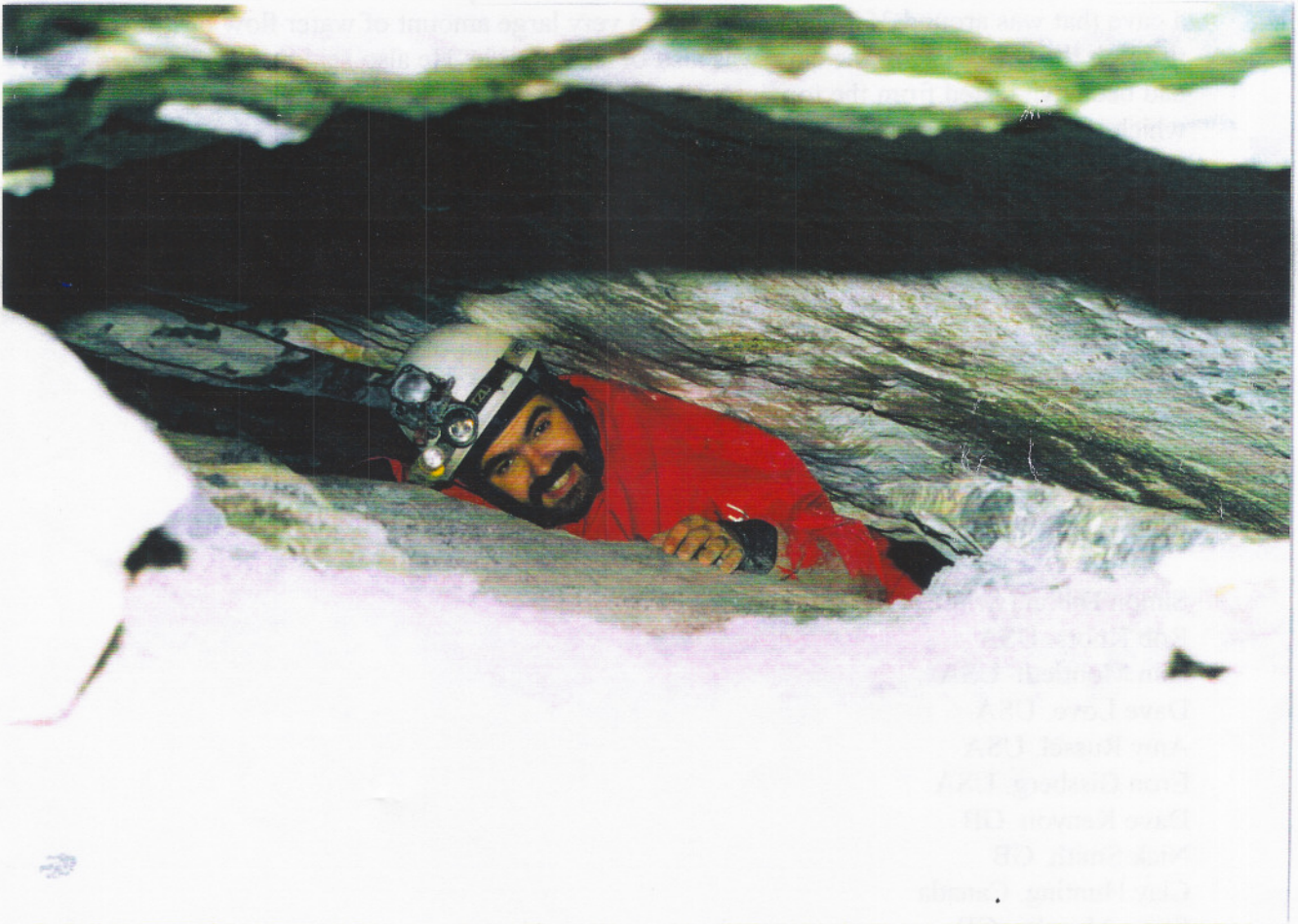


*THE 1998 SOUTH EAST ALASKA  
BURNING BRIDGES CAVE  
EXPEDITION*



**The Derbyshire Caving Club  
&  
Glacier Grotto**

By Simon Dillon

## 1998 Burning Bridges Cave Expedition

### *Preface*

After the 1997 Tongass Cave Project (TCP), we were told by one of our team members Eron Gissberg of a cave system which lay on Chichagof Island. Chichagof Island is situated on the South East Coast of the Alaskan pan handle. We were told of a cave that was around 3500 feet deep, had a very large amount of water flow passing through the cave system, the cave was also of blue marble. He also said that the cave had been dye tested from the top entrance and had a positive result at the resurgence which is around 50 feet above sea level.

