

A Family Goal Met

by Jim Dawson (o]B-)

A friend showed me a 1993 Arizona Highways magazine featuring a story about S.P which sparked my family's interest. We decided as a family to make it a goal to explore S.P. but first we had to learn how to do it correctly. We joined the CAG to learn how to cave safely, learn about the gear we needed and some rope techniques as well as how to leave little impact on the cave. We scheduled the trip for last year, but when the date arrived, Jerry was out of town so we were unable to obtain the key. The Forestry service only allows one trip of up to six people to enter the cave a month. If a trip is canceled, nobody goes in that month. Over the past year we've had some great caving experiences, but we kept thinking about S.P., so we rescheduled and this time we made it!

We left N. Phoenix at 4:25 am and arrived at the cave area around 8:45. We leisurely gathered our gear together and suited up for the 30 - 40 foot entrance drop. After a short hike, we made it to the cave about 10:30 and we all entered by 11:20. Dave unlocked the lock hidden under the cave gate, pulled the heavy steel gate open and tied it back so it wouldn't accidentally slam shut. I went first.

I attached myself to our rope with my rappel device and sat on a ledge inside the entrance of the cave just below the gate. I felt moist air pass me but I couldn't smell the normal musty cave smell I am familiar with. Nervousness set in as I couldn't see past my feet not to mention to the bottom. I didn't know what was waiting for me below, a tight crevice to wedge myself into, or perhaps the jaws of a big monster?

I checked all the connections and safety devices of my gear then took up the slack in the rope and headed down into the unknown. After scooting around obstructions, the drop widened into a room and by the time I could look around I was almost at the bottom. Hardly worth all the worry, I felt relieved I hadn't been eaten.

I waited for everyone else to rappel down and join me.

We proceeded into the cave through a series of crevices, crawls, and squeezes, moving carefully until we came to a flagged trail. Our instructions were to stay within the trail limitations and not to touch anything outside the flagging tape for any reason.

We started seeing formations everywhere. It was like watching an adventure movie that had

excitement from the beginning to the end or fireworks on the Fourth of July. One formation after another, everywhere you look is a different one just as awe inspiring as the one before it. The formations were more beautiful than I had ever possibly imagined. Some of the formations included high shields, massive flowstone, draperies, stalactites, stalagmites, cave carrots, patches of helictites and soda straws plus things I'd never seen before. Doug pointed out a formation that looked like an exotic pole dancer with a rabbit head.

Oh well.

Some of the shields and flowstone were covered with sparkles. We saw cave bacon all over from the very small to massive intricate structures.

We went into the mud room. The mud was dried out and cracked and looked like 3 inch high chocolate pudding squares the size of your hand with powder sugar sprinkled on top. One area of the mud had a top crust forming on it possibly an early stage of flowstone and maybe eventually a stalagmite. We geared up and started our ascent up the rope one by one. We exited the cave about 2:40 and headed home about 3:30 p.m.

I felt really honored to be one of the few to see the majestic beauty of S.P.

I now fully understand why protecting caves is such an important job.

I've seen Peppersauce, a well known cave that has been open and unregulated for well over 30 years and the destruction done by the public just because it is an unsupervised cave. Inside you will find trash, including toxic waste, what seems to be a bazillion miles of string, graffiti and nasty things I'd rather not mention. None of which belong inside a cave. If that wasn't enough, locations of missing formations are everywhere. Peppersauce is now a trashed and destroyed cave but if visitors could simply look and enjoy instead of trash and mutilate, it would be a much better place to visit for future generations to come.

Education is very important!

People need to know that everything brought inside caves needs to be taken back out and flashlights should be used for light instead of candles. Candles produce smoke that remains in the cave forever because there isn't any air flow to blow it out.

We have a Peppersauce Cleanup Project underway to remove trash and graffiti.

I wish to thank Dave so much for being a very large part of making this goal a reality for our family.

I'd also like to thank the CAG for teaching us so much about cave conservation and more. It was well worth all the effort we put into it.

Now we need a new cave goal.











