of Nikki Fox's first 2,650-foot rappel. Photo by Nikki Fox)



for the next day. We got on the trail and followed the scree slope up to the bottom of the rope. We were scheduled to climb at 3 a.m., and had arrived at 2:30 a.m., just in case the rope was free.

We hollered over the radios and no one responded, so we assumed the folks were off rope and out of radio communication

Day 2:  
Chris and I awoke in our tent at Camp 4 in Yosemite Valley to a sea of people Monday morning. It was strange that all it took was a day on the trail and a day atop El Cap to quickly adapt and enjoy life without the tourists masses. We had a luxurious shower and then ran belay at the bottom of the rope for the afternoon until all the day's rappellers were off the rock. We went back to camp, made dinner, got our gear ready for our climb early the next morning and went to sleep well before the sun went down.

(Rappeller -- A member of the expedition rappels El Cap, as the wind whips around the rope below the person. Photo by Nikki Fox)



range and we were good to go. We had a snack and each of us pounded an energy shot. Then we organized our packs and put all our gear on. As I was attaching to the bottom of the rope, one of the

climbers came over the radio and said "I think we're about half-way up."

Day 3:  
Early Tuesday, we awoke at 1 a.m., and made breakfast. We gathered our gear and then drove out to Yosemite Meadows where we would park my car



Chris and I both looked at each other in shock, disbelief and regret. If they had gotten on rope at their designated time, midnight, that means they had been climbing three hours already and had only gone half way. We tried to find comfortable spots on the rock to take a nap, but that didn't happen. We were both wide awake and spent the next two hours waiting and looking at the stars. Finally, shortly before 5 a.m., we got a call they were off rope after a 6-hour climb!

Unfortunately, the stars were no longer visible, so there went our supposedly awesome climb under the stars. I got on rope first and then Chris climbed below me. It took about 30 minutes before I found my groove. And once I did, I tried to maintain a brisk pace as to try to get as high on the rope as possible before the sun peeked into the Valley and roasted us like ants under a magnifying glass.

It was about two hours into our climb, and about 800 feet left to go, when I noticed the sun on the rock several hundred feet above me. I shouted down to Chris that the sun was getting close and I was going to stop for a snack before we reached it. Less than a minute later, as I was getting out some food, I was hit by the bright sun. I rummaged in my pack to find my sunglasses as the light-colored granite bounced the sun back with so much ferocity that I was literally blinded. Seconds later I hear a groan from Chris and thought he must now be in the sun too.

*(As the sun lights up Yosemite Valley Chris Coates climbs below the photographer, Nikki Fox, during their 3.5-hour climb. Photo by Nikki Fox)*

Sitting on the rope, not moving, I was already getting hot. I was dressed for night climbing, not for day-time climbing. That last 800 feet took 1.5 hours to climb. It was brutal and horrible. At one point I seriously contemplated taking out a knife and cutting the legs off of my new \$80 pants.

Below the lip, I did a change-over to the edge line, hanging 2,650 feet in the air, and took some final photos of us at the end of our 3.5-hour climb. We were drained of all energy and painfully walked up to the kitchen area where the group was eating breakfast.



*(Chris and Nikki take a photo together under the lip of El Cap after their first ascent. Photo by Nikki Fox)*

The rest of the morning, we hung out in the shade and tried to get some sleep. But short naps lasting 15 minutes where all that we could do in the heat. Chris had his second rappel off of El Cap and I stayed up top for the night. He was scheduled to



climb Wednesday night/Thursday morning. I had a great night's sleep, once the sun went down.



Day 4:

I woke up in the middle of the night with Chris shining his light around camp, undressing and getting into his sleeping bag. He had a speedy climb that took him 2 hours and 15 minutes. Wednesday we spent the day manning the top of the rope again and then I got my second rappel of the expedition. This rappel, however nicer in the fact that I got my number of bars correct, was worse overall.

It was this rappel where I experienced horrid thermals. I was about a third of the way down when I noticed that the rope was going through my rack, but I was looking at the same place on the wall. I prepared myself for what was to come next — a free fall when the wind stopped. Luckily, I had heard similar stories from other people and knew how to handle the situation. It was only around a 50-foot drop getting out the slack.

Next, I was being swung about 300-400 feet from side to side. I felt like I was in a Mission Impossible movie, having to run perpendicular along the rock face as I zigzagged down the rock on my rappel. It was during one of the “Z” motions that I had my second strong vertical thermal, where I had another small free fall on rope.

Once I got to the Apron, the last 250-feet of the rappel where the base of the rock juts out, like a pregnant belly on a woman, I experienced the icing on the cake of my rappel. I felt a twitch at my pelvis and looked down to my side. I saw the bag containing my digital SLR fall from its attachment point on my side. It hit the apron, and then comically bounced its way down the 250 feet. During its gentle roll, I thought, “Maybe it won’t be that bad.” Then I saw the impact and heard its unforgiving crash. In an instant my optimism died . . . I knew it was dead.

