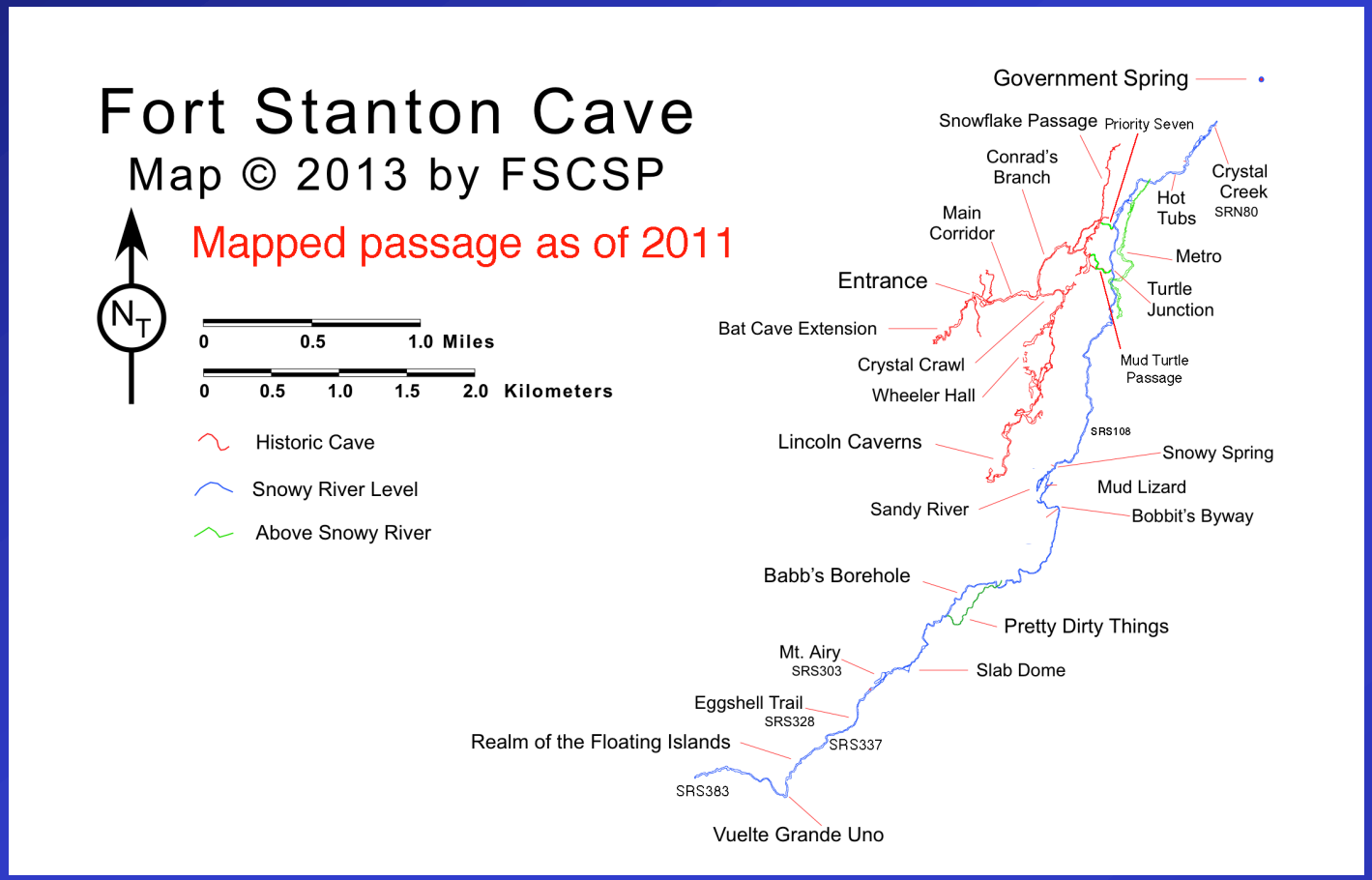
# Snowy River's Second Decade: Chaos Prevails

John T. M. Lyles
April 7, 2022

"EVERY CALCULATION BASED ON EXPERIENCE ELSEWHERE, FAILS IN NEW MEXICO."

Lew A. Wallace, Governor of Territorial New Mexico, 1878-1881

Technique of magic carpet crossings, shoe covers and cylindrical packs allowed teams to travel efficiently for long distances




- Total length of cave at beginning of 2012: 15.57 miles
- Total length of the Snowy River passage: 5.3 miles
- Distance from the entrance to the frontier: 5.4 miles

