

CAN YOU REMEMBER WHEN . . .
A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON SIMMER

Bonnie Creed, Reporter
Grayson Harding, Coordinator

RECORDS AND HISTORY DIVISION
SIMMONS-MINGO EXPEDITION

OCTOBER 5, 6, 7, 8, 1973

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1973

The day began with bells, bugels [sic] and bursts of rain, Bob Lutz sounded a bell at 7:01 A.M. A bed-checking and awakening system was not yet set up so that the Expedition was set in motion with various forms of coercion as well as everyone's general excitement and dedication. By 9:00 all were up, fed (on their own recognizance) and commencing work on their set-ups. Word has spread of the HQ Tent disappointment (which later turned out to be better than originally designed -- an example of how adaptations can often produce more desirable results). Bill Miller had been unable at the last minute to procure the Army tents he had been promised and the proposed tent would now be smaller. It certainly proved more interesting. The area soon resembled a house raising. Wood framing was cut and nailed over which clear polyethylene film stretched. The guyed frame measured 30' x 18' with a partition down the middle. The mess tent which was erected later had the same dimensions except that it was self supporting. To take the overflow of departments needing a set-up on the HQ facility, a Ryder rental truck (which brought materials and equipment) was used to house the personnel and operations departments. This adaptation proved beneficial in keeping traffic flow away from the two departments which required the most on-the-spot communication and coordination. It also tended to isolate from the surface crew what was actually going on inside the cave, it later developed.

The water system was the first facility to be functional. Consisting of about 800 feet of hose which went up the hollow to a spring, it ran into a holding tank, 55-gallon capacity, and on to the water heater, a unit built by Lutz resembling a still. The original water source selected had been a spring running up a hill on an adjoining neighbors' property. When an advance party (Logan & Lutz) scouted the area Thursday to select sites, it was decided to use the stream on the Simmons' property, taking into consideration minor disagreements between Simmons and his neighbor, the minimal amount of water available at that source, and the distance (1500 feet). The original site had been inspected and measured previously in September, but the exact location of the water supply was decided upon at the Expedition.

There was not an excess of personnel but all pitched in according to inclination and skills. The few children around were sent running by calls for duct tape, nails and other miscellaneous materials. In addition, they rolled logs down the hill for firewood to heat the water. About five persons were available for set-up work Thursday night and about 10 more came in Friday morning.

Sporadic sprinkles produced mud puddles in the road and a crew was detached to fill them under the direction of John Reich.

Conscientious Lanny Lehto, supposedly ridden with guilt feelings for sleeping late, attacked the job of latrine digging. This job turned out to be one of the most lengthly [sic] as hard soil and rock were struck below 6 inches. The pits were to be one foot wide and about three feet deep. Carol Logan had helped her husband with the water system and crewed the latrine digging the length of the operation. The latrine seat construction was headed by Gil Ediger and his wife, Jill, later that afternoon. By 4:00 the construction was completed and facility became operational. Partitions were ponchoes [sic] attached to poles (found on location). One unit used clear plastic with a trash liner overlay for privacy. Light materials were necessary as the poles were not sturdy enough for tarps.

Communications had steadily been progressing since morning. Gene Harrison strung a line from HQ to the Simmons' gate for traffic control. A telephone could now be used by incoming cars. This released a person from having to man that station, as would occur if CB radios were used as originally discussed. A CB unit was also installed for backup. While Harrison and helper Glen Davis were occupied all morning with the task, Bruce Patterson set up the switchboard, connected and strung 6-pair wire from the cave to the switchboard (located in HQ tent). Twelve wires were suspended out of harm's way on three poles procured locally.

Euclid Coukouma set up photographic coverage and worked on the PA system which was located on top of the Ryder rental truck.

Gil Ediger arrived with all the food, which was unloaded. At this point, the mess tent was the only partially completed structure. The mess tent took longer to finish as people were diverted to other tasks leaving only three persons working on it. Steve Logan, working alone, began the lighting system.

Work slowed around noon as people took breaks for lunch. Status at 1:30: PA system in operation, Lights in HQ tent, Roof on mess tent, Personnel moving into Truck, and Tables set up in HQ tent. There were some minor discussions over who got what tables, and a shortage continued throughout the expedition, but enough were available.

Traffic control in operation. Incoming cars called at the Simmons' gate to the switchboard for clearance before coming up the road, as it was too narrow for two vehicles to pass. There were very few afternoon arrivals and work continued with personnel on hand.

The weather cleared by noon and at mid-afternoon it was pleasantly warm with a perfectly clear sky. Patches of color on the hillsides became noticeable -- just enough trees had turned to give a "fallish" feeling. The warmth of the day was no warning for the unexpected frost of that evening -- and the cold weather from Friday night brought out even more yellows and reds and browns on the hillside.

3:00 - A call went out for all underground supplies to be delivered to HQ tent for packing. Gene Montgomery was in charge. Due to the transparency of the HQ tent, which was unanticipated, a separate ID photo tent was pitched beside the HQ tent and rather in the way of passing traffic to the Truck. Kitchen stoves arrived as Brenda Miller drove in with their truck. The kitchen then began to take viable form. A doctor arrived and sat around watching all operations.

Communications placed four additional lines in the truck. The phone at the entrance of the cave and at the sign in rock were yet to be installed. Stan Carts was finally persuaded to get some rest as he would be on the first team in the cave.

Registration began about 4:30. Organization was lacking in the set-up and more personnel than designated were needed to man the table. There were so many tasks for registrants that confusion was unavoidable. Finally signs were made with 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. directions. By 5:40, 32 people had registered (this included those already on site and those arriving Friday, although not everyone who was available Friday registered by that time).

Dinner started later than planned due to a malfunctioning oven. Menu: spaghetti, green beans, french bread (homemade by Brenda Miller and daughter Karen), gingerbread and sauch [sic], coffee and grape drink. At 6:35 dinner was ready for the underground people, and the children were served next.

(To be continued)

This article is from the December 1974 issue (Volume XVII, No. 12) of The Potomac Caver (pp. 107, 109, 110 & 111). The Potomac Caver is the monthly publication of the Potomac Speleological Club. All rights reserved.