I landed after 16 minutes on rope and retrieved my camera bag. The camera’s guts were gushing out of one side, the back of the plastic housing was split open, the built-in flash barely hanging on and my 20mm lens was broken in half. All it would do was turn on and I could scroll through my images. Amazingly, the LCD screen on the back survived. The Nikon had a glorious life underground

photographing caves and an honorable death at El Capitan.

Chris and I made our way back to Curry Village for a shower and dinner, then crashed in someone’s bed since we had to leave Camp 4 the day before. We had a 5-hour nap, awoke at 9 p.m., and got ready for our second climb. We were shuttled to the bottom of the rock for our second attempt. We got on rope for our second tandem climb at 11:30 p.m.

Again I was on top and set the pace. However, the week had been starting to wear on me. I was unable to keep a swift pace for long and had a slower pace than I wanted. But the 3-hour and 45-minute climb itself was amazing. I lost count of how many shooting stars I saw after 17.

Perhaps the most sublime part, for me, was witnessing the sky’s rotation. Usually I do not get to see my Zodiac sign, Sagittarius, in the night sky. The half-man, half-horse mythical creature normally rests along the southern horizon. Typically, only the top of the constellation can be seen, if at all. I gazed out into the valley and watched Sagittarius travel from behind the mountains, into full view in the sky. Amazing.

Day 5:

It was 3:30 a.m., in the morning when we both got off rope. I rushed to tear my gear off as I needed to pee for the better part of an hour while climbing. We quietly hiked up the rock to our sleeping spot as no one else was awake. We crashed until the sunrise woke us up Thursday and spent the day sending team members off the rock, as it was the last rappel for those not on the derig crew.

That evening I think my body had reached its physical limit with endurance in the high sierra sun. I was massively hungry and rather tired of the tiny calorie amounts of dehydrated/freeze-dried meals we were living off of for the better part of two weeks. Luckily some team members had extra food to share. Chris gave me an awful hard time about my ravenous, almost animal-like unquenchable hunger . . . but I didn’t care. I ate and ate.

Day 6:

It was a sad and also an exciting day waking up Friday. It was our last night sleeping in the open night on top of the iconic giant. And it was derig day. It was also the last breakfast-in-a-bag we had to eat before we could have real food. There were seven of us on top and only four of us to rappel team and personal gear off the El Cap. The morning was spent cleaning the kitchen area, filling bear canisters, double packaging trash, packing up everything else in duffles and double checking to make sure we left no trace.

I was the second to last to rappel. I had two packs, weighing a total of ~80 pounds. One was hanging over each leg and the rope ran between my legs. My third and final rappel off of El Cap was the best. It was the perfect time of day, early — before the thermals started. And I'm sure the extra weight helped too. The only real challenge I had during my 16-minute rappel was some spinning on the last ~1,500 feet. I endured a soft landing, as part of my cargo was the port-a-john and the last of its contents.

(Last Rappel -- John Cadle photobombs Nikki Fox while she takes a portrait from the Diving Board. Photo by Nikki Fox)



After I was off rope, the topside team worked on taking down the pulley system, which raised and lowered the main line for slack. The slack made it easier to get your rack on rope and over the lip. So when Pete Hertl, who was the last off El Cap, came down with the system and a 150-foot edge line in his backpack, he was managing the full weight of the rope.

Once everyone was down, the topside team unpacked a long piece of 550 Paracord used to lower the main line. I walked down to the road and hitched a ride to pick up my car in Curry Village. Upon my return, with a bag full of snacks to share with everyone, the lowering of the 3,000-foot rope had commenced. After what seemed like forever, the rope was finally on the ground and the haul line was back on its way up to the top. The crew worked on stuffing the main line in four duffel bags to hike back to the road.



(Derig Rope -- Chris Coates helps stuff the 3,000-foot rope used for the expedition. Photo by Nikki Fox)



Up top, John Cadle, Mike Broome and Andrew "Stitch" Rentzel packed up for their descent to the valley floor using a rock climbers route called the East Ledges. There are supposedly three places on the route that have ~200-foot ropes rigged to rappel down. Of course, one would expect the rope used to be dynamic rope. So the team had planned on donating two of our ropes for the cause, making a better rappel with static rope.

Most team members met back at Curry Village for a meal and celebratory beers. The ones who had planned to spend the night in Yosemite and leave Saturday morning, like Chris and I, got rather rowdy into the night.

Looking back, it was a great group of people to be with for a week!