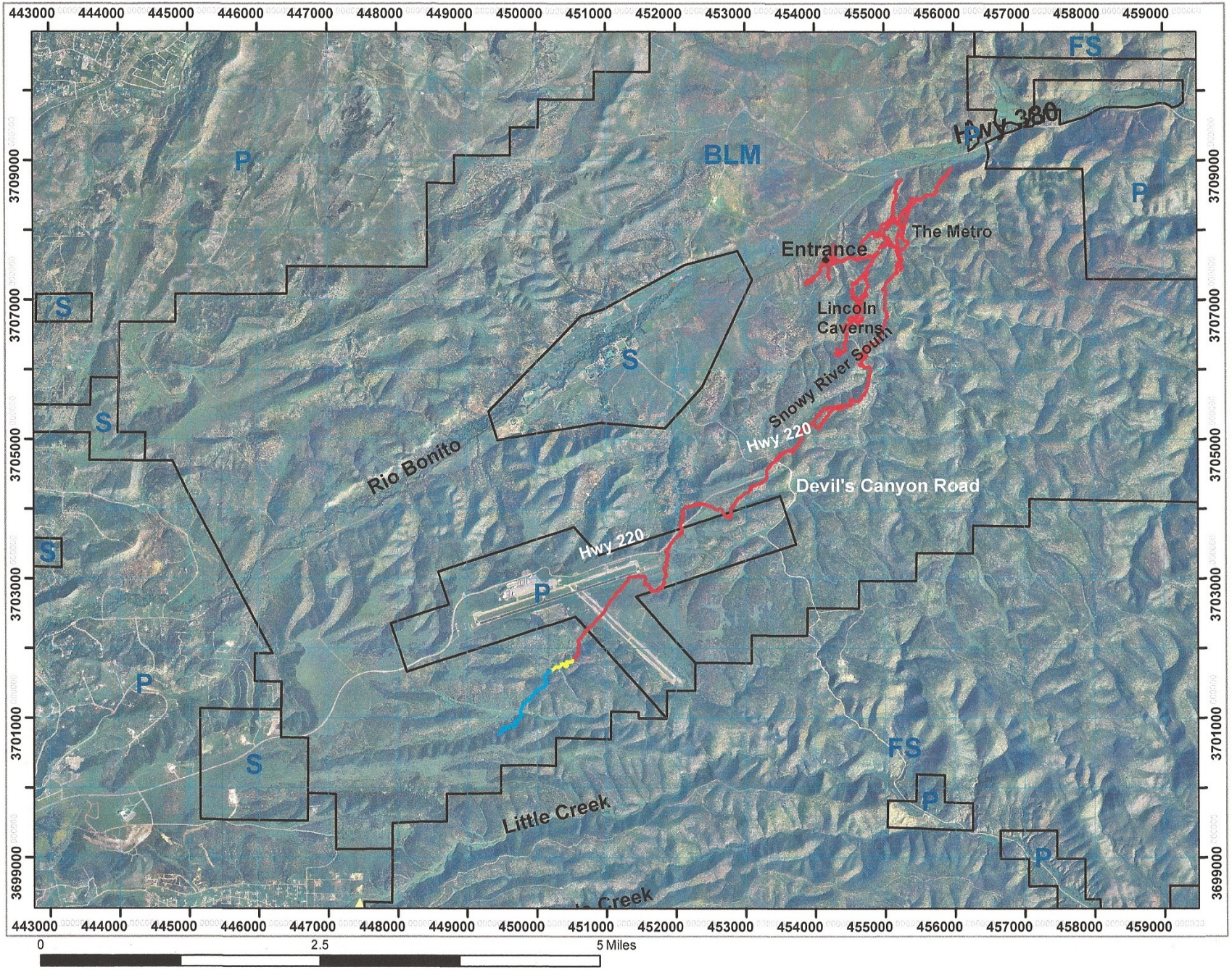
# 2012

Snowy River goes under airport

# Fort Stanton Cave - Snowy River South - July 2012

FSCSP

UTM, WGS84, Zone 13 S

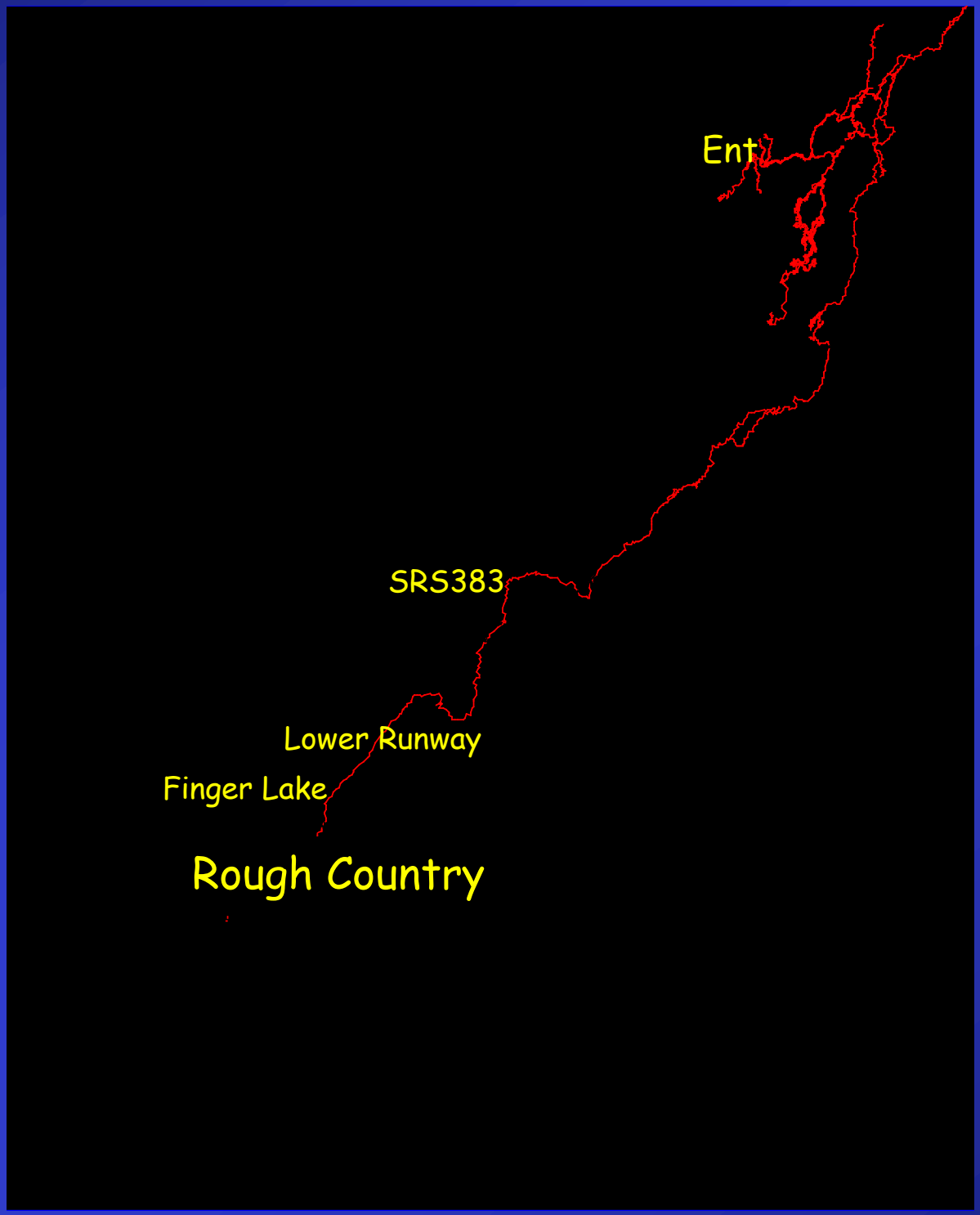


# Signs of Flowing Water

# Finger Lake

We were Hauling 5-6 L before this

# Testing Water at Finger Lake

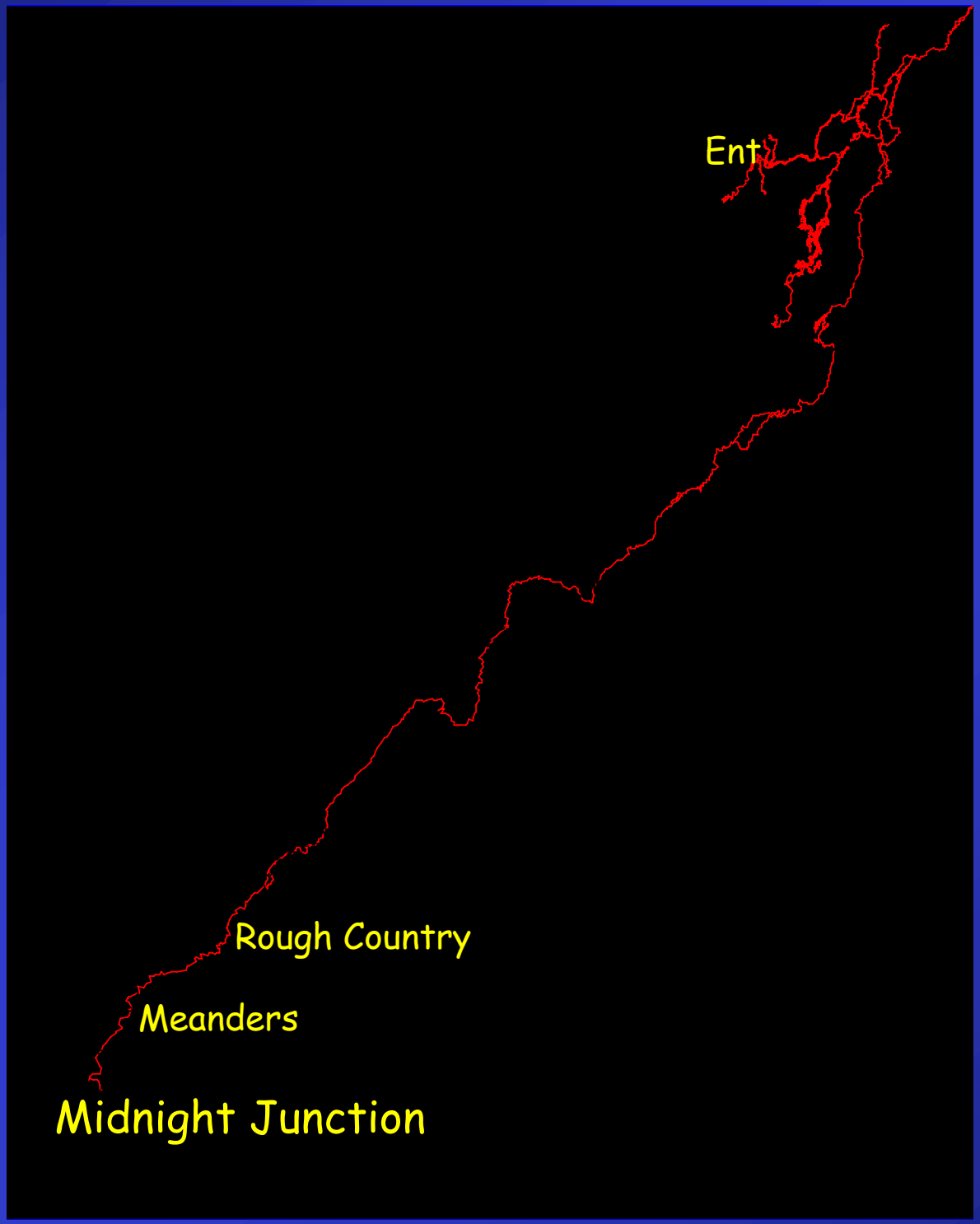

Ent
SRS383
Lower Runway
Finger Lake
Rough Country

# 2012 - Rough Country

- Some of original explorers no longer able to go the distance to return with productive survey as trips were very long
- Concept of *Strong and Light* cavers adopted, teams made up of cavers from expedition survey projects in Jewel, Lechuguilla, Grand Canyon

# Meanders

Travel requires many shoe changes


Ent
Rough Country
Meanders
Midnight Junction

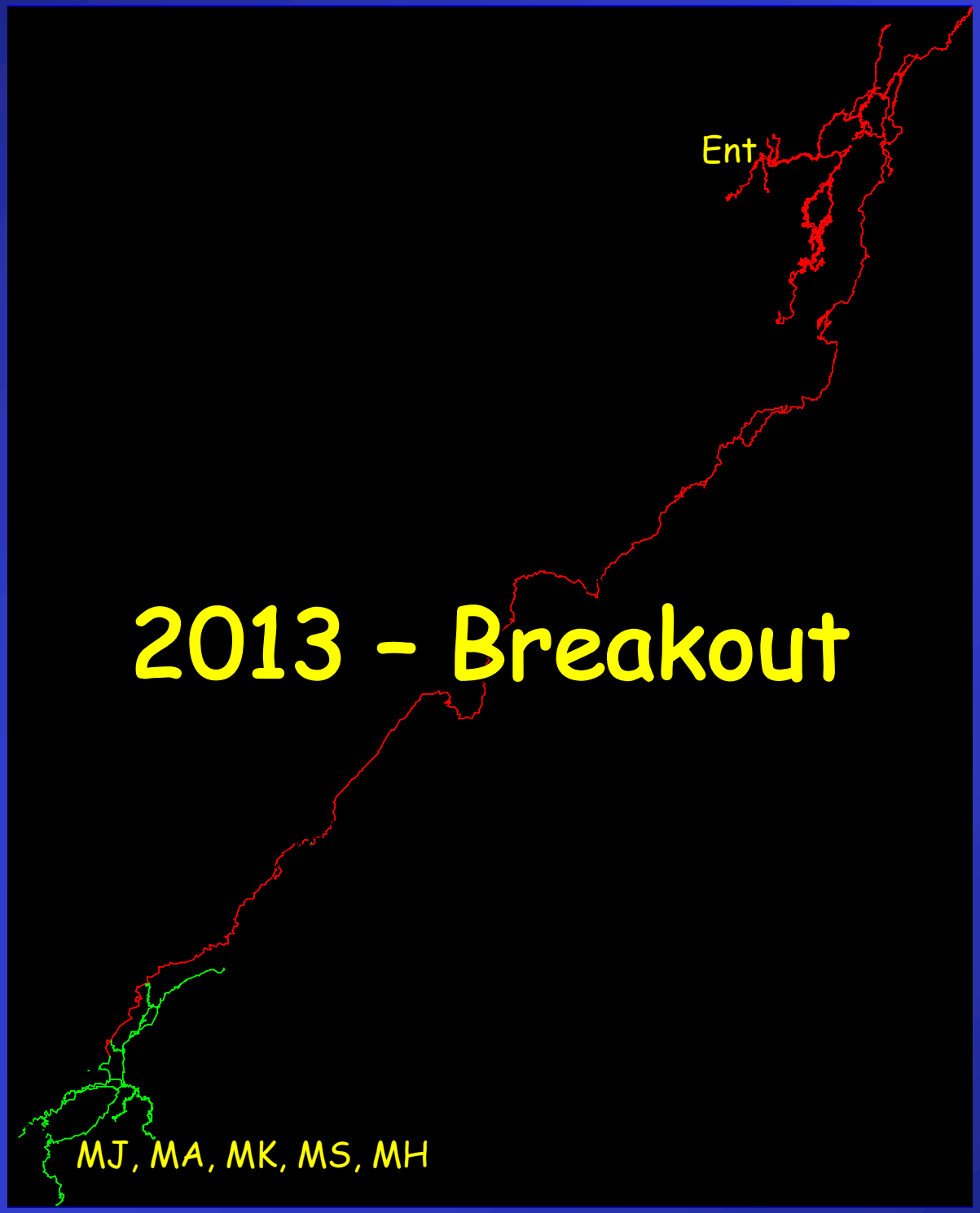
# Midnight Junction

October 2012, 12:00 AM

# Hydromagnesite Balloons

# Flowers and Frostwork

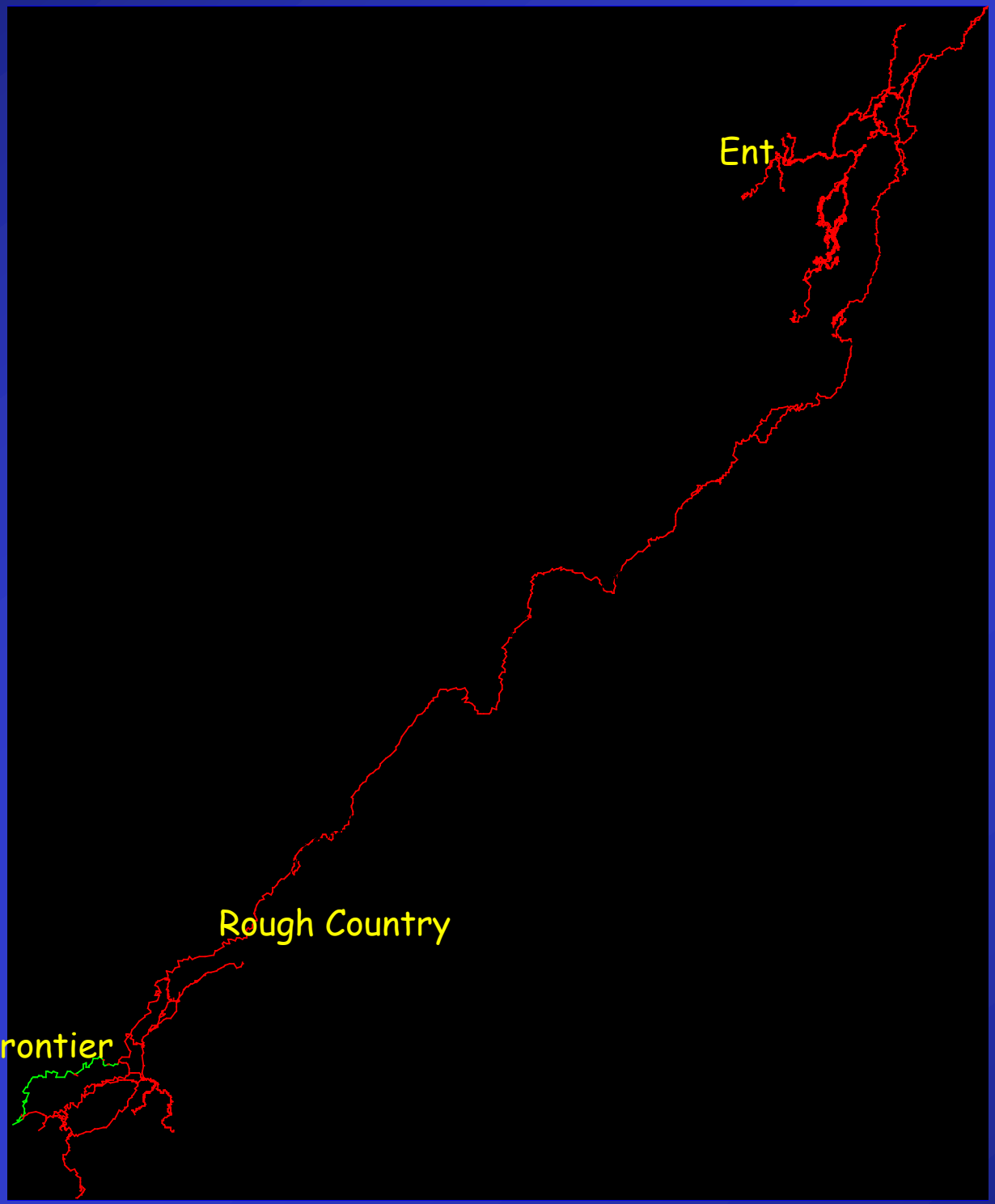
# Harmony Hall


Ent
2013 - Breakout
MJ, MA, MK, MS, MH

# Midnight Creek

# Lemonhead Canyon

# Red Velvet

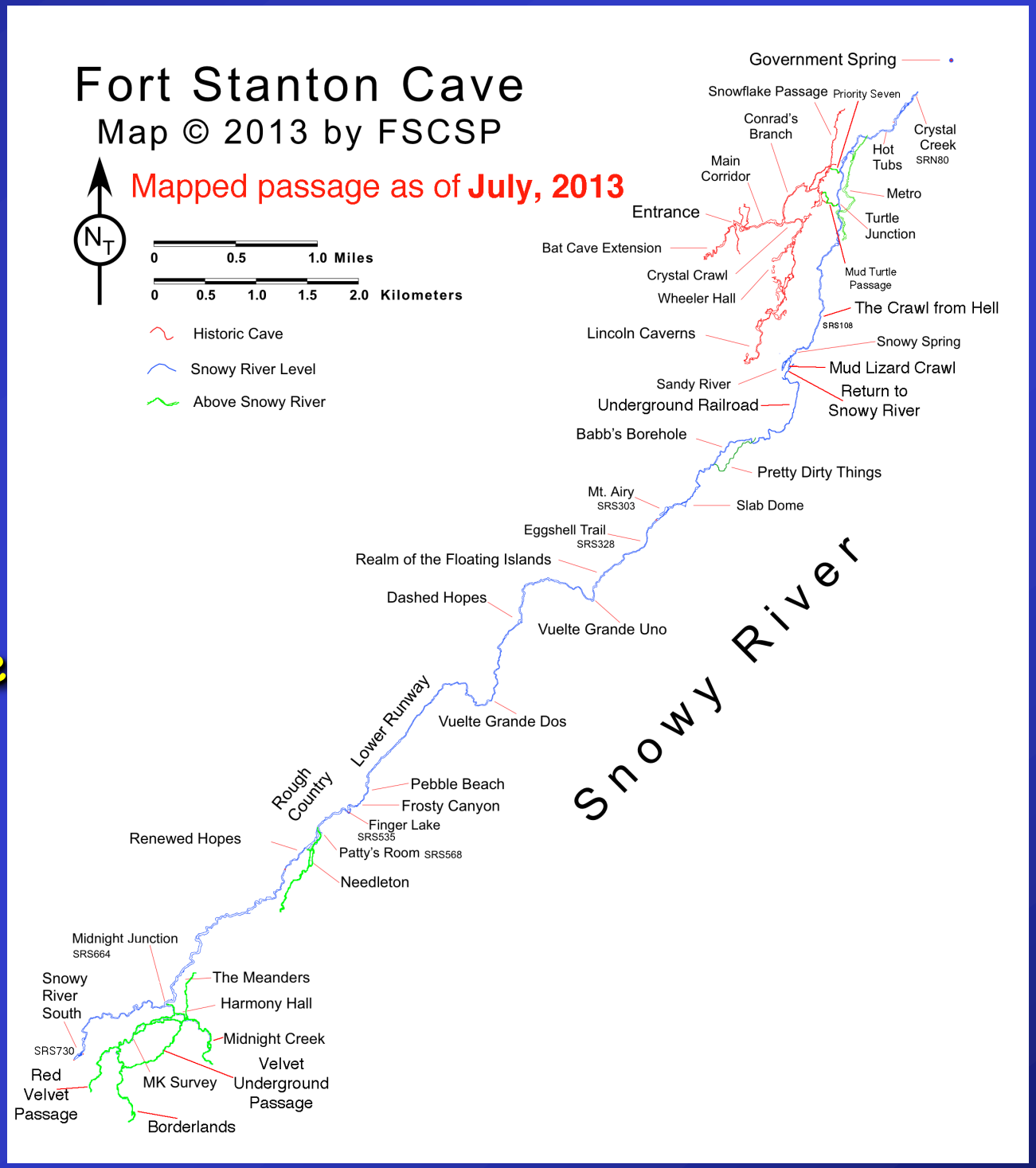

Ent
Rough Country
SRS Frontier

# April 2013 SRS Push

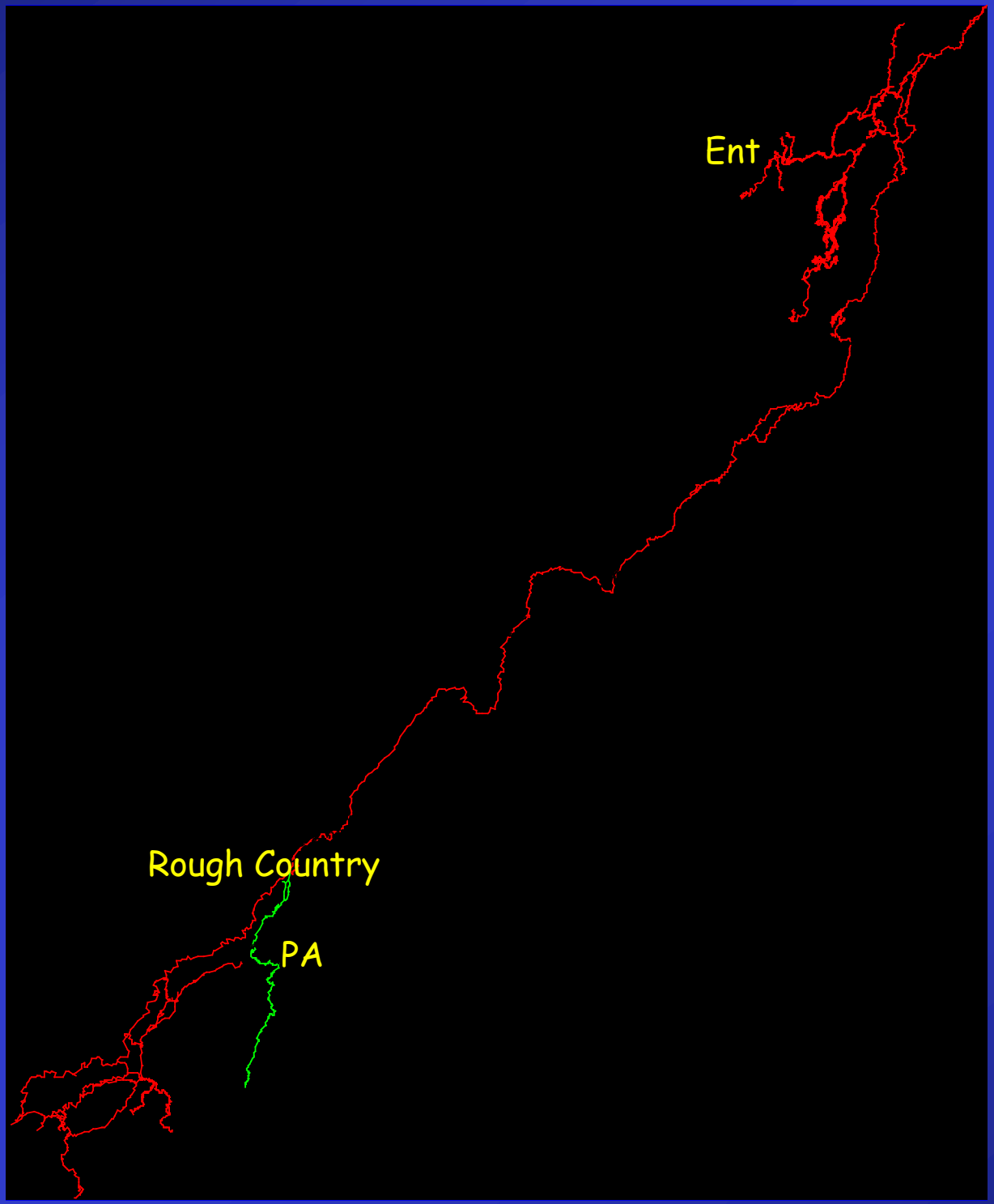
Total length of cave, mapped through 2013:
26.3 miles

Total length of the Snowy River Passage:
11.18 miles

Distance from the entrance to the frontie of the Borderlands passage:
11.42 miles



# High Lead in Rough Country

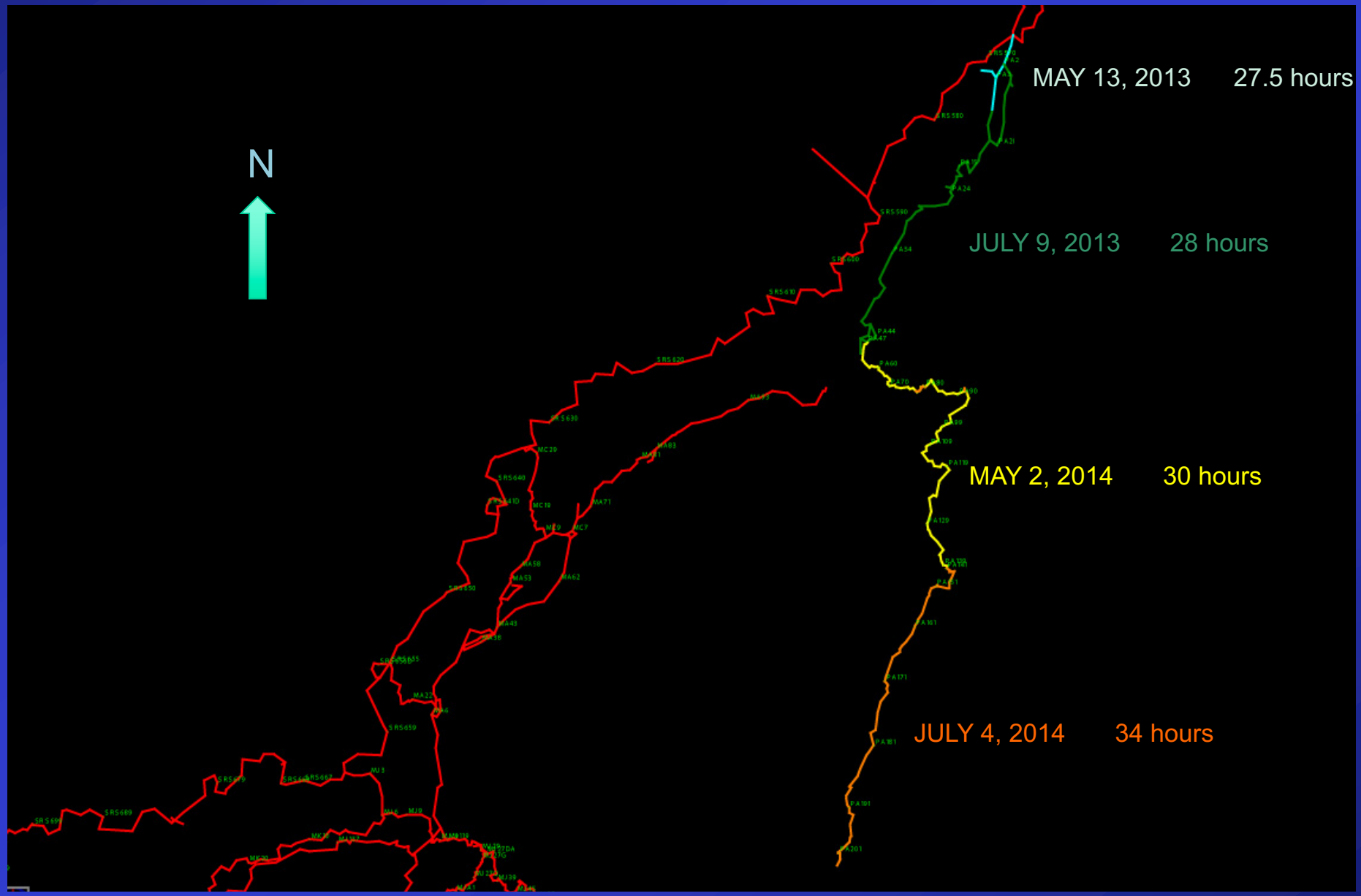

Ent
Rough Country
PA

2014
~9 hour travel time to Midnight Junction
hauling clean camp packs that roll

Midnight Junction Camp

# Jabba's Palace

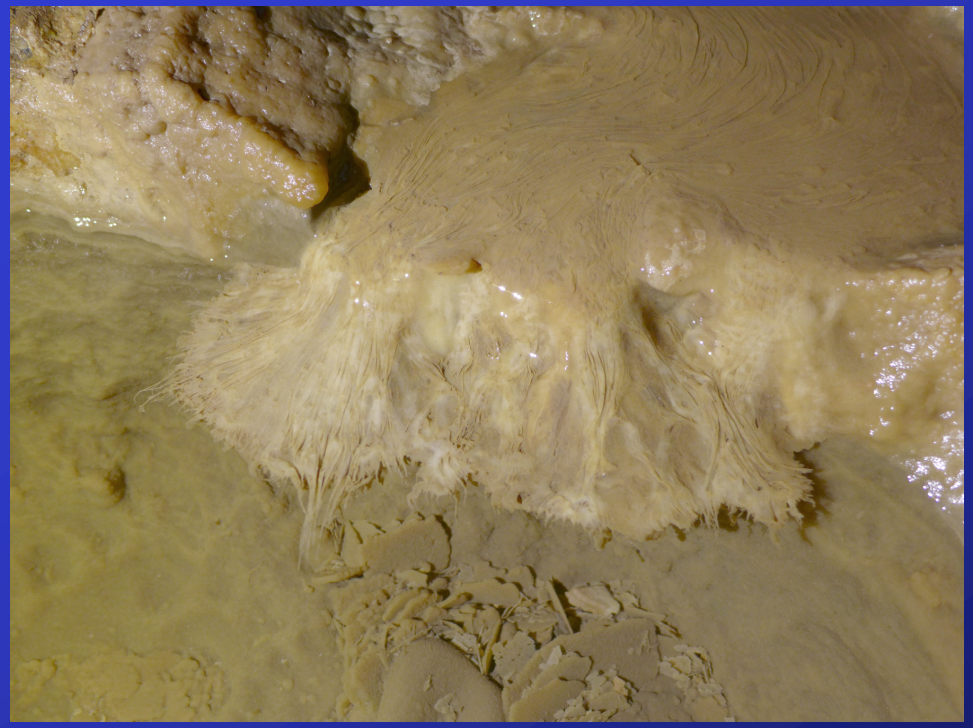
# Four Surveys – PA1 to 208



PA21 *

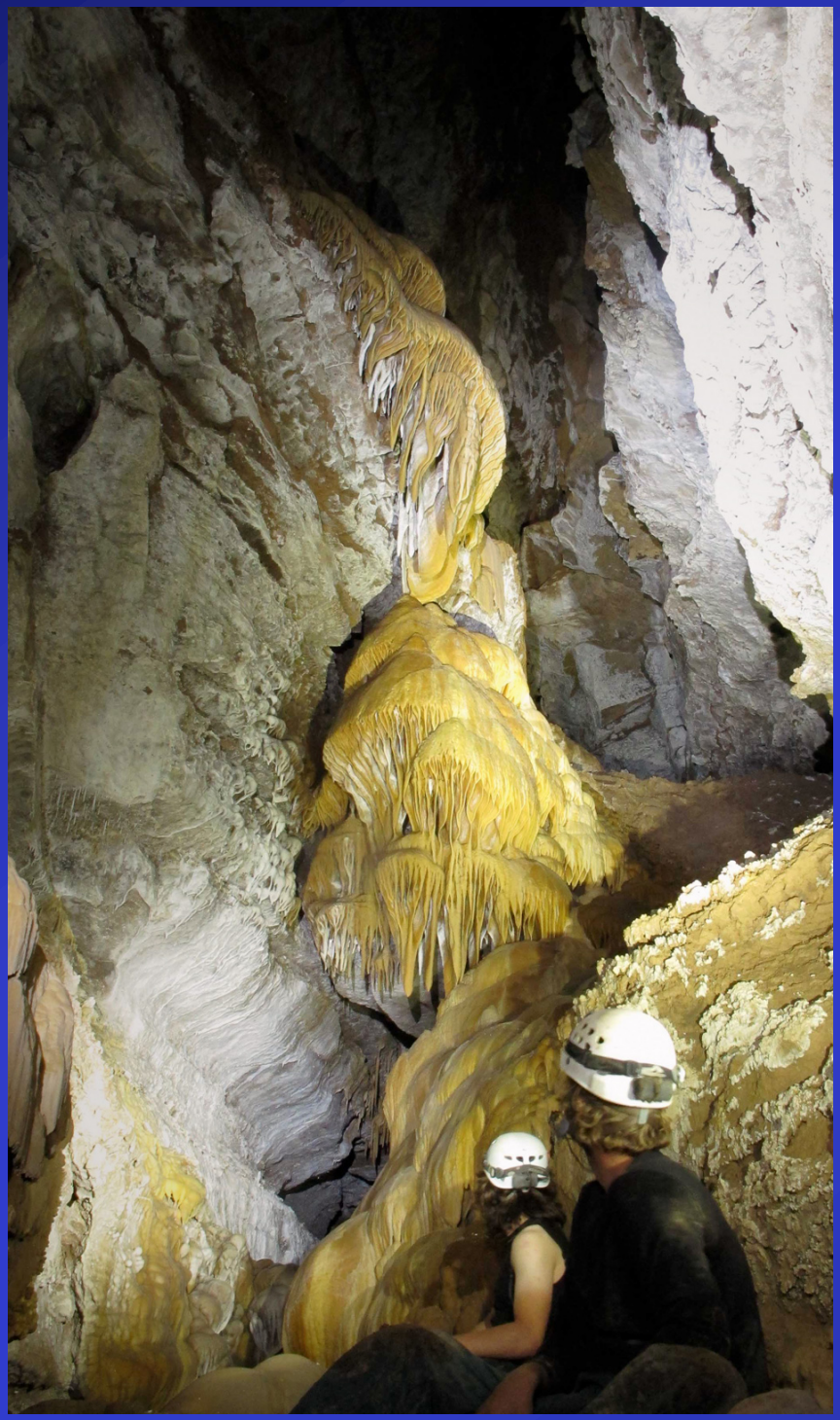
# More Water

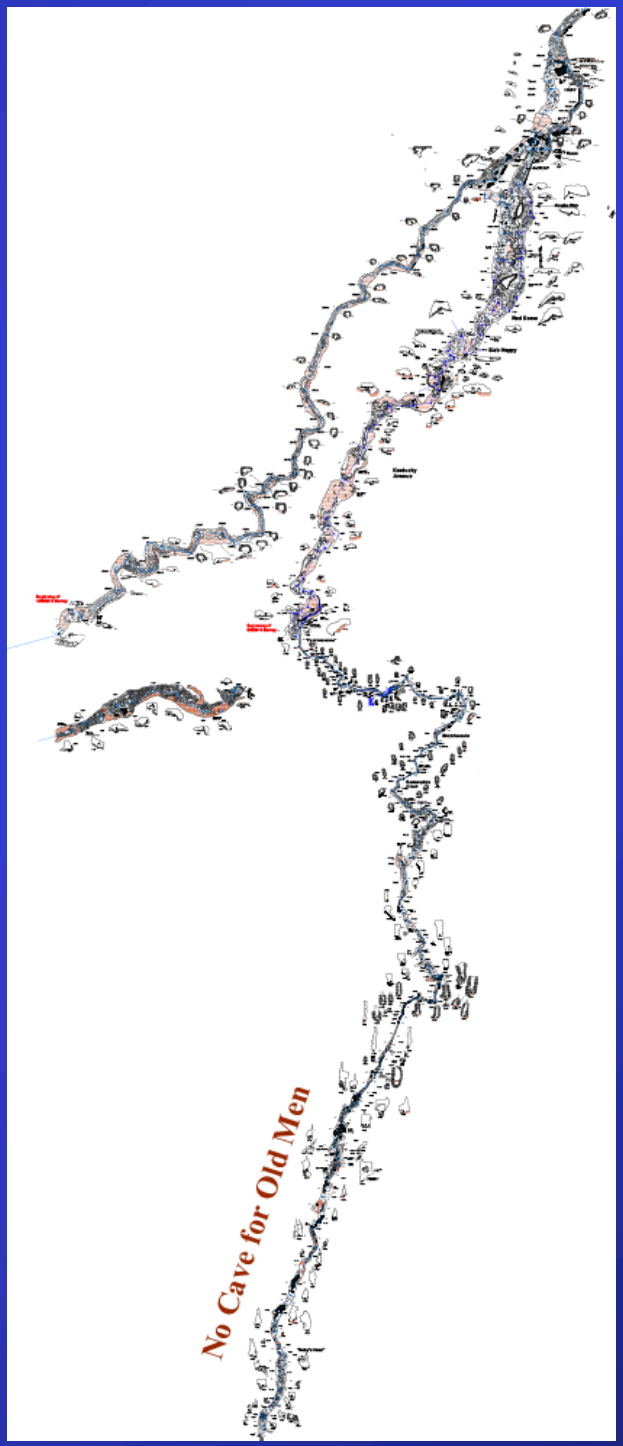
# Calcified Pool Formations



# No Cave for Old Men

# No Cave for a Ringtail?

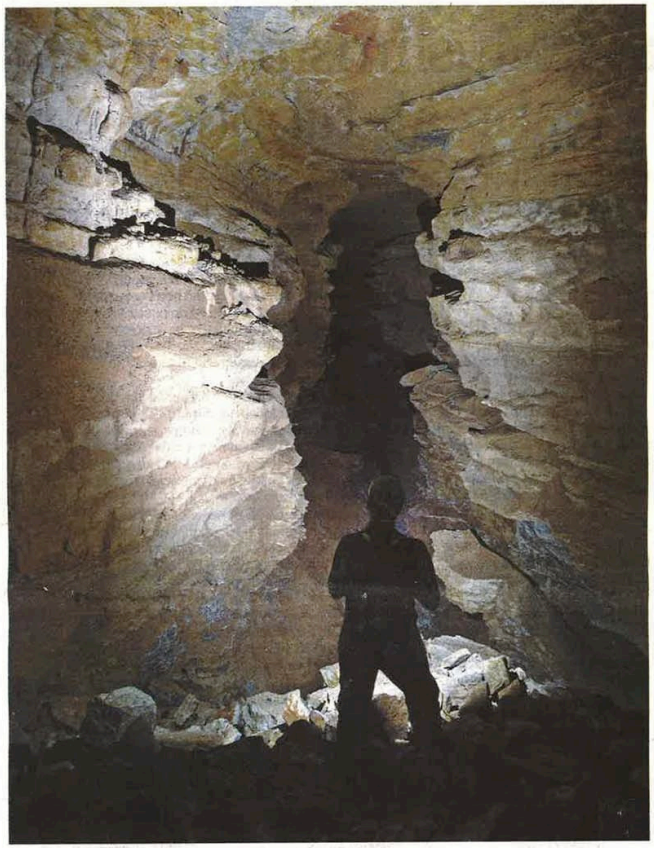



No Cave for Old Men

Front page of Santa Fe New Mexican, Aug. 3, 2014

Fort Stanton Cave passes Carlsbad Cavern (49.7 km) with 31.32 mi (50.4 km)

# Descent into the depths of Snowy River

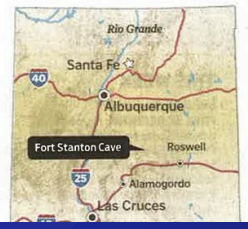


**A caver peers down a new passage discovered this summer in the Fort Stanton-Snowy River cave complex. Cavers have mapped more than 10 miles of the Snowy River passage and some of its side tunnels since 2001.** COURTESY DEREK BRISTOL/BLM

## Team of explorers mapping mineral-lined passage deep inside Fort Stanton Cave

**By Staci Matlock**
The New Mexican

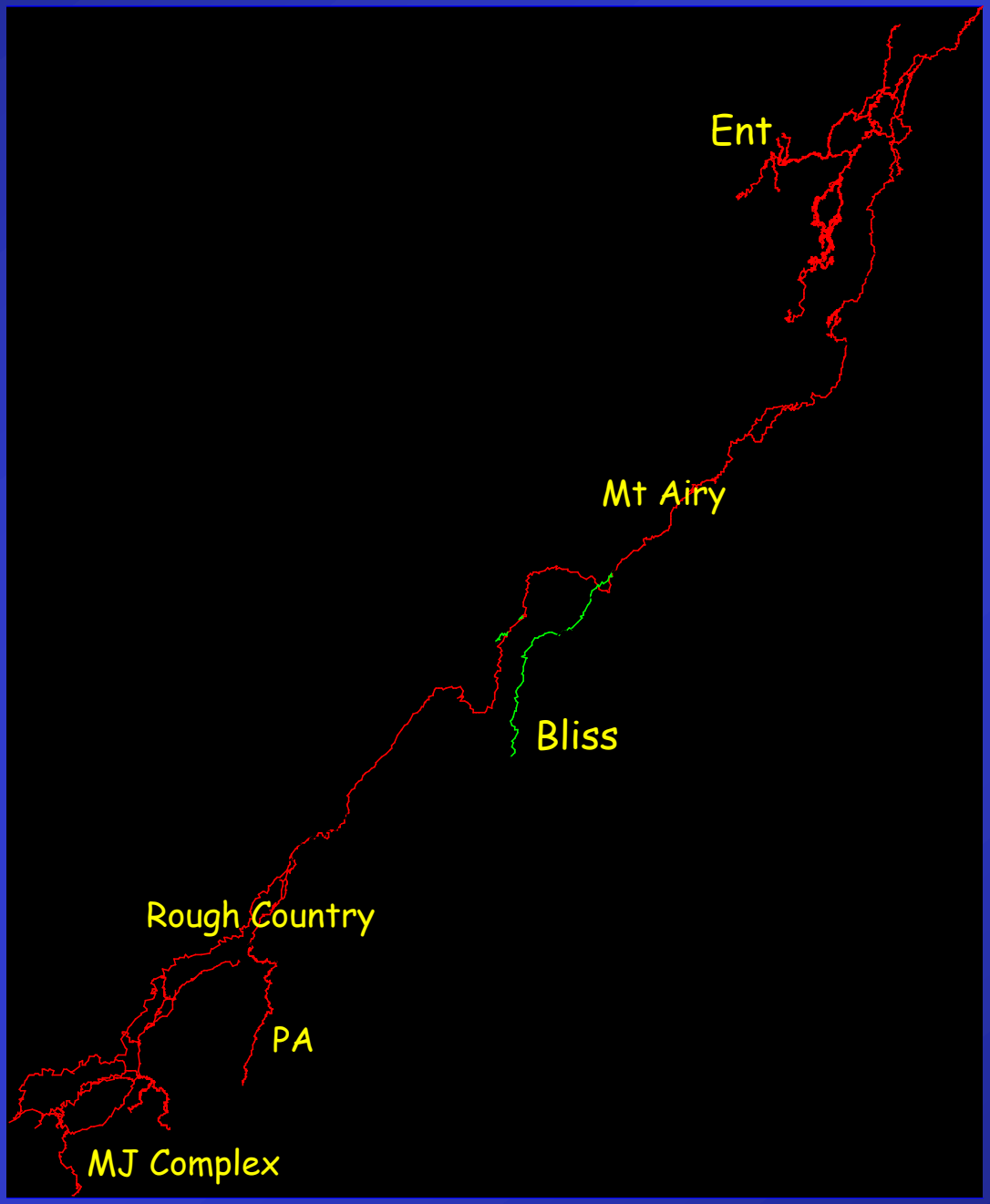
In 2001, a team of cavers following a small flow of air hand-dug a narrow passage through a dirt wall deep in the Fort Stanton Cave in south-central New Mexico. When they finally squirmed through the cramped tunnel, they popped out into a new passage carpeted with a brilliant white river of minerals. They named the passage Snowy River.



