[Field Test–Olympus E-300 Evolt]

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Contents

Volume 30, Number 4 July 2005 http://www.photolife.com

Regular Features

Editorial 6

News 8

Your View 12

Showtime 30

Students' Corner 54

The Contact Sheet 79

Looking Back 82

Gallery

Profile: An Interview with Writer/Photographer Anne Bayin

During her extensive broadcasting career, Anne Bayin has produced some of Canadas major network radio and television current affairs programs with hosts Peter Gzowski, Barbara Frum, and Pamela Wallin. In 1999, she left broadcasting for a freelance career in writing and photography 14

Readers' Gallery: Raphael Shevelev 32

Readers' Gallery: Bill Young 80

Feature Articles

My Favourite Photo Spots in Nova Scotia, by Stephen Patterson

I have picked several locations that I frequent on a regular basis because I know that they offer a rich supply of interesting photo opportunities. Most of those locations are well visited throughout the year by travellers from other parts of the country and elsewhere, and whenever I return for a visit myself, I see why they are so popular with tourists 22

Photographing Utah's Caves, by Brandon Kowallis

The clear, polished ice absorbed our light, and in some places, we could see several feet through the transparent floor to the rocks below. I walked with caution over the 50 x 50 foot ice field. One careless step, and I would end up sliding down a 12-foot hole onto large blocks of ice and rock. Sixty feet above, huge icicles clung to the ceiling, threatening to fall and put an end to our adventure. Beneath these giants, large ice stalagmites had accumulated, some of them standing as high as 15 feet 34

Kids Being Kids, by André Gallant

Photographing children can be very rewarding. Patience and imagination will help you capture precious moments. Rather than posing them, try to capture their spirit and exuberance. Be prepared for the unexpected, and embrace it. Get down to their level, physically and mentally. If you act silly with them, they'll play along. If the resulting photographs bring a smile to your face, chances are you've succeeded in capturing kids being kids 45

Six Hours with Soggy Feet, by Wayne Lynch

The Fakahatchee is renowned for its endangered Florida panthers and black bears, as well as its bobcats, otters, opossums, and hundreds of birds, snakes, lizards, and frogs that live there. Plenty to occupy and fascinate a camera-toting critter junkie like me 50

Expecting the Unexpected: A Key to Successful Wildlife and Avian Photography, by Scott Leslie

As wildlife photographers, we must learn as much as possible about the subjects that we photograph. This knowledge enables us to know where to focus our attention while photographing. Knowing the behaviour, habitats, and daily cycles of wildlife tunes us in to their lives, and enables us to guess (but only guess) what they'll do next 56

Alberta Book Excerpt, by Daryl Benson

Art can be found in many human activities. A baker, a factory worker, an athlete, a boat builder, a sculptor, an electronics engineer, a social worker—all can be engaged in the process of investing their time to create something. The something can be a physical object, a thought, or an impression left on someone else's life, but the point is that it involved the expenditure of someone's time 62

Equipment

Field Test Report—Olympus E-300 Evolt, by Peter K. Burian

An affordable, full-featured, and fast 8-MP digital SLR camera 70

Imaging Products Review, by Peter K. Burian 74

Digital Domain

Modifying Shape & Perspective in Photoshop, by Val Brinkerhoff

I've found myself using my view camera less often for basic architecture because the controls in Photoshop are so fast, intuitive, and effective. For these same reasons, I'm also generally tempted to change imperfections in faces. That's when taste, judgment, and ethics have to kick in. But used with skill, vision, and thought, these two digital shaping tools can provide great control and precision for the right images, plus a lot of fun while doing so 66

Pixels in Time, by Quinton Gordon

Digital photography has made picture-taking easier and certainly more prolific over the past few years, but the technology has not yet fully developed a tool as convenient and dependable as the simple photo album—or even the shoebox—for retaining our memories. It takes considerable time, effort, and technology for the home-computer user to extract good-quality, lasting prints. All too often, we just hit the delete button 72

PHOTOGRAPHING UTAH'S CAVES

BY BRANDON KOWALLIS

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Tim Barnhart travels along the perimeter of the cave.