Expedition Numbers  
23 Team members  
48 Rappels  
28 Climbs

### ***BOYLES CAVES***



Boyles (TGriffin)



Boyles 2 (TGriffin)



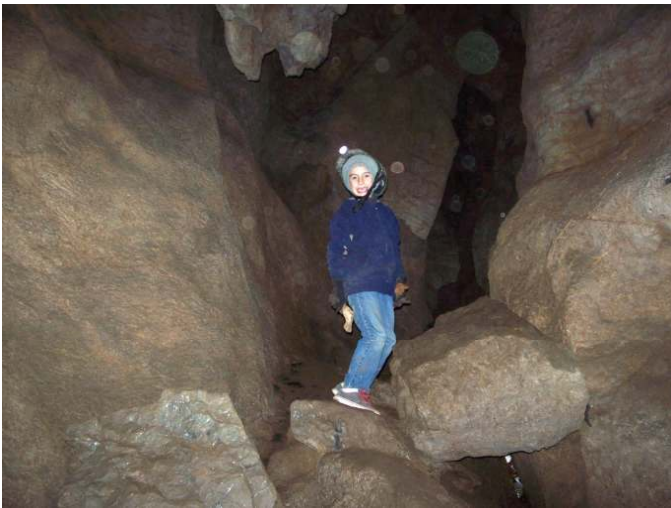
Little red wagon - Boyles (TGriffin)

### ***CHAPMAN CAVE***



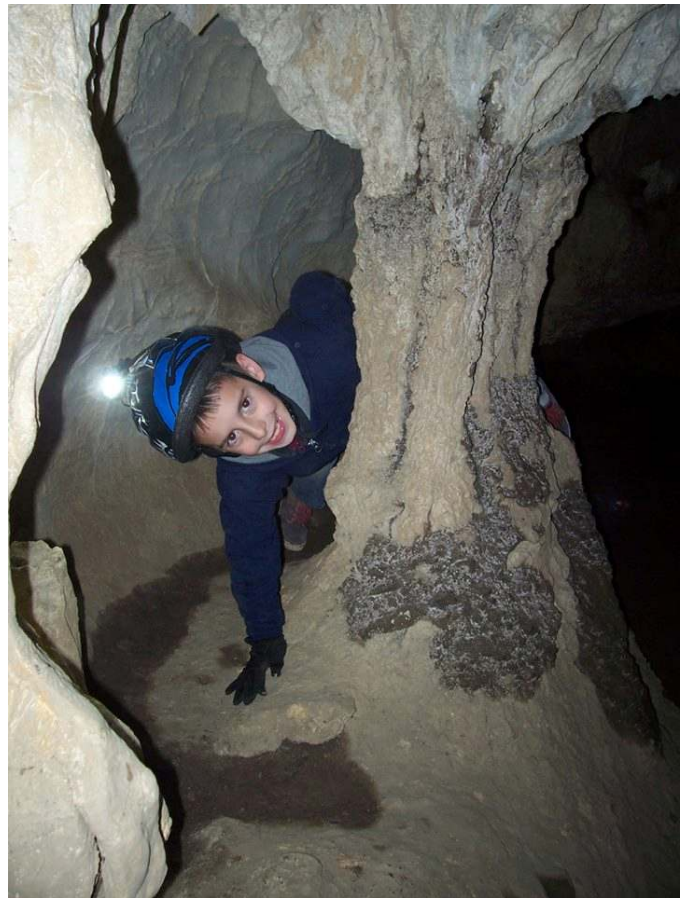
Chapman entrance (JDiCarlo)





Adam in Chapman Cave (JDiCarlo)

***INDIAN RIVER CAVE***



Adam in I R Cave (JDiCarlo)

***MOLERS CAVE***



John in Indian River (MWard)



Took 14 geologists to Molers - Bob's best side (JDiCarlo)



I R Cave (MWard)





# CAVIN CALENDAR

## NOVEMBER 8TH - DECEMBER 19TH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>Nov 8</b> Jones Quarry Cave - Marni Epstein 845 am	Nov 9	<b>Nov 10</b> MPT - Tanglefoot - 730P	<b>Nov 11</b>  Meeting 7pm - Nominations  <b>VETERAN'S DAY</b>	Nov 12	Nov 13	<b>Nov 14</b> WVCC Banquet 7pm Poor Farm Cave - Pocahontas Co - 11am Sadie Hawkin's Day
Nov 15	Nov 16	Nov 17	<b>Nov 18</b> Donaldson Cave - TSG Wed caving - 630pm	Nov 19	Nov 20	<b>Nov 21</b> Crew 22 Scout caving trip - WNeck & IRiver - see Tom
Nov 22	Nov 23	Nov 24	Nov 25	<b>Nov 26</b>  <b>THANKS GIVING DAY</b>	<b>Nov 27</b> <b>Black Friday</b>	Nov 28
Nov 29	Nov 30	<b>Dec 1</b> MPT - Tanglefoot - 730pm	Dec 2	Dec 3	Dec 4	<b>Dec 5</b> Crew 966 Scout trip - WNeck & IRiver - see Tom
Dec 6	Dec 7	Dec 8	<b>Dec 9</b>  Meeting 7pm	Dec 10	Dec 11	Dec 12
Dec 13	Dec 14	Dec 15	Dec 16	Dec 17	Dec 18	Dec 19

# DEAD DOG DISPATCH



GEOLOGY CLASS OUT SIDE OF CHAPMAN CAVE (Courtesy Photo)

## DEAD DOG DISPATCH

TRI-STATE GROTTO OF THE NSS  
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TO:

