

BUT WHY AN EXPEDITION ?

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PSC 227

As many of you already know, we are well into the planning stages of the Simmons-Mingo Cave Expedition (Project SIMMER). Yet the doubt lingers. Is a full scale expedition required for such a small cave? I would like to share some of my thoughts on this with you.

About a year ago, I was convinced that an expedition to finish the exploration was ridiculous. I was further convinced that repeated trips by a small group of well conditioned, fairly expert cavers could finish the job. I still believe this is true. However, the fact is that neither the repeated trips, nor the small group of well conditioned, fairly expert and *dedicated* cavers seem to be forthcoming. In the meantime, the uncompleted map and that unplumbed drop at the end of the exploration hang over our heads as another uncompleted task. Mention a push trip to Simmons at a club meeting and listen to the response. Try to get Thrun, Williams, Sanford, and Reich together at the same time, in the same place, and in good condition. *Forget it!* Certainly there are other expert cavers in good condition in the club but repeated efforts over the past year and a half have produced no serious push trip. So, do we just keep waiting until some other group finishes it off for us?

Some of us did try to reach the drop last year, but I "pooped out" before we got there. This brings up my second point. For any caver to go back to the drop and out again is cutting the safety margin rather thin. To do the drop and explore beyond on one trip is "Super Caver Stuff" and violates all safety standards, including common sense. Only one who has been all the way back can appreciate what it would be like coming out with even a slight sprain!

So what about a small group sleeping in? We did that last time, Thanksgiving 1971, remember? Think of hauling, hoisting, pulling, pushing, and wrestling food, sleeping bag, rope and personal gear from 10 to 12 hours, sleeping in a strange environment, working for awhile, then sleeping so you will have strength enough to get your gear out again. How many productive manhours will you get and at what price. This is clearly well beyond the point of diminishing returns. I have to conclude that the deep exploration and mapping parties require support for any extended period in the cave to make their efforts worthwhile.

So, where do we stand? In theory, the project could be completed without an expedition. In fact, it will not -- at least not by the PSC.

In addition to the possible completion of the Simmons project, an expedition offers other attractive features. First of all, it will be a valuable learning experience for everyone involved. It is an exercise in planning and execution that is applicable to any walk of life from a military operation to a church picnic. Secondly, we stand a good chance of finding out why this type of thing isn't done more often. Next, there is a good chance that some experts in speleology will be attracted who would not otherwise have an opportunity to share their expertise with us. And last, but not least, and ultimately more important, the planning and execution of the

expedition will afford an opportunity for all club members to be involved. It will give a chance for a person who may never see the inside of the cave to vicariously share in the experience of the deep exploration party for he or she will be in part responsible for their well being.

Although many of us cavers are anarchists at heart, we can organize for a purpose. I think the expedition is well worth the small concession to order.

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