

## Retreating below not just for groundhogs

By KATHRYN WYLE  
Staff Writer

You may have missed it, but Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow yet again this year. Prepare for cold, batten down the hatches, and head below ground to deal with the next six weeks of winter, suggests this Outdoor Advisor. "It's snowing!" you say. "Why would I want to go outside when the nighttime low is in the teens or single digits?"

Our answer is that you are looking in the wrong place. Why brave the elements when you can avoid them altogether? Go caving. In the subterranean wonderland of a cave, the temperature always hovers near a balmy 50 degrees. In summer, you retreat to your underground lair for nature's air conditioning; in winter, caves are one of the warmer places you can be.

First, let's dispel a few myths: there are no vampire bats in the United States; bats are quiet, shy mice with wings that would much rather sleep than nest in your hair or attack. Second, caves come in all shapes and sizes, from Kentucky's Mammoth Cave—the longest in the world, clocking in with more than 300 miles of explored passageways—to underwater caves (of which there are many in Florida) and virtual holes in the ground that you could easily pass by and never notice.

So, yes, there may well be claustrophobia involved, but just because it is a cave does not mean that you will spend all, or any, of your time squeezing through passageways

with names like "The Birth Canal."

You may think that, having visited Ruby Falls, learned the difference between a stalagmite and a stalactite, and purchased your "See Rock City" birdhouse back in seventh grade, you can scratch "caving" off of your lifetime "To Do" list. Not so. There is much more to caves than the occasional petroglyph and ridiculously cool rock formations.

Have you ever seen a troglodyte? What about glow worms? Do you derive great joy from contorting your body through tiny passageways and scrambling over boulders? Or perhaps you have ever wanted to wear a flashlight on your head? All of these are but a taste of the joys of caving.

As coincidence would have it, Davidson Outdoors is running an introductory caving trip on March 12-13. This two-for-the-price-of-one caving extravaganza includes two Virginia favorites: Links and Pighole caves. Let not the names deceive; there are no pigs involved. You may feel some kinship with pigs, however, as it does bear mentioning that caves tend toward the muddy end of the cleanliness spectrum. Consider it an excuse for an epic Goodwill run. The truly hideous stuff looks even better when smeared with mud.

But if you want to go caving on your own, there are some important things to consider, so as to avoid pulling a Tom Sawyer and becoming hopelessly lost. No matter how good your sense of direction is above ground, you must not assume that you will be similarly skilled in a cave. Caves are great fun to explore, but be sure to keep to well-

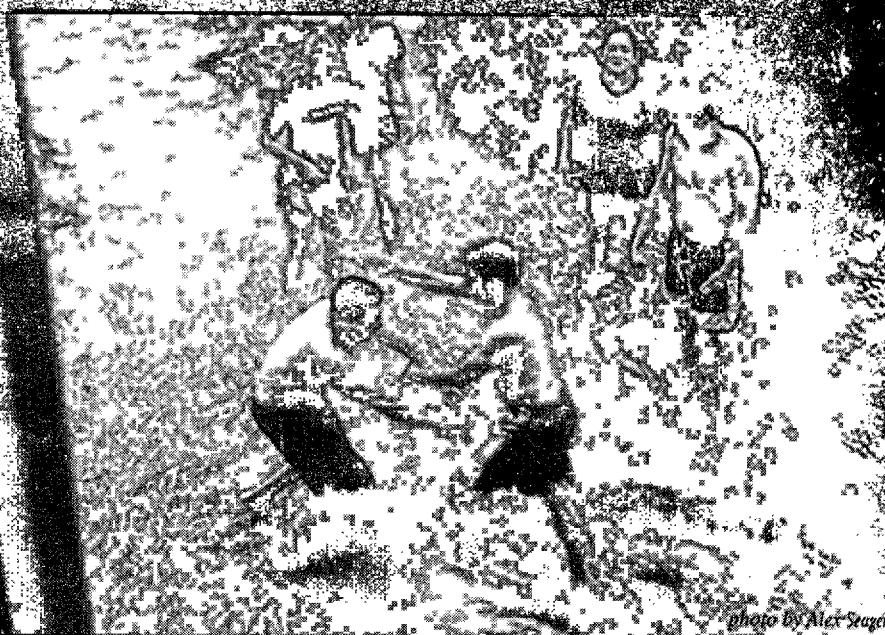
known caverns, and don't explore any depths from which you are not absolutely certain you can return.

Regardless of your fashion sensibilities, wear both a helmet and a headlamp. You will bump your head more often than you think, and it goes without saying that caves are rather dimly lit. Unless you think that you can find your way out by touch, always carry back-up light sources. Warm clothes, preferably polypropylene or similar, are essential for a base layer. As in all outdoor activities,

follow a "Leave No Trace" philosophy. It's way cool to find a 1000-year-old cave drawing, slightly less so to discover the remains of someone's lunch or (worse yet!) the result of it.

So if you are tired of sunlight, or have a hankering to hang with some bats, if you want to see Mike and Ed in ridiculous costumes, or if you often find yourself yearning to roll in that huge puddle in front of Chambers, consider caving for your next outdoor adventure.

### SNAPSHOT OF DAVIDSON



Students play in a puddle outside of Tomlinson as a study break. This week began with two days of downpours before clearing up yesterday.

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