Around 9 of us then decided that day to do a break away from the TCP and set up an expedition to this cave. The cave had already been named as Solstice Cave by parties unknown we were also told that not much of the cave had been pushed.

The expedition did not receive its name until one week before it was due to start. It was named by myself and Rob Knots, the reason well, a lot of people did not wish us to go anywhere near the cave, even though we had invited these people to join our expedition. The reason why they did not wish us to cave did not reveal itself until a later date. So please read on, the events as written as a diary.

Participants for the expedition.

Simon Dillon (writer ) GB  
Rob Knots. USA  
Dan Montieth. USA  
Dave Love. USA  
Amy Russel. USA  
Eron Gissberg. USA  
Dave Kenyon. GB  
Nick Smith. GB  
Clay Hunting. Canada  
Steve Murphy. GB

**Photograph front cover: Writer in the collapsed fossilised resurgence of Solstice cave.**

### 1<sup>st</sup> July 1998

Today I arrived in the USA and met up with Rob knots, it was off to Robs house to prepare the equipment that would be needed for the expedition. I informed Rob that due to unforeseen circumstances two Brits have had to drop out, Steve Murphy and Dave Kenyon. This does not cause any problems as we still have and 8 man team.

Rob has been working hard over the last few months he has been able to acquire a rope grant of a company in the US and we are now in possession of nearly 6000 feet of rope, our only requirement is to send in survey data and photos of the cave system. we also have 2 large tents to act as a mapping and cook tent and for storing all the equipment in.

After several days of preparing the equipment and of course consuming as much alcohol as possible, we are now ready to start our long drive to Alaska. Rob lives in a small town named Prairie City, Oregon. Our mission now to drive up the US picking up members as we go. We make our first phone call to Eron Gissberg, and we receive more bad news Eron will not be joining us. This is quite bad as Eron is the only one that knows the cave location and he was arranging a boat that would be needed to get us across a 5 mile stretch of water. He gives us the best description he can of the cave entrance and resurgence. We try the guilt trip on Eron but it does not work.

After 3 days travelling we arrive at Tasis on the west coast of Vancouver Island to pick up our next participant, Clay and yes we are again informed that he can't make it, not only that but the carbide which Clay had ordered for us had not yet arrived, this was very bad Karma. The following day was spent running around Campbell River town buying carbide of local cavers, we manage to get 60 pounds together. Rob and I come up with an idea that we will use the collective guilt of all the people that have dropped out so far and use it on Clay, it nearly works Rob gets a brand new Warmbac suit and me a new pair of knee pads. (Clay is the local dealer for Warmbac) The following day we drive to port Hardy to catch the first of our ferries up to Juneau, with a stop in Ketchikan to pick up 2 more members. Needless to say when we arrived in Ketchikan to pick Dan and Amy up they also had dropped out. Dan however had been up to Chichagof (Chich) a month before to scout the area for a good camp site which he had found, we try the collective guilt trip which by now is really gaining power. So its back on the ferry and up to Juneau to meet with Dave Love who had also been out to Chich with Dan, we were also to meet up with Nick in Juneau.

When we arrive at Dave's after a bloody long ferry ride he tells us he can only come out for 3 days which is now use to man nor beast.

It seems that Rob and I had named the expedition well! There were now only 3 people Myself, Rob and Nick, we now have now chance of doing the full extent of Solstice if indeed we can get to it at all, as we have still not yet managed to get a boat. Dave tried to boost our hopes by saying that he may have found some caves close to our camp site, but our only focus is Solstice Cave.

### 13<sup>th</sup> July 1998

After yet another ferry ride from Juneau we arrive at Hoona on Chichagof Island. Hoona is a small native logging community, however we are camping some 30 miles away at an area known as Freshwater Bay. We have a good freshwater supply from

Kennel Creek, which is also a salmon run river, so some good food may be had. We have still had no luck in locating a boat to get us to Trap Bay, and the hopes of finding one that is not being used and that is big enough to carry all our equipment is not looking good at this point.

