

An excerpt from the St. Charles Canoe Club news (1973)

## A TYPICAL WEEKEND AS A CANOE RACER

Written by Richard Diebold, Sr. and embellished by Steve Conlon

It's the weekend of June 23<sup>rd</sup>; we started out as usual on Friday after work. It was a rather uneventful 6 ½ hour drive to Louisville, Kentucky. Shortly after arriving at 12:30 A.M. – 1:30 A.M. eastern daylight time, we sacked out for the night. (at 2:30 after pitching tents in the dark) About 5 hours later we were up and shortly off to the races. There were numerous sprints plus the mixed couple's marathon race, all taking most of the day – or so we thought.

Back to camp a quick swim in the pool, supper and then an extra bonus. Todd Adams was to take a group of us (13) cave exploring or caving as they call it. We started out at 7:30 P.M. After stopping to pick up a couple seasoned cavers, and a 61 year old man who had never been in a cave in his life, we were on our way. At 10:30 P.M. we arrived at the entrance to the cave. (After a ½ mile hike from the van through the woods to the base of a mountain where Todd pulled back some bushes and revealed the opening to our adventure)

Cavers are the biggest liars I have ever met. All the way we heard "It isn't far – it won't take long – you can walk through the big caverns. ect. ect."

Starting out through the first passages about 10 minutes, we walked over a few rocks, next was crawl on our hands and knees – after which we hit water – about up to our waist. Half hour later we're out of the water going up through small squeeze holes. At this point our guide said just a few more feet and you can stand up. Fifteen minutes later we stood up. One minute later he says "The guys up ahead must have hit the crawl space." Sure enough – 205 feet on your belly. (to enter the crawl space you had to climb down into a 20 foot in diameter hole with no insight of what was at the bottom. Just looks like a pit! When you get down on your hands and knees you see a crawl space, one arm span wide and about 14 inches tall. One by one we crawled, pushing with our toes and pulling with our forearms'. After all 13 of us were in and moving, Rick Diebold said, "hey are you guys out up there yet? No!" At times, as we crawled, the passage got so narrow we had to take off our hard hats and slid them in front of us the brim was to wide! Somewhere father back . . . ) 20 feet into the crawl the 61 year old man can't make it. He's too big – won't fit. Back out; take off your coat while we scap some of the mud away. Try – again – you push – I'll pull. A few grunts later he's through the tight spot. Only 185 feet left to go on our stomachs – no room for our hard hat. Half hour later we're 100 feet into the crawl. The man stops. "I'm sick!" Oh No! I'm behind him – our guide is ahead, so we tell jokes for 20 minutes. Lucky us we put his mind at ease. "Let's go" 205 feet, 1 hour 20 minutes later, "Wow, look at that . . . Holy Cow, a stalactite as big as my house." What are those hairy things over there?" (Those are cave crickets which died 50 years ago Todd explained) One hour of looking in the big room and it's time to go back. (one of the interesting questions was asked