Our lights pierced through the darkness, but revealed nothing; then, the large obscure passage devoured the light, so that all we could see was the floor beneath our feet. Despite the seeming loss of one of our senses, we headed down the passage, hoping that our eyes would eventually adjust to the absorbent nature of the lava tube. The floor was wet and muddy. In some places, we would sink in up to our knees, filling our boots with 40°F water. The daunting nature of this large subway-like passage distracted us from the frigid environment. As our eyes began to adjust, and the massive hallway came into view, I wondered if we should stop and set up now, or continue in the hope that something even more photogenic would manifest itself later on. We flipped the proverbial coin and opted to press onward.

A few thousand feet of following small rapids and miniature waterfalls led us to a restriction in the passage. According to our map, we were about halfway to our destination. We put on our wetsuits and decided that some of our gear would have to stay behind. I took only the essentials: a homemade PVC tube full of flashbulbs, a tripod, two flashpans, a waterproof ammo can to house my 35-mm Nikon N90s film camera and my Canon A60 digital camera, a Promaster flash, and a few spare batteries. Packed and ready, we took turns prostrating ourselves on the ground and sliding forward into the one- to two-foot-high, mud-filled passage.

After 30 minutes of squeezing through several tight, mud and water-filled craws and dancing carefully through more delicate walkways, we emerged into an auditorium-sized passage. We had reached our destination, the 'Tabernacle Room'. By now, I was covered in mud. I carefully removed my gloves in an attempt to keep my hands from getting too dirty and handed a diffused million candlepower flashlight to each of my companions. As they explored the room, I observed the changing light shifting from mood to mood. When something interesting happened, I cried out for my assistants to stop and remember their position. Here is where our adventure would begin.

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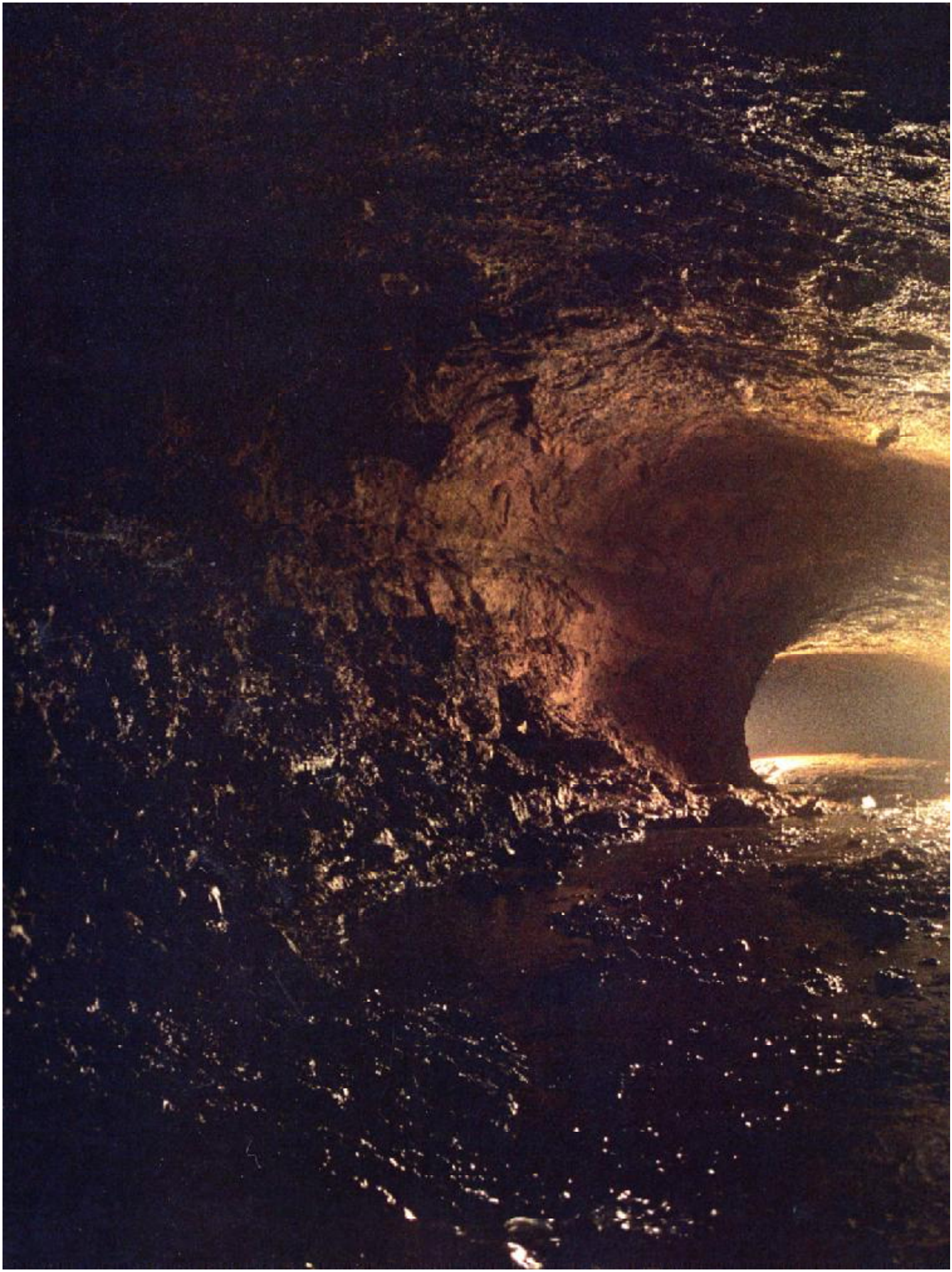
Tim Barnhart admires the symmetry of the lava tube passage.



