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FRONT COVER: Sumidero Yochib; clockwise from top right - upper streamway; Bad Dreams crossing; bolt traverse over The Stinger; lower streamway near the sump. Photos by Norm Pace.

BACK COVER: Icefall Brook Gorge, B.C. Photo by Ian Drummond

Caving In The Rockies

A SHAFT ON WARDLE MOUNTAIN

by John Donovan

The rumour: a shaft which stones fall down for four seconds before first bouncing and rattling on. Hearing it at the Cecil one Wednesday night I pricked up my ears. I treated the depth with my usual scepticism, so declined to go on the first trip up to the shaft. The first trip failed to descend the shaft but did manage to get a 500 foot Goldline within 500 feet vertically of the entrance. It also brought Irv back with news that the entrance was twenty feet by thirty feet and that a stone did fall four seconds for a theoretical distance of 260 feet and then rattled down further drops. Knowing that Irv does not exaggerate and can count and has a mathematical mind (being an engineer drop-out), we arranged a trip for the following weekend.

The trip began in the usual disarray and got more confused after three hours in the Cascade Bar. After a good night's sleep we were up early for a good breakfast and several cups of tea. Should we camp close to the shaft or do a quick dash up and down to the bar at Radium? Gary and I decided to camp up there because of lack of finances and to ensure a serious push on the pit. Wes and Irv set off ahead.

did they say

Driving to the take-off point I noticed a black vertical slot in the lower part of the mountain. Through the binoculars it looked to be about twenty feet high and ten feet wide and went back at least twenty feet into pitch darkness.

The walk up to the shaft starts from a disused quarry with an animal trap in it. The walk up to the campsite took several hours, camp being a depression with a pond at 8,000 feet. When we had lunch and set up the tent, Wes realised we were staying the night. (He had left his sleeping bag at the car). We picked up the 500 foot rope, left there the week before, and walked up to the hole. Near the top of a boulder slope, and only 200 feet vertically below the summit, it must be the highest entrance in the Rockies, 9,000 feet.

We decided I should go down for a quick look round. Gary belayed the rope from the pit's lower edge with three pitons and a back-up belay. No gardening was needed, and I was surprised at how firmly fixed the rocks in the boulder slope were. The rope was lowered down and I started the descent at 6 p.m., saying I should only be half an hour. The shaft remained 30 feet by 20 feet for the whole of its depth of 200 feet. The landing was on a slope of snow and ice. Here the passage led off to my left as I faced the rock wall of the descent. The first thing I noticed was light entering the cave lower down. Below the shaft closed down, but I could see an upper and a lower rift. Twenty feet down the snow was the biggest bird's nest I have ever seen. I realised that descending with brake bars was out, and put a rope walker on the rope. I also yelled up to the others to tell them what was happening.

Gary shouted back that I should go all the way down and check for horizontal passages. So I started fighting the tangle. I passed the section

where the rift was split in two by bedrock and off the ice now, came to a short drop. Here the roof opened up and daylight entered from two shafts. This was the light I had seen at the foot of the entrance pitch. I continued down several small drops and slopes, fighting the rope all the way. The rift widened and narrowed in widths of 3 feet to 20 feet. I then came to where I could see an exit 15 feet by 6 feet. I straddled the final drop untying the rope until I could eventually descend.

A magnificent view was the reward for my efforts. Looking out I could see the highway and the picnic ground we stayed at first night. Below was a sheer face, of 1000 feet to a bench, then the mountain dropping steeply away again.

I made sure the rope would not tangle and started back out. On top the sun had sunk and the lads were cold but had had the pleasure of watching a beautiful sunset. We decided to derig and head back to camp, arriving there to darkness and brew already started by Wes.

Wes had an uncomfortable night, but survived with all our spare clothes on. The descent next day was torture on my toes and legs. It took three days for my legs to stop aching and three weeks later my toes were still skinned.

The lower entrance of the shaft is visible with binoculars from the picnic area. The other entrance we saw has been left for the future.

GLADSTONE'S RIFT

by Mike Boon

Jean Jancewicz, a caver from Denver, and I decided on a trip to Waterton Park in early summer on the basis of a story I had heard about Mount Crandall. Years before, while hitchhiking near Pincher Creek two women had picked me up and told me that Andy Russell, the writer of wilderness books, knew of an ice cave on Mount Crandall.

Like all good Rockies cave researchers we began our search in Waterton itself, with periodic visits to the bar to review the evidence. The Park Warden, Mr. Gladstone, did not know of any cave of significance on Mount Crandall, and a phone call to Mr. Russell himself confirmed this. But Mr. Gladstone did know of holes on Sofa Mountain.

So, to the cirque in Sofa Mountain. We walked up a long transverse ridge to where scree from the long east face met small pines and avalanche brush. These took us up an ascending transverse route to a huge rockfall. Making our way through this we came on a cirque facing us, centred on M.G.R979 331 with an obvious hole in it. But this was not the cirque Mr. Gladstone had directed us to which was round the corner to the right. We scrambled into this cirque but could see no holes here. I now suggested to Jean that we split up, she going up over the broken rock and scree of the headwall to drop down into the valley of Sofa Creek and thence back to the road.

I went into the cirque with the hole in it, a promising round opening with an approach that looked hard. But the approach turned out to be an easy scramble. The cave was a dead-straight rift floored with scree and of comfortable height. There were some ice columns about five feet high, and

SHAFT on Wardle Mountain
CRG Grade I

ENTRANCE

feet
0

ELEVATION

100

Snow
& Ice
Slope

200

300

Exit

1000'
cliff ↓

400