### 15<sup>th</sup> July 1998

Yesterday turned out to be one hell of a day. Myself, Nick, Rob and Dave left camp to have a look at a 3000 foot unnamed peak, which by all accounts nobody had been up and I can now see why, nobody in there right minds would want to. The going started *quite easy through old growth forest, however as we hit the sub alpine this is where things changed.* The undergrowth was so dense in parts that the only way to could get through to get down on your hands and knees, and this was done on slopes of 80 to 90 degrees. It is hard to explain how bad the undergrowth is but if your friend stands 1 foot away all you can see is Slide Alder or berry bushes, or worse the very painful Devils Club This plant commands utmost respect it is covered in painful thorns which even cover all the leaf, most are around 12 feet high and can cover vast Areas. If you happen to get a Devils Club thorn in you the only way you can get it out, is to let the area go septic and then pop it out with the puss. There are also swamps known in Alaska as Muskegs, basically if you take a jungle take away the heat and the poisonous biting things, well that's what we have to contend with for the next month.

It tends to be every man for himself at times fighting to find the best way through the bush, as I stop to catch my breath the ground that I am stood on gives way I start to *do somersaults backwards down the hill, all I get to see every now and again is a flash of my orange wellingtons, I'm aware of my arms flailing around trying to grab at the undergrowth to stop me falling.* I come to a stop shouting in pain, with Nick shouting back if I'm OK. I had banged myself about a bit and cut my wrist and acquired my first Devil Club thorns of the trip but nothing to bad, just a dented ego. We eventually reached the top of the knife ridge that we were aiming for. It was down to Dave he had done some research and he believed that there was a limestone sink on top of the mountain, it was going to be fun finding it as the fog had now come down, so I took a GPS reading and away we went in search. After quite some time hiking we came to the conclusion that Dave's research was CRAP the mountain was bloody granite and not one square foot of limestone (this I confirmed at a later date when myself and Rob did some research in Hoonah and got to see a geological map of the area). We decide to make our way back to our truck, I take another GPS reading and try to plot a course back, *but the GPS did not want to play, we pulled out the compass and tried that but we were not sure of our exact location.* So a lesson is learned never just rely on a GPS. Dave picks a route out and away we go, things start to get a little steep on the way down, we hit a very large slope covered in small leaf growth, as Rob starts to cross the slope he is on gives way. Rob is now sliding down the slope head first at one hell of a speed and getting faster, myself and Nick stand open mouthed unable to shout, he is sliding towards a 500 foot vertical drop and things were not looking good. He manages to spin around so he is facing up slope, dig his hands and feet into the loose soil and grind to a halt near the drop. Rob was pretty shaken up after his 200 foot slide, and I must admit my nerves had now gone and every step I placed was checked more than once.

We arrive at a river at the bottom of the mountain and follow it out, as we do so we hit a marble band and come across a few small caves, which kind of makes us happy. The river then starts to cut down a large gorge and we need to cross it, the only way is a large log that Nick spotted spanning the gorge which at this point was around 100 foot deep, O god I was so happy to be crossing that slippery log with branches sticking out every where that we had to negotiate, after the day we had! We arrived at the road at around 7.00pm and after some working out on the map we all came to the same conclusion we had come down the wrong side of the mountain! This was a little bit of a problem, we did not have enough daylight left to cross the mountain, and we could not afford to sleep in the open due to the bear problem, also the temperature drops quite a lot at night and we were not equipped for an open air sleep. Dave comes up with another solution, one of his friends Steve Lewis lives around 13 miles down the logging road in a small area known as Tenakee. Steve was away but there was a boat at his house that we could use to get back to the other side of the Island. We start the walk but my feet are in a bad way and the walk is slow, my sore feet were due to hiking over a mountain in wellingtons, the only attire that is suitable for the Alaskan bush. We arrive at Steve's at 1.00am and get a few hours sleep in his half built house. Come sunrise we are all worse for wear due to the cold night and having to sleep in only what we had. After a boat Ride we arrived at Freshwater Bay at around 10.00am.