Jon Jasper stands at the back of the 'Tabernacle Room'. © Bragon Kowallis

When I photograph a cave, I follow a routine that is very similar to a studio or location shoot. We start by finding a fascinating and appropriate location (passage, room) or object (formation). We observe and light it from all possible angles. I say possible because there are certain angles from which the photograph cannot be made without damaging what you are there to protect. There are incredible places where I simply had to walk away from because I could get neither the camera nor the lights into the right position without causing damage. However, when both the lighting and the position work, the photograph is composed, and a Polaroid or digital test is done. I often have my digital set up on a tripod next to my film, simultaneously exposing both so as to not waste exposures. From there, adjustments are made. Tests are redone, and the final shot is recorded on film. Film is ideal for cave photography because they have yet to produce a high-quality (11+ megapixel) digital camera that is lightweight, and won't break the bank when, not if, it is destroyed by the humid, muddy environment of a cave.

A few weeks later, we began another trip into one of Utah's spectacular hidden caves. The descent was one of the most difficult I have ever made. I hadn't thought to tie my 40-pound pack to my harness, and instead wore it on my back. For 350 feet, I fought against gravity as it attempted to pull me upside down. My stomach muscles ached as I fought to hold myself upright. This struggle was augmented by the fact that my rappelling device was having problems maintaining a controllable speed on the wet rope.

Reaching the bottom was a relief, and I entered the large ice-covered room. The slick nature of the ground made standing up difficult. The clear, polished ice absorbed our light, and in some places, we could see several feet through the transparent floor to the rocks below. I walked with caution over the 50 x 50 foot ice field. One careless step, and I would end up sliding down a 12-foot hole onto large blocks of ice and rock. Sixty feet above, huge icicles clung to the ceiling, threatening to fall and put an end to our adventure. Beneath these giants, large ice stalagmites had accumulated, some of them standing as high as 15 feet.

FLASHBULBS PRODUCE AN AMAZING QUALITY AND INTENSITY OF LIGHT FOR CAVE PHOTOGRAPHY. WHEN IGNITED, THEY CAN THROW AN EVEN, WIDE BEAM OF LIGHT THAT CANNOT BE ACHIEVED VIA FLASH. GUIDE NUMBERS CAN REACH UP TO 640 WITH 100-SPEED FILM, MAKING THEM ALMOST AS POWERFUL AS A PORTABLE STUDIO HEAD.

Flashbulbs produce an amazing quality and intensity of light for cave photography. When ignited, they can throw an even, wide beam of light that cannot be achieved via flash. Guide numbers can reach up to 640 with 100-speed film, making them almost as powerful as a portable studio head. The only problem with flashbulbs is that they are very difficult to find and can be relatively expensive. I buy mine on e-Bay, but there are places that still manufacture flashbulbs for scientific photography, if you are willing to spend a lot of money.

The set-up for our next shot was based on an ethereal glow I had noticed as Jon ventured beneath the ice. We set up with two Press 22 flashbulbs. One lit the ground from below, illuminating the ice and highlighting the formations, while the other I set to the side to fill in the detail. We found, with a test, that the one bulb from beneath was sufficient.

The 'Big Room' shot was done looking down into a hole that disappeared under the ice. By now, we were getting cold and our patience was dwindling. We tried a few tests with a number 5 flashbulb, and with a little feathering and a few exposure adjustments, we created the final shot.

We were now ready to begin our ascent out of the cave, but first decided to explore deeper into other passages in order to warm up. For the next 30 minutes, we squeezed through ice, walked through a large trunk passage, and admired a balcony view above

Great ice formations draped from the ceiling above the 'Big Room'.

the 'Big Room'. We opted not to venture into what was said to be one of the more decorated sections of the cave. Our primary reason for being there was to photograph the ice formations, and we had no desire to cause more impact than was necessary.

With our body temperatures now elevated a little, Jon took the lead and began his ascent out of the icy pit, while I went up to shoot a few more pictures of some of the ice formations down the passage we had just explored, using electronic flash. The more I use the electronic flash, the more I appreciate flashbulbs. With flash, the light is often harsh and less even with larger objects and places, and I am almost never able to shoot at the f-stop that I would like unless I pop the flash several times. However, for smaller formations, flash is the way to go. Since lighting contrast is directly related to the distance and size of the source, moving in close with electronic flash provides sufficient intensity and lower contrast.

Back at the rope, Jason was suiting up to begin his ascent. It had been about 20 minutes since Jon had gone up the rope, so we figured that it was safe to load up the next caver and send him climbing. Jason attached himself to the rope, stepped onto the ice slope, and slid onto his belly. The ice was so slick that it was almost impossible to stand up. All he could do was lie there, and try ascending the rope while lying on his side. When he had disappeared into the dark chimney, and rocks and ice had ceased falling, Tim got on and followed his predecessors' steps. After he had begun to make a little more progress, I let go of the rope and sat there reading the register as the sounds of Tim disappeared up the passage. Soon, I was left alone in the silence. I turned my headlamp off and just listened. All around me, water dripped from above. The ice that had accumulated on the floor beneath the drips created chime-like sounds that rang throughout the cave. It was as though I were in the midst of a Tibetan orchestra. Each uniquely shaped formation resonated a distinct

Tim Barnhart emerges from beneath the ice.

© BRANDON HOWALLIS

note. It was as beautiful in the dark as it was in the light, here in this underground icebox. I held the rope in my hand and waited for it to stop vibrating, from its source 350 feet above, signaling me that Tim had made it to the top. Time was as frozen as the room that I lay in, and my thoughts drifted freely, unopposed by any distractions.

After an estimated 20 minutes of waiting and feeling only minor vibrations in the rope, I assumed it was safe to get on the rope and begin my ascent. I freed the rope of any snags, attached my lifeline, and stepped onto the ice. My feet gave out and I found myself on my side, just as the others had experienced. With a 40-pound backpack dangling from a rope attached to my harness, I slowly began climbing. Quickly, I found that small, constant steps yielded less exhaustion. At times, I would stop to rest on the cold, wet ice, absorbing freezing water into my coveralls. Looking down, I imagined what it would be like if the rope or my ascenders were to fail at that very moment. Three hundred feet of total dependence on mechanical equipment gives you plenty of time to think about such things. At times, the rope would creak or jolt as it shifted positions against the rock. The worst case scenario would be falling from the near top and not dying, but sitting in pain in a frozen ice-land, waiting for a rescue party, and realizing that even with their help you're going to be there for at least a couple of days, and you still have to make it up that pit that you just fell in.

As we continue our photographic exploration of Utah's caves, we are made aware of the importance of this work. Crystal Ball Cave, in Utah's West desert, has one of the greatest examples of spar in the world. These crystalline formations, which formed over hundreds of thousands of years as warm waters cooked the earth beneath the state, cover virtually every wall in the cave. Yet despite their beautiful and irreplaceable nature, for the last few years, vandals have shot their way through the gate and broken into this cave to pointlessly damage its walls and formations. There are many caves that have been completely robbed of their treasures. Colonies of bats have been shot at and nearly destroyed. entire walls of formations have been removed, and beautiful colours have been replaced with neon orange and pink obscenities sprayed onto the walls. Local cave clubs and the National Speleological Society continue to fight long and hard to protect these unique environments for future generations. Through images such as these, we are able to show to the world that beneath this wonderful planet on which we live, there is something worth preserving.■

BIO: Brandon Kowallis is a Utah-based cave photographer. He received his Bachelor's of Fine Arts degree from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. For the past few years, he has worked seasonally as a Park Ranger at Timpanogos Cave National Monument and has been involved in cave exploration in both Mexico and the United States. You can visit Brandon's Web site at www.brandonkowallis.com, or e-mail him at Brandon@brandonkowallis.com.

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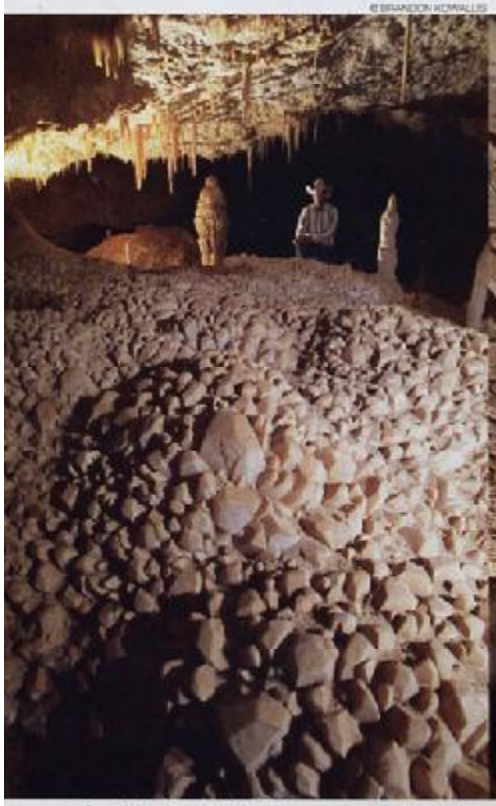

Gerald Bates, the landowner, poses for a shot against this well-decorated section of Crystal Ball Cave.

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Tim Barnhart admires the spar-covered ceiling in Crystal Ball Cave.

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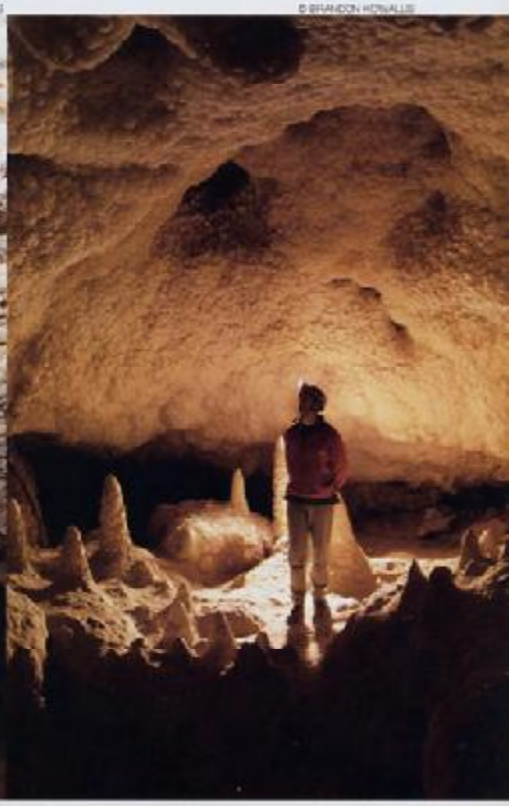

Jon Jasper admires the spar formations that decorate the walls of Crystal Ball Cave.