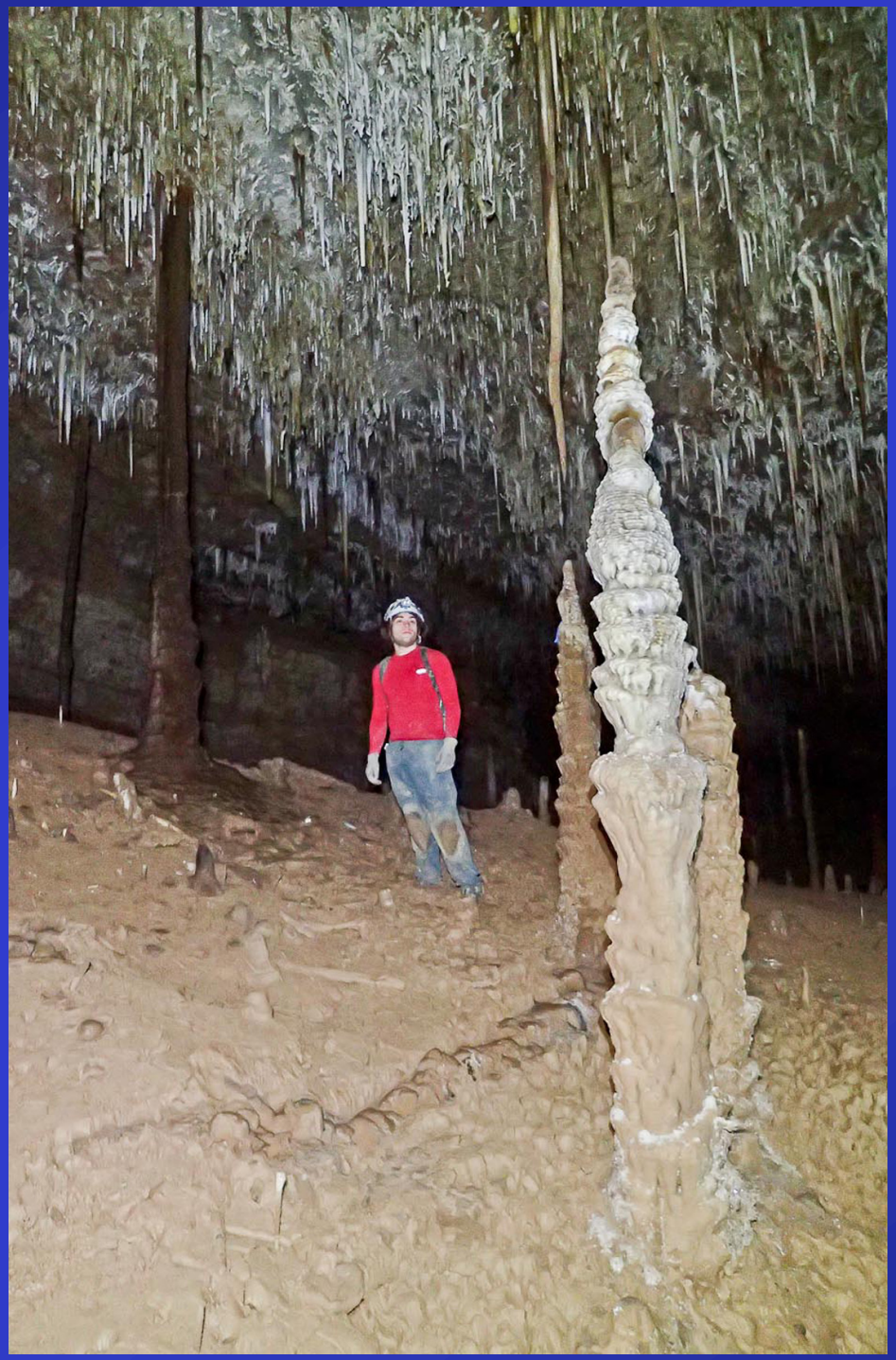

**FINDING SNOWY RIVER**

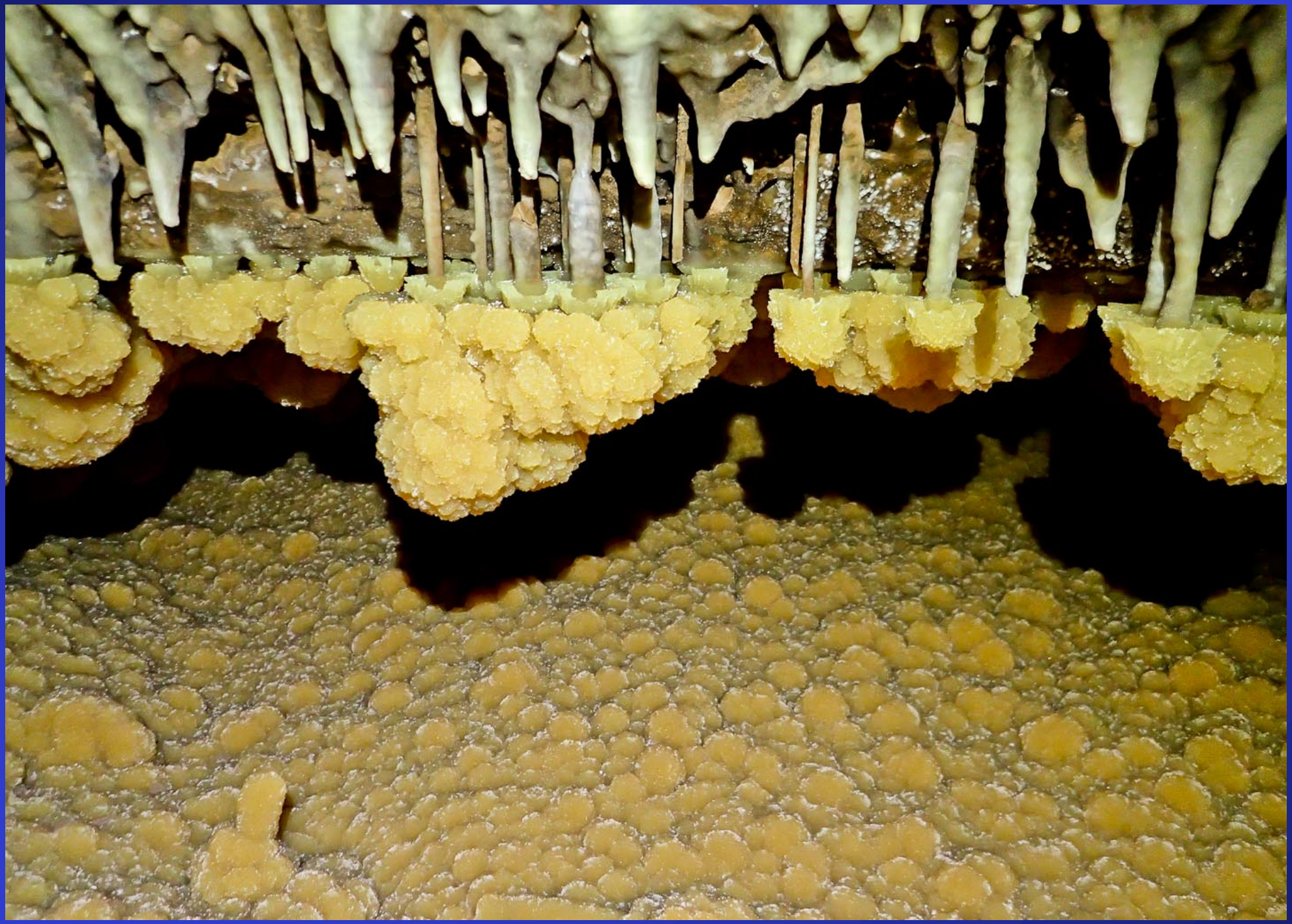
Reaching the entrance to Snowy River requires a mile hike through Fort Stanton Cave near Ruidoso in

# Last Expedition of 2014 - Climb Lead



# Bliss Borehole





# Flood!

In July of 2014 l monsoonal rains started with 6 inches in one week.

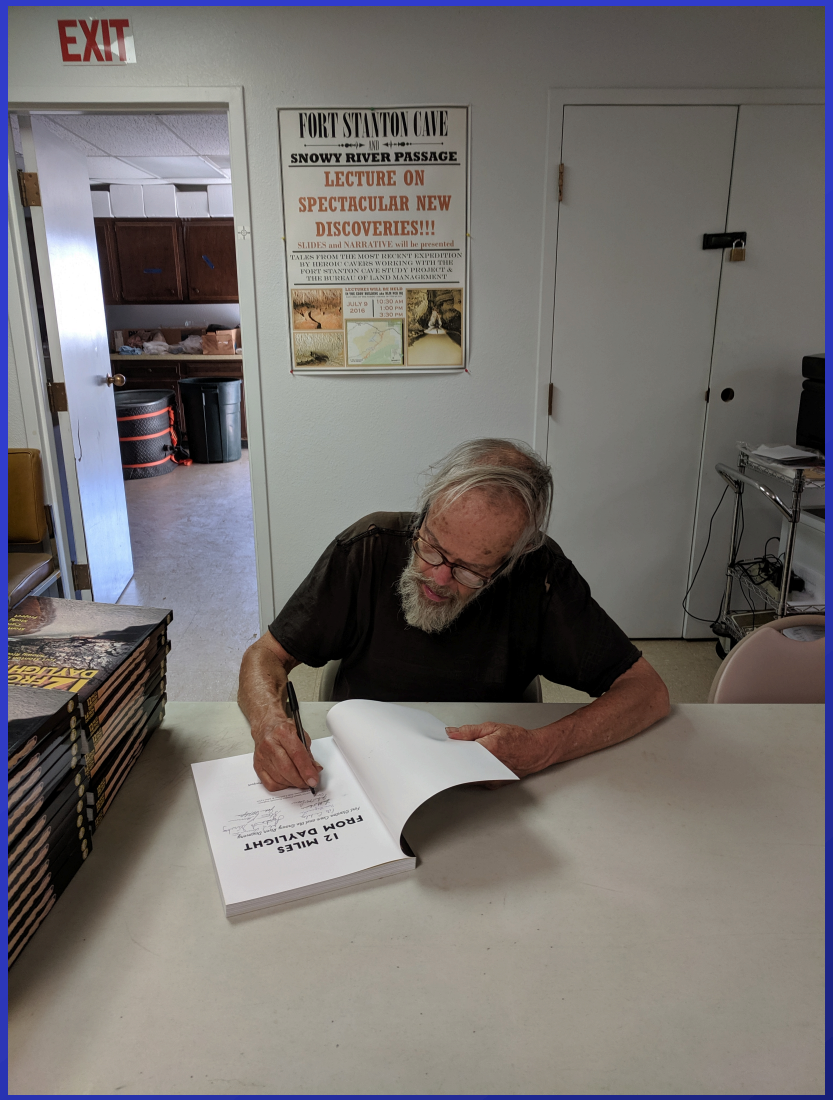
On August 16, team found a flood front slowly moving downstream at SRS391. They exited the cave.

This was the beginning of a major flood event that continued over four years.

+15.8 miles of new cave had been discovered over 2 years so we shouldn't be upset.

Plans to return to Bliss Borehole, camp at MJ, and camp at PA ended

The main cave route through Conrads Branch was under deep water in 2015

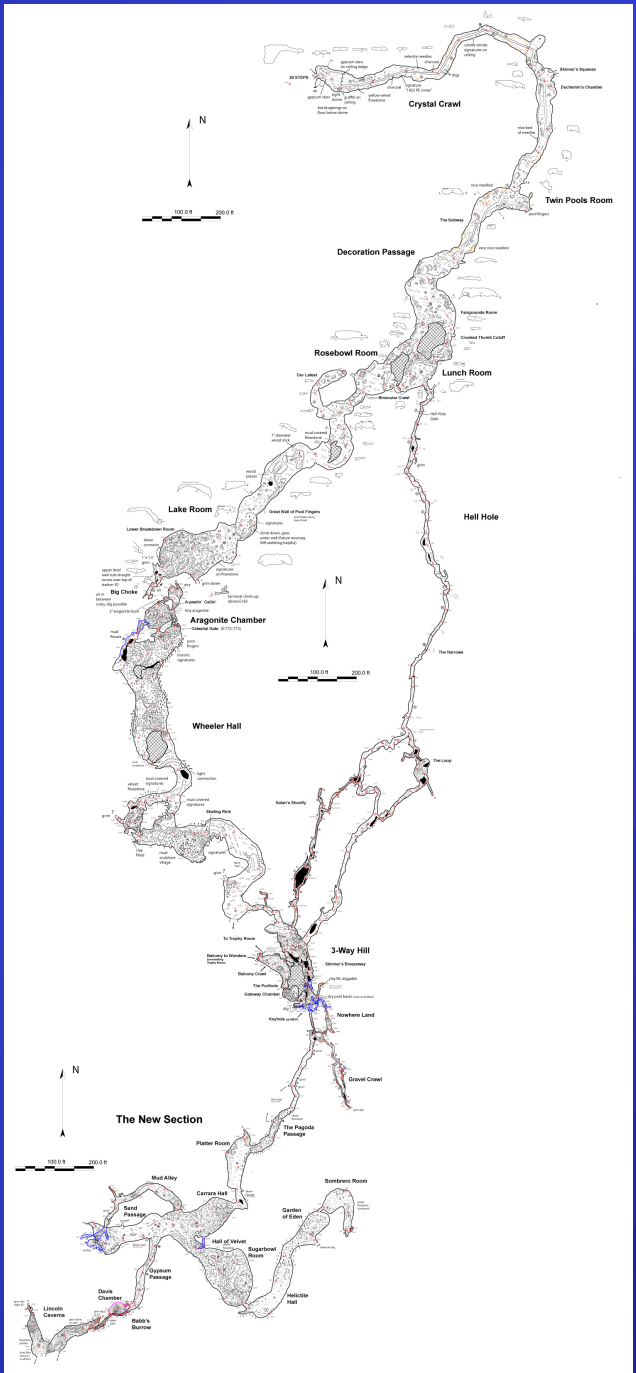



# So we wrote a book

John Corcoran passed Cartography task to Brian Kendrick

Resurvey of the historic parts

Map moved to Adobe Illustrator



- In September and October of 2018, floodwaters receded and we returned to Snowy River
- Post-recon team saw high water marks and impacts from magic carpets
- Bliss was continued, we returned to PA and a new breakout opened in another climb above SR

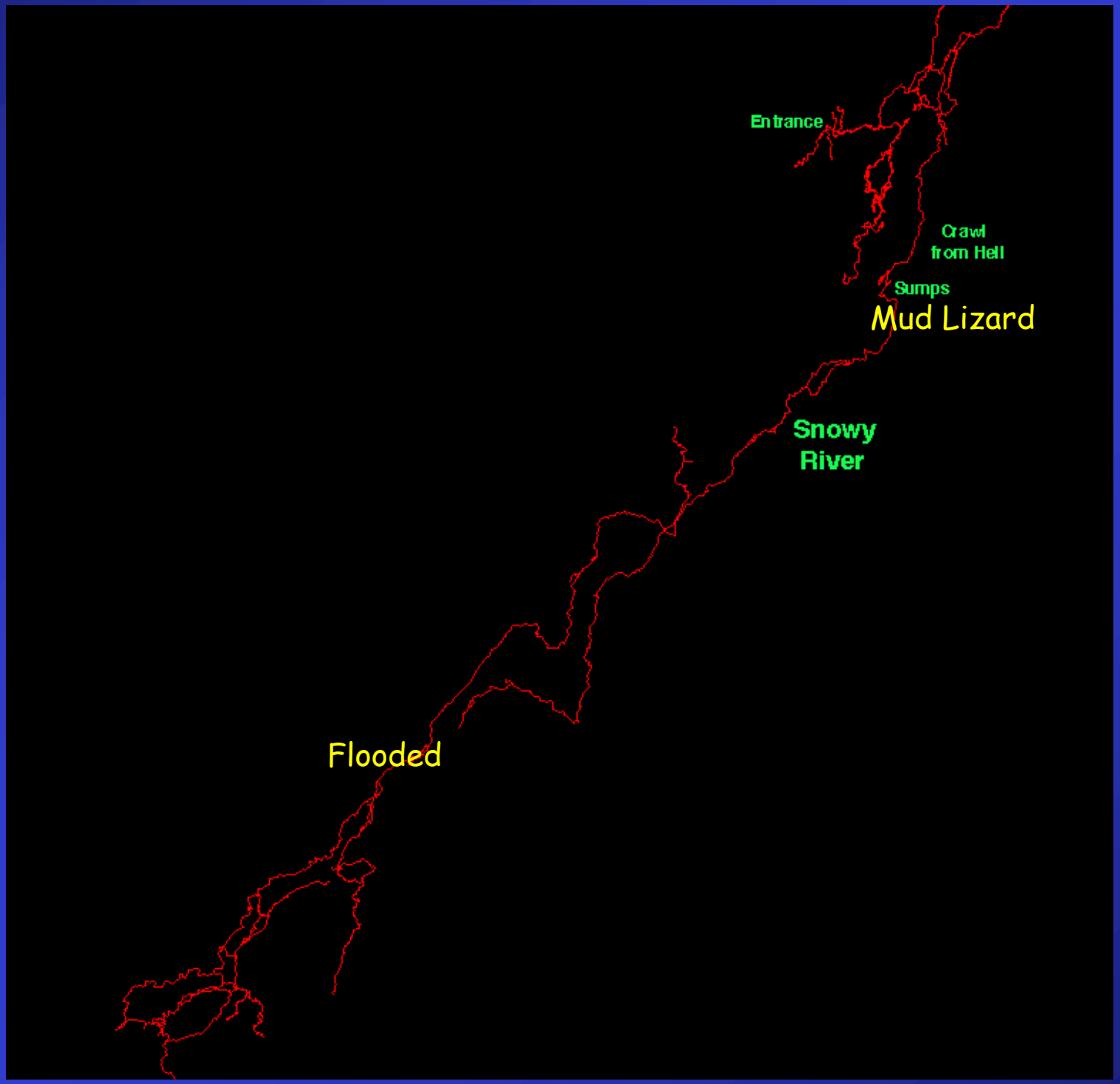
# September 8 2018 Post-Flood Recon to Mt Airy/MJ Radiolocation

# Magic Carpets
## 16 of 70 were replaced

# Detriuscite ?

# Plasticite at Egg Shell Trail

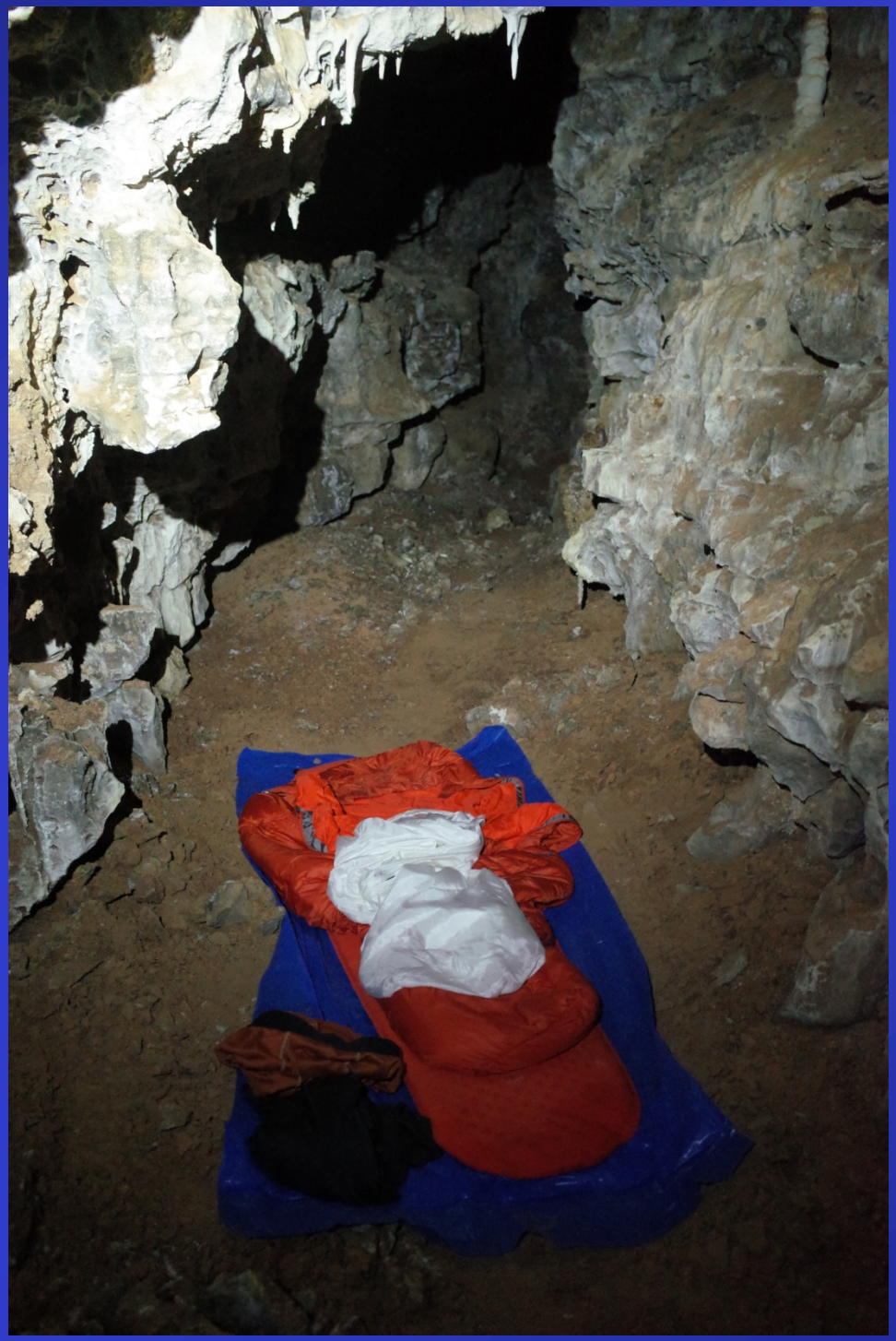
# Mud Lizard had been 20 feet underwater in a sump


Entrance
Crawl
from Hell
Sumps
Mud Lizard
Snowy
River
Flooded

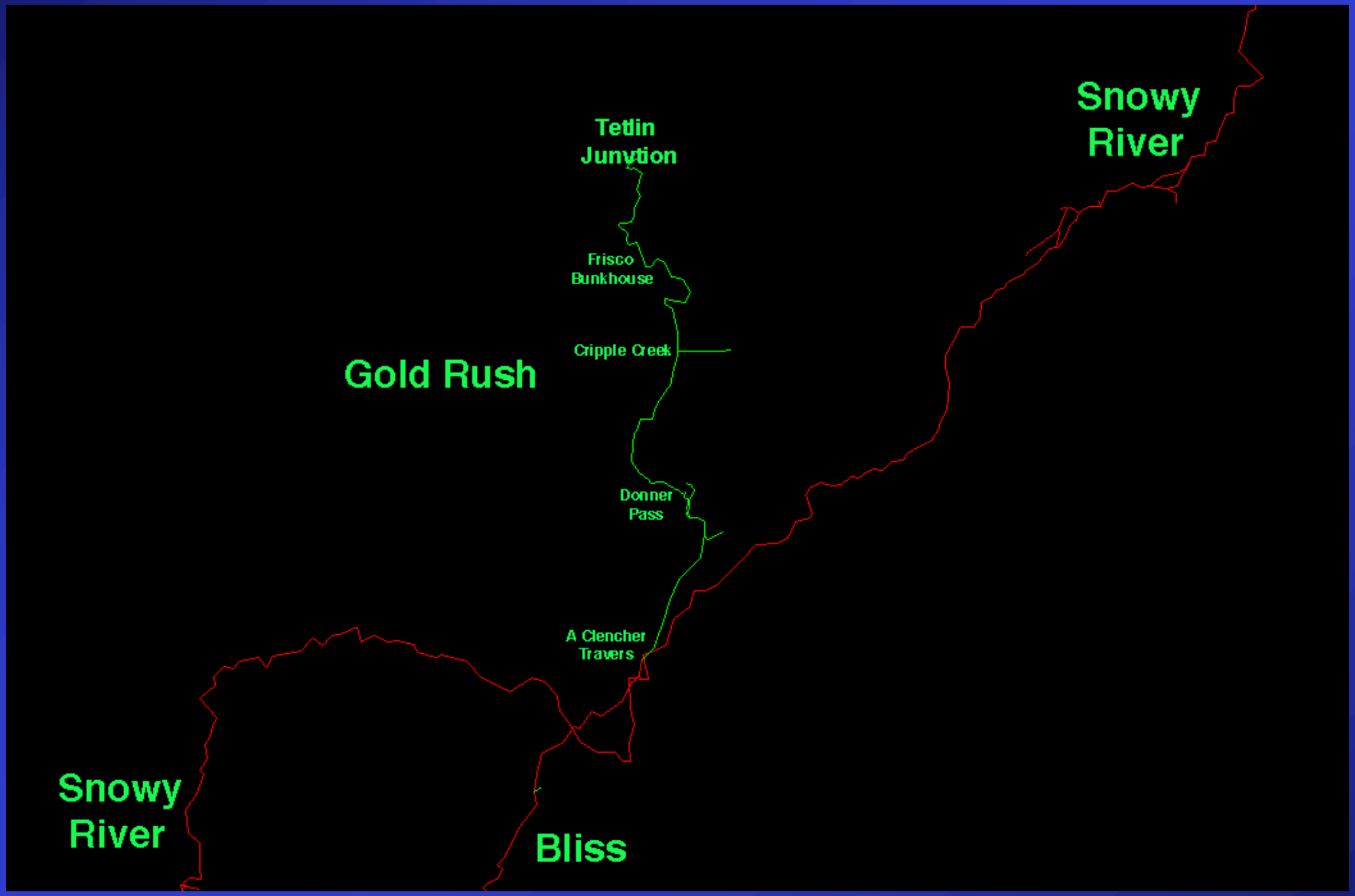
2018
Ent
Gold Rush
Bliss
Balconies
Alchemy Canyon
FSC_102519

# Bliss Continues

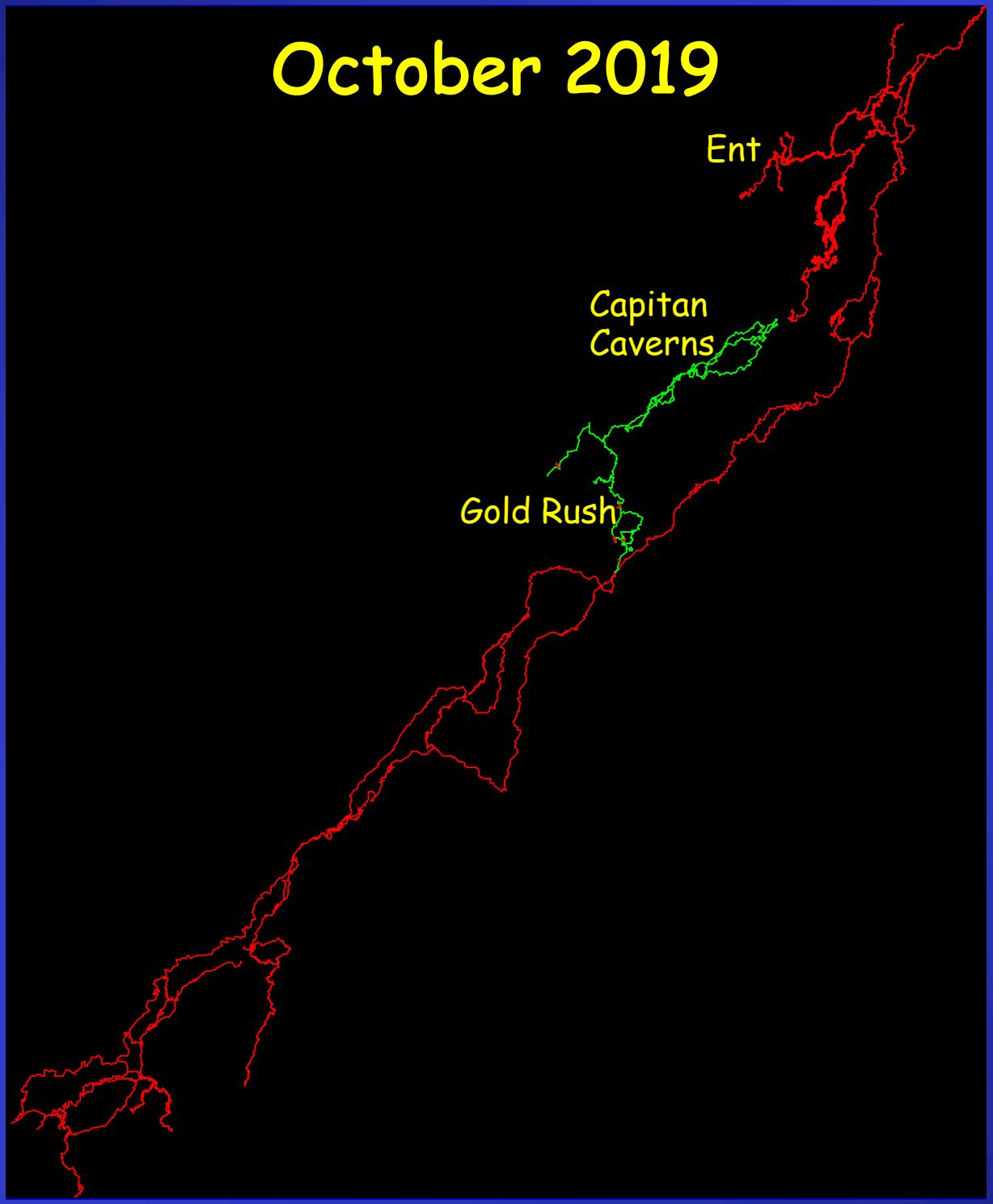
# PB Survey - Alchemy Canyon



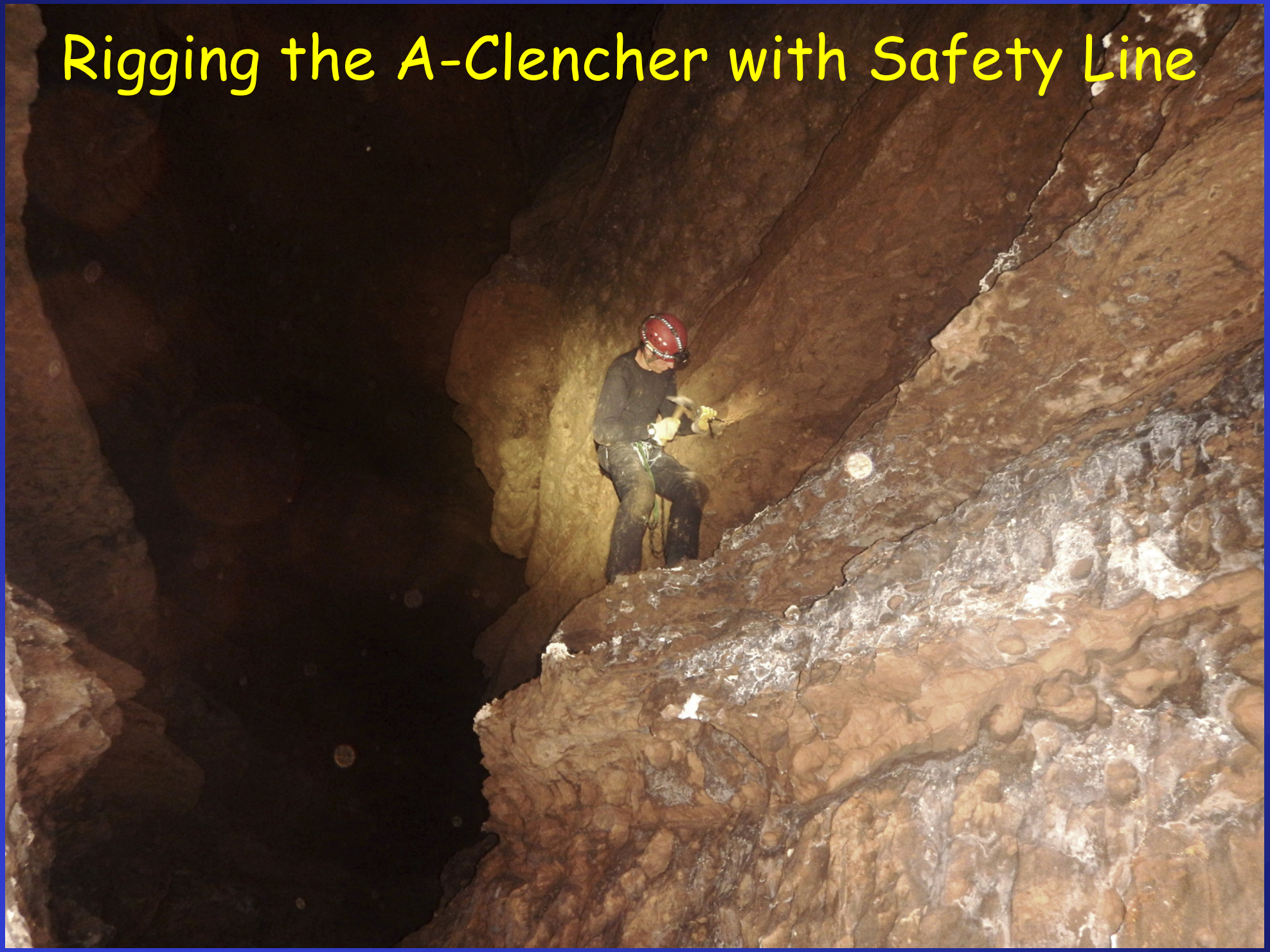
# October 2018



EDELRID
Franklin

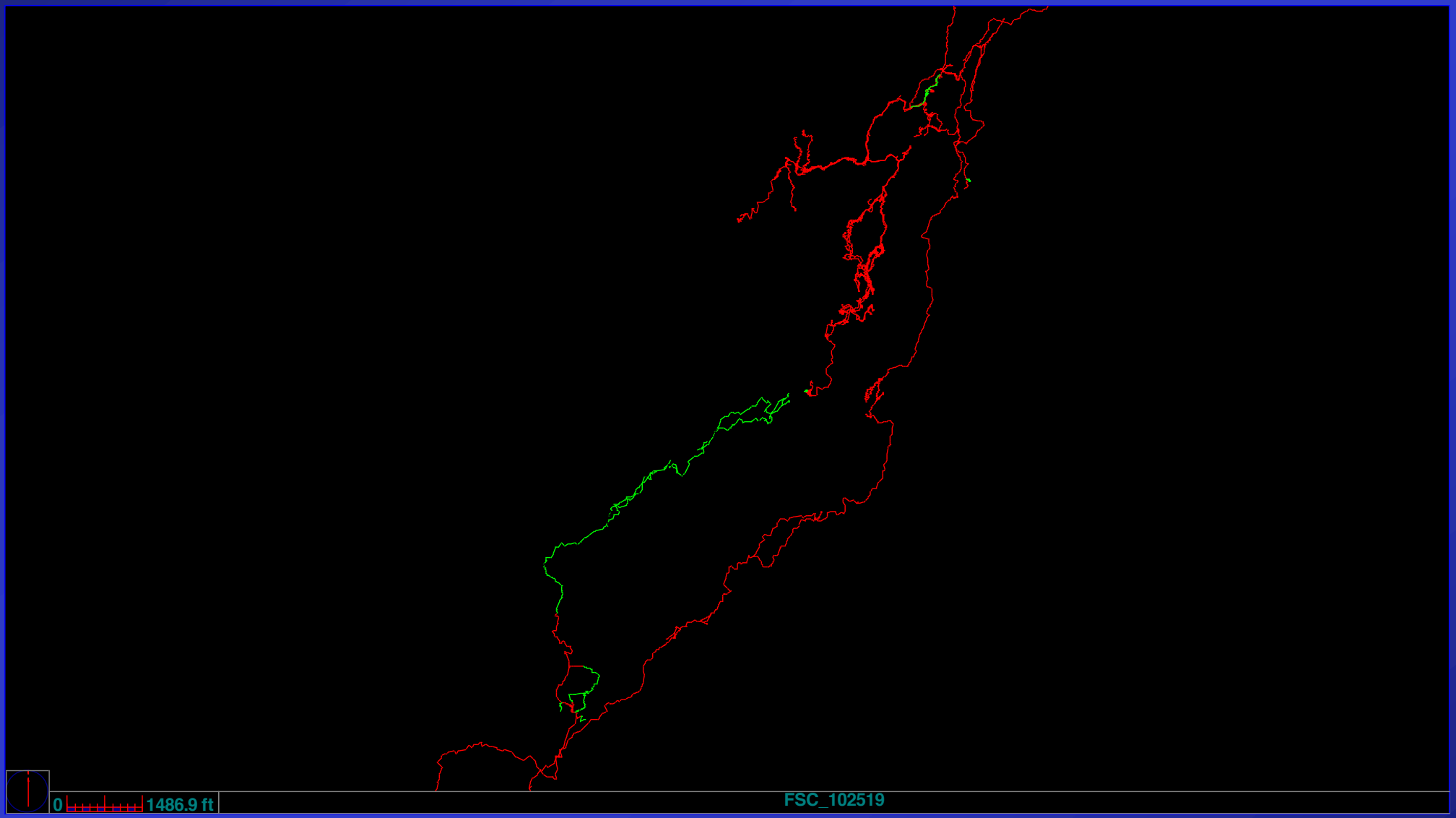

October 2019
Ent
Capitan
Caverns
Gold Rush

# Rigging the A-Clencher with Safety Line



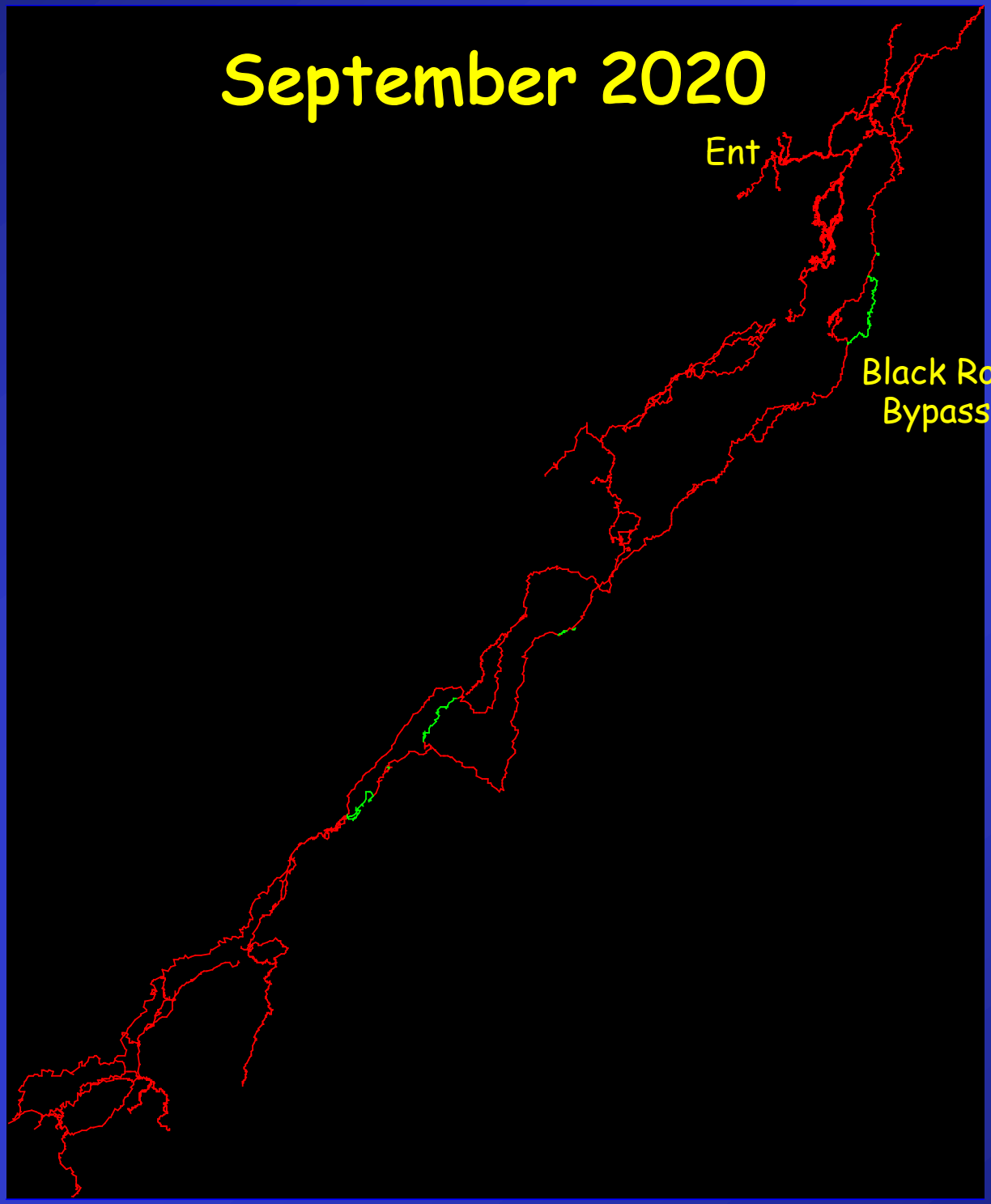
cm

# Mystery of Engel Hill Air Solved



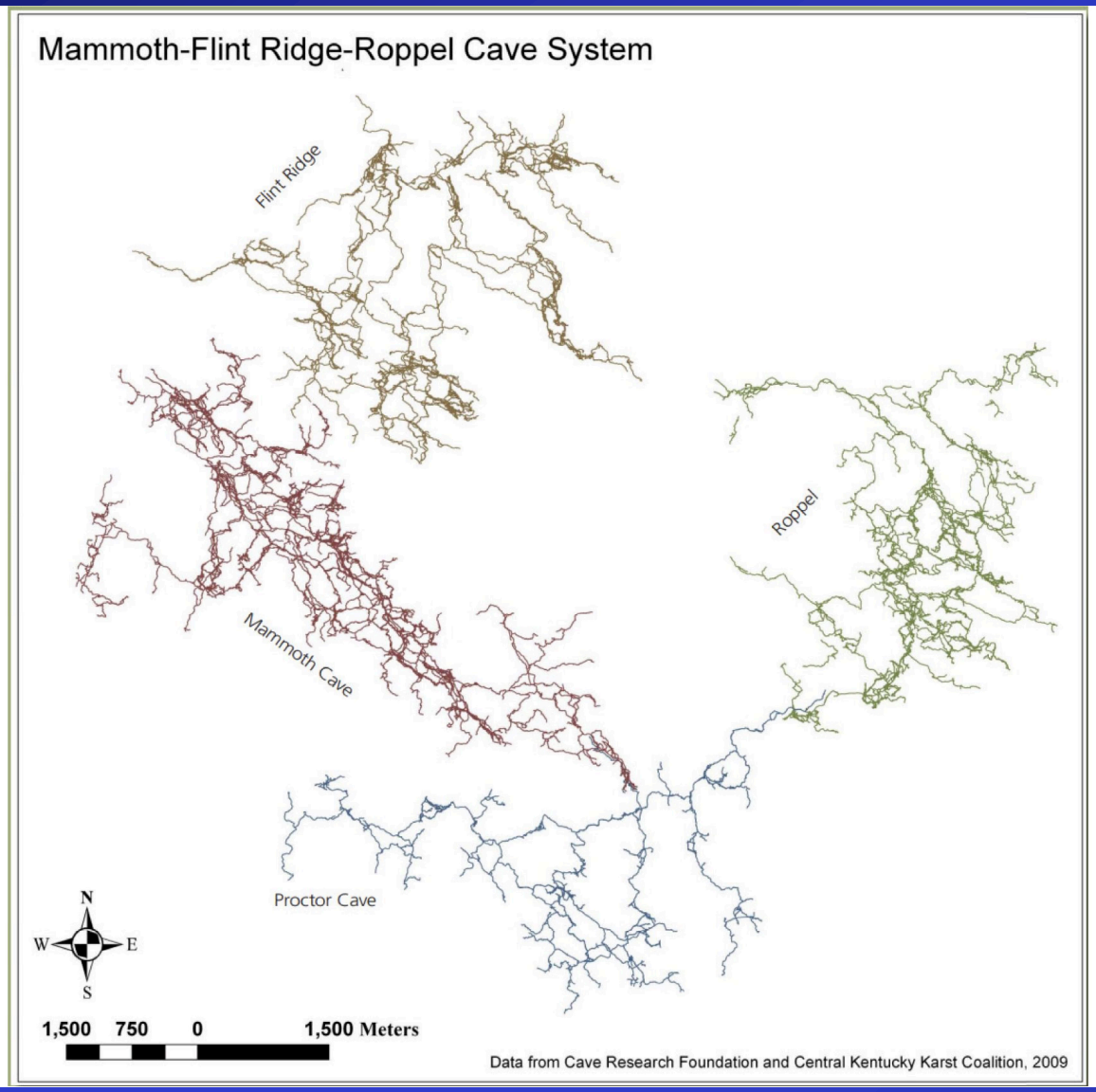
# Scorched Earth

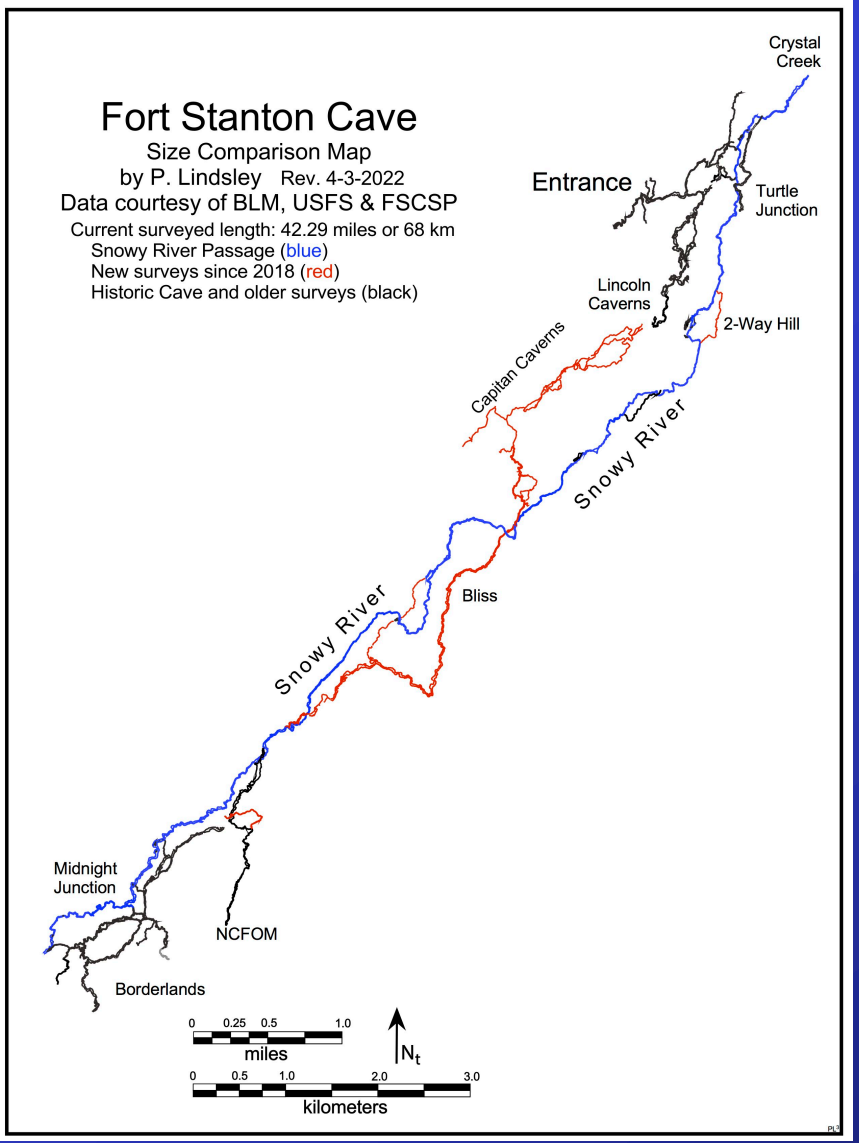
FORT STANTON CAVE
40
MILES


September 2020
Ent
Black Rock
Bypass

# Black Rock Bypass avoids Mud Lizard Sump

# FSC now 42.3 miles



# Photo Credits:

Stan Allison
Nick Anderson
Ramon Armen
Nic Barth
Derek Bristol
John Cochran
John Dunham
James Hunter
Brandon Jaap
Garrett Jorgensen
Brian Kendrick
Sean Lewis
Pete Lindsley
John Lyles
Ian McMillan
Rene Ohms
Ben Smith
Shawn Thomas