### Meeting Larry

To cut a long story short Larry had a float house anchored in-between 2 islands in Freshwater Bay, we had met him a few days before but did not get to speak to him much, however whilst Nick and I slept Rob found out that Larry had a boat and after exchanging stories of chopping down trees ( they are both loggers and knew the same people). Larry offered to take us over to Trap Bay, the location of solstice. However he could not take us until the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, at least we knew we were now going to get there if only for a short time and with a 3 man team, as Dave had now left Chich. Rob and myself also called to the District Rangers office in Hoona and met with the head of leisure for the forest service, Geno Sesinero who was very helpful I managed to get to look at a geological survey of the area and found out that the mountain that we had gone up was made of granite. We cursed Dave for the next week wondering why he did not get this inf. whilst he was on his recon. Geno also offered to take us to some areas with high cave potential, and as we could not get over to Solstice yet we took him up on the offer, but not today. The rest was to be spent nursing blisters and getting very drunk

### 16<sup>th</sup> July 1998

We took an hours drive around the island to a limestone area known as Hill Cove, as when we sailed past the other day we thought it had good potential for lateral caves. After a short hike through a clear cut, on what was a gloriously sunny day, we arrived on a cobbled beach. Looking across a 5 mile stretch of Tenakee Inlet we were greeted by the sight of the infamous Trap Mountain, a mountain we were informed that carried native superstition, it is deemed very bad luck to point at the mountain and utter its name. So with the way our luck was running we made sure that we did not do it. We spent a good few hours walking the stunning coast line and came across some

beautiful karst features and very small sea eroded caves but nothing worth breaking out the surveying equipment for. So we just sat on the beach for a while and looked longingly at Trap Mountain.

### **17<sup>th</sup> July 1998**

For the first time on our trip we packed rope and full caving gear and away we went, we were off to a cave that Geno had spoken about, set high above Hoona just off an old logging road. The cave was next to a muskeg and was taking water, from past experience myself and Rob are expecting quite a good cave, as the majority of large cave systems in south east Alaska are usually found near a muskeg area, this is due to the high acidity in the water run off from the muskeg.

We manage to locate the road which leads to the cave, which is situated just above the local city dump. Unfortunately we are greeted by massive boulder blocking of the road.

The area where we were entering belonged to the native Indians and they are not happy about people trespassing on their land. So if we were caught it would be down to me and Nick to act like stupid tourist that didn't have a clue.

The day was looking the way it should for the south east, lots of black clouds, so we knew we were in for some rain, but hey what the hell to day we were going caving, or so we thought. After a long walk up a crap logging road and the clouds opening up and hours of searching muskeg area of which there was a bloody lot and due to yet again the very heavy under growth we were unable to locate the entrance to the cave.

So we left the area and returned to camp, broke out the fishing rods and went and caught some trout for tea!

### **18<sup>th</sup> July 1998**

Today we had arranged to meet with Geno, who was taking us to an area known as Sonyakay Ridge, a massive limestone area that had only been walked by a geologist from the forest service, he reported of sinks and resurgences in the area. Geno had spoken of a large land slip that had opened up a large hole in the side of the ridge, so this was the main objective for the day. After an hours drive from Hoona we arrive at Sonyakay just above Wukluklook Creek, straight away we see 3 holes in the side of the ridge one was extremely large, however we had to negotiate a clear cut on a steep slope to get to the largest entrance and what looked like a very unstable boulder slope. Nick, Rob and Geno head straight to the large opening whilst I headed to the smaller 2, these after investigation turned out to be very large frost pockets. I headed over to meet with the others. The area where the others were looking was a large limestone face, and the hole was some 40 feet up a vertical face. Nick leads a climb with Rob as the belay man, whilst myself and Geno wander about. I find a small entrance under some very large boulders and manage to dig my way in a full body length till I can hear water trickling in the background, but the only way to progress would be to blow up some very large boulders blocking the way. Nick and Rob climb, even though only short was hard, due to the unstable area and all the moss on the wall. As Nick got to the hole he was greeted by the sight of a very large frost pocket and what gave it the illusion of it being a cave was the depth of the pocket. Yet another day gone and no caves found we are beginning to think the cave trip is cursed.

### Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1998

Now armed with an exact location of the cave above the city dump, myself and Nick head off. First of all we need to get some fuel from Hoona we have just enough to travel the 30 mile trip from camp to the town. Upon our arrival at town we are greeted by a closed petrol station, a sign on the pump saying no fuel on Sundays. More bad luck, now we are stranded in Hoona and Rob thinks we have gone caving and when we don't return he has no way of getting to us. Walking 30 miles at night down a bear infested track is not advisable. Now also we do not have enough fuel to go caving, it is seeming more unlikely by the day that we will get under ground. We call Geno's however he has gone fishing for the day so we leave a note on his door asking him to meet us at the local bar. At 8.30pm Geno came to the rescue and sold us 10 gallons of fuel for the truck, which came from the forest service compound. He also gave us one bloody great King crab which would feed all 3 of us.

### 20<sup>th</sup> July 1998

I am awoken at 8.00am by Rob shouting his head off, I take no notice and put it down to a moment of overwhelming joy as tomorrow we are off to Solstice cave, compliments of Larry and the plan is to leave at around 7.00am so today is camp breaking day. I slide out of my now smelly sleeping bag at 8.30, as I stand outside my tent to greet the morning and I greet more than I really wish to, 15 feet away is a grizzly just strolling past. I shout at it as loud as possible, I get a look off it that says, O yeah want a go, and it just carries on walking. The last thing we need is a grizzly around camp so we dive in the truck and drive at it to give it a fright and that does the trick.



**Photograph on the opposite page: setting up camp in Freshwater Bay, note the 6 spools of Pigeon Mountain Inc. rope (PMI). Some 6000 feet supplied by a grant from Intermountain Outfitters**

**21<sup>st</sup> July 1998**

As we wake early we are greeted by a very overcast day, we break down our tents and pack them away and transport all the equipment down to the landing dock, to await the arrival of Larry. With in a short period of time the weather starts to turn bad, the wind is starting to pick up and this is a bad sign for we are in a very sheltered area. With the wind blowing strong we now know that today we will not be able to go to Trap Bay, as we will have to travel through a stretch of water known as Chatham Straight.

The straight is around 100 miles long of open water and is a very dangerous stretch, only last week Larry was at a funeral of 3 native fisherman who lost their lives in the area and their bodies were never recovered. The wind blows hard through the straight and makes very high swells capable of tipping a boat over. The most dangerous place was East Point, a spit of land that we would have to negotiate. Larry arrives and tells us that it's a no go day and then slips into a story about when one winter he and a friend were caught out by bad winds around East point, they managed to get to shore and find a small cave in which to take shelter. He went on to say that the weather was so cold that his socks froze solid and they had to sit that close to a fire that his friends jacket melted on the back and he still felt cold. This they endured for 3 days before the weather broke. It takes a hardy man/woman to live in Alaska.

The rain starts to come, our spirits are now starting to break and Solstice Cave appears to get further away every day. So we head off to Hoonah to hit a pub, we may not have done much caving so far, but my god we have drunk one hell of a lot of alcohol.

We arrive back at camp late at night, but our tents are all packed away. I take a quick visit to a forest service cabin that is all locked up, It is fully equipped with beds, showers, Kitchen and living room. It is still raining and the inside of the cabin is calling, I recall all the tacky USA cops and robber programs I watched back home, so I break out a credit card, and would you believe it the shit works, the door pops open straight away, so at least we will sleep in a dry bed tonight. It is classed as a federal offence to break into a forest service hut it carries a \$100'000 fine and a prison sentence but we are miles from anywhere with nobody around, so to be frank we don't give a shit. Larry told us that around a month ago persons unknown used the hut for target practice and the day after the FBI were crawling all over the place.

**22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998**

We awake at 6.30pm and meet with Larry not long after and away we go to Trap Bay. We arrive at Trap Bay at low tide so we have to hump all the gear up the beach which is not much fun. Then off we go in hunt for a cabin that Eron told us about. After a short search we come across a cabin that used to be used by the Forest Service Laboratory (FSL), when they were doing fish and wild life surveys. The cabin was now kept in a good state of repair by Nick and Molly Smith who are part of the small group of people that did not want us in the area. They wished to keep the cave secret, at present only around 5 people had been in the cave. We also believe that it is down to Molly that the American cavers dropped out. It would take many pages to explain why

But one reason is Nick is a director on the TCP, and all the cavers are TCP participants, also they all live in Alaska and the last thing they would want is a 40 year old tree huggin proto yuppie in tie dye jeans writing letters an causing a general stink because they were coming to her beloved area. Nick and Molly live in Tenakee Springs a weird area that would fit into any X files saga. After talking to many people we have come to the conclusion that nobody likes the people from Tenakee Springs as they are activists against logging, this is not a very good thing to be when you live near a logging community. Molly has a way of kicking up political storms and winning them her way, this I was to find out in a few days time.

Rob and I later spoke to one of the scientists that had used the cabin, he said Molly had no right to the cabin and that it was not a problem that we used it, as long as it was left as we found it.

After humping our equipment to the cabin we then went in search of Solstice. The first part of the hike was on very good track with lots of small log bridges going over numerous side streams. We kept the river to our left and followed it, although most of the time we could only hear the stream due to the thick under-growth. It did not take long before we ran out of track and we hit solid under growth definitely the worst we had come across, navigating became hard. We hit the usual devils club but this time in abundance, to make thing worse, the muskegs were very deep and massive fallen spruce trees forced us to take many diversions. After just short of 2 hours walk in humid conditions we feel a surge of very cold air, we turn a corner and are greeted by a massive marble cliff face, before we get there we know that the river is resurging at the face.

We then see the main entrance, a massive draft is emitting from the cave resurgence, a sure sign of a big system



**Photograph pervious page: Larry, Rob and myself in Larry's skiff, our equipment was loaded into this and pulled by a larger boat that can be seen in the background.**

Some 50 feet up and to the left of the wet entrance appeared to be a dry entrance, I went to investigate it and was met by the same strength of draft. The dry entrance was tight and would require a dig to gain entry, we would have to do the dig as we only had one dry suit, so all of us entering by the wet entrance was not an option. With our spirits high we made our way back to the cabin trying to find a better route back, no such luck, but at that time we did not care.

As we have a drink to our change of luck, Nick ( Molly's Husband) and Steve Lewis burst through the cabin door "OK the party's over", shouts Steve "it's time to leave".

A discussion takes place and bloody feeble argument as to why we should not be there, also we could not have any data on the cave in any way shape or form. Steve Lewis had before the expedition started given us some likely areas to look at on the other side of the island. It now clicks with our group that the info that Lewis had given us about the other side of the island was a bloody big bum steer, he was hoping we would find a cave on the other side of the island and leave Solstice well alone. This is now turning into an X Files saga, why did they not want us there? They then go onto tell us that they have fully surveyed the cave and the whole of the mountain. I ask Lewis some questions and he looks at Nick like he is his puppet master and can not answer without him throwing his voice, Nick tends to answer all cave questions, even when not aimed at him. We are now in the bad book for taking Lewis's boat, we know that if we had used it to go anywhere but trap bay he would not have said a thing. We give him a 700 foot reel of rope as a good will gesture and they leave the area. ( Lewis is now trying to discredit our group by saying we had stolen his boat, even though Dave informed him we had it and that payment would be made for it).

Rob spirit is now broken and he does not wish to even go caving, in fact if we were not stranded here for another 5 days Rob would make his way home. I come to a conclusion, 'fuck em', I'm going caving and I going to tell the bloody world the exact location of the cave. After all anybody that can get to the area and get into the cave deserves to go in it, but for now I'll just get drunk.

### **23<sup>rd</sup> July 1998**

Nick and myself get our caving gear together and set off on our way. Rob does not wish to come. On our way I wonder if Rob can swim 5 miles across Tenakee Inlet with all his equipment, if he could he would. He has totally lost it now, Rob has put around £5000 into the expedition so far, Running around the States for equipment shipping his truck up, the cost soon adds up. Myself and Nicks cost are also running high, but that today is set far back in our minds, we are finally going to get underground.

Our trek from the cabin is still quite hard, we have trouble finding the second half of the path that we bush waked the previous day. The day is hot and we are in full waterproof gear to keep out the dreaded devils club thorns. We change into our caving gear with haste, Nick adorns fleece under suit, dry suit and over suit. He will be entering the cave system via the active entrance, I will attempt to dig into the entrance that is higher up, mainly due to the fact that we only have one dry suit, and with the water being so cold, I would like to keep certain parts of my anatomy from freezing off.

Even though the entrance that Nick is to enter looks large, it is a flat out crawl, much fun in fast flowing freezing cold water. As soon as Nick is gone I head off and start the dig, after only 5 minutes digging I break through. I head into the cave head first and the entrance soon drops away in a downwards sloping trend and it looks tight. Due to being on my own I decide to come out and then start in feet first just in case it gets too tight to pass, I figure it would be hard trying to push myself up hill, as the marble is very slippy. It takes me a few minutes to find a route through the entrance, but I hit standing passage. I now have a choice, I am in a passage that to my right slopes down towards the river, and the other way heads off up hill.

As Nick is already in the River passage I head off up hill, I soon become aware that in major flood the passage I am in is the over flow passage, there are very large swirl pools, some that are at least 15 feet deep and 3 or 4 in a row. I am also greeted by large wind erratic stalactites, many shaped like large sabres and pure white. These are the first speleothems that I have ever seen in Alaska. There are many side passages that are running off, in these are thousands of soda straws, you can tell that they are virgin passage as there are very few broken, these I leave alone not wishing to damage them. The further I go the more the caves shows me, stalactites with cave corral on the leeward side. Moon milk covering large areas, this is a type of fungus living on the rock. As I hit some side passages the dull thundering roar of the river can be heard cutting it's way through this magnificent cave system, and the wind, "my god" I say to my self this is a bloody massive cave. I now know that I am standing near the bottom of the deepest cave system in the America. After some time on my own I head out of the cave, even though I just wish to push on as far as I can. I meet up with Nick outside, he describes a cave of blue, grey and green swirling marble. I tell him of the speleothems where I had been and we head off back to see them. We are both suitably impressed, but with time flying by it is time to head back to camp. We hike back most of the way in the river, even this proves hard due to the massive trees that have been blown down across them, and also a bit more dangerous as the sound of the water covers our noise as we progress, therefore any bears that my be close by might not hear us coming. Stumbling into a bear and surprising it is when most of the bear attacks take place, so we keep an extra eye out.

When we arrive back at the cabin we retell our story to Rob, there is a slight twinkle in his eye, but it takes nearly all of the 24<sup>th</sup> (which we take as a day off due to the weather) to get him to join us on our next trip.

We had also planned to make a trip into the alpine to locate the upper entrance to Solstice, but due to low cloud cover on the mountain, this was out of the question.

### **25<sup>th</sup> July 1998**

We all head of to Solstice Cave, but Rob is still not in a very good mood, at least we find our path to the cave this time. We all kit up and the plan is to go in the dry entrance. Rob has some major problems getting his lights to work, but we soon solve the problem and away we go. The idea for today's trip is to survey as we go, no scooping at all, well maybe a little bit. We decide to do the American way of surveying so Rob takes the note book and brings up the rear, I take lead and Nick on instruments. The Yanks have a strange way of doing surveys, they actually draw their sketches to scale as they go so it makes it a long drawn out process, and I knew today's would be a cold trip due to the slow pace. The main reason for our decision is Rob was going to do the final drawing for the cave.

Picture opposite page, Nick entering the resurgence of Solstice Cave. The water comes from a snow field high in the alpine, this makes the water a lovely 4 degrees along with the high wind it makes for cold caving.

Below, Nick in the fossilised passage. This is the first wind erratic speleothem, only a short distance inside the entrance.



We headed further into the cave than during my trip, coming across many more large swirl pools, some which were fun to get around as they had vertical walls on both sides and they were around 15 feet deep and full of very cold water. We follow the draft as far as we can until we hit the top of a pitch, our survey grinds to a halt. The wind is coming up the pitch and rolling down the cave towards the exit, this is something we did not expect. The Pitch is some 40 feet deep in all, and during peak snow melt, water off the snow flows up the pitch and down the fossilised passage, the scalloping on the walls and roof are massive and there is signs of flood debris on the walls. Nick free climbs down the pitch as far as possible till he hits a vertical wall. We search the area in hope of finding a way to bypass the pitch but come up empty handed.

We make our way out and as we do we see another side passage, we head off down this, not surveying. We come across a small chamber that is filled with stalactites and stalagmites and many more types of speleothems, there is also a lot of sight of peat seeping down some of the walls from high in an aven, this probably leads to the surface. The cold is now starting to take its toll so we make our way out, as we come across the largest swirl poll which has vertical walls, I start to climb round. I start to slip off the wall due to the lack of hand holds, and not having long enough legs to reach good foot holds, a sudden wave of hysterical laughter takes hold of me as I start to slide towards the water. I manage just to get across without getting wet after I regain my composure. We soon reach the dry exit and Rob heads out, I head on down the passage towards the river. After a short squeeze over sharp flakes myself and Nick arrive at the river. It was, I found as amazing as nick said, the deep parts of the river were a deep



Blue. We followed the river up, we soon came to a traverse, which my little legs could not span. I went through a bedding plane high in the roof and Nick went over the traverse, this split us up and away we went exploring the roaring passage. This part of the cave has many sumps, but above are slots that you are able to squeeze through to bring you out the other side, again some of the small side leads contain many speleothems, I went as far as I thought safe in the active part of the cave, then made my way back to meet up with Nick and then on to join Rob on the outside.

### **26<sup>th</sup> July 1998**

There has been a break in the weather and the top of the mountain is now open to full view. Nick and Rob are today heading up into the alpine to locate the top entrance and any other caves they can, I am taking the day off so as to save my energy for the last days caving tomorrow. At around 10.00pm they arrive back at camp, there last part of the hike was made in total darkness, not something that should be advised in S E Alaska. After a good feed I am told that they found the main entrance to Solstice Cave as well as many other small entrances. Also one very large sink some 100 foot by 100 foot and very deep, however they were unable to get down this, but GPS readings were taken of them. I then told them of a visit that I had from Molly and Nick, and about molly's speech on why we should not be in Trap bay. I was told by her that we were "invading her temple", this totally threw me and I was lost for words. I was also told a few other things that we were, but just as good was given back. They did not wish to engage in any further argument so left the area never to be seen again. As for Rob and Nick, after their long days hike up the majestic mountain sleep soon came upon them both.

On the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> Nick had very sore feet and Rob was pretty out of it, so with no caving partner, I knew that I would not be returning to Solstice, not this year anyway. We had now decided that we would class this trip as a recognisance trip and return another day on a full blown expedition, this time with a team that would not drop out on us! The rest of the day was just spent packing, awaiting Larry to pick us up the following day, we also had a 2 lt bottle of Vodka that we had to polish off, after all it would be less weight to carry to the beach.

Larry returned to us on the 28<sup>th</sup> and all went smoothly. On our return to Hoona we booked in the only motel in the town and then hit the bar after a long shower in warm water. Hoona through out the expedition at times turned out to be our saviour.

The meaning of the origin of the name "Huna" is local Tlingit and means "place where the north wind doesn't blow". It is mainly a logging and fishing village, although the local cannery closed down in 1953. The population for Hoona is 800 people.

On the last day we were also to meet with the local police force and get the FBI involved in a small investigation, it turned out that we had a counterfeiter amongst our group passing over forged \$20 bills, Nick! We went and found the local sheriff, a big man with a big dog, or should I say Timber Wolf. We told him that we were leaving the area the next day, he said, "don't worry if I need you I'll find you! Nothing comes or goes without me knowing, I control this town". We managed to smuggle Nick out on the next plane Nick is now amongst the most wanted 1'000'000'000. People in America. It was then down to me and Rob and we made our way back towards Canada, unfortunately due to the ferry being over booked we were unable to get to Vancouver Island. We had to drive the remaining 1200 miles from Prince Rupert to Seattle, where

By this time I had gone over budget, also it seemed I had nothing but bad luck for most of the trip, I decided to cancel my 3 weeks caving trip in Canada and call it a day. However upon my return to old blighty, phone calls were made to start the ball rolling for the next adventure in Alaska in 1999.

### **Conclusion.**

It would seem that even a few months after my return, our small band of cavers has caused quite a stir, many arguments broke out during the first few weeks after our return from the cavers that wished to keep the cave secret. Now they have turned into proper discussions and we are all involved in the banter, via email, and it seems that we are working things out. The people who found the cave are still keeping the location secret, however if I place my self in their position I can see why they are doing it. The forest service and the local logging companies have no regard for cave systems, and as the tallest trees grow near cave locations, the loggers would love this piece of land. In the long run the cave would be damaged, one only has to see what the logging has done on Heceta Island ( where I spent time caving in 1996/7 ). With this being the most significant cave in the USA at the moment it seems weird that only 9 people have ever been in the cave, 3 not being welcome.

### **Data**

One of the theories why this cave has formed beyond the size of any other cave in Alaska is that the main entrance sat well above the glacial fields in what is known as a noonatak, therefore not being quarried away by the usual glacial erosion, as one tends to find in lower elevated areas. In the lower lying alpine most of the caves have been scoured away or filled in with glacial erratics

The main reason for the large tree growth in the karst areas of Alaska is the colander like Karst lands allow better drainage, and better drained soils tend to support better growth trees. Aerial photos show a sharp change in vegetation along what turn out to be contacts between carbonate and non-carbonate terrain. This is why the logging companies tend to log on karst lands which causes soil run off into the cave, as well as all the slash that gets washed in, causing the cave environment irreparable damage, that's the main reason for keep solstice cave being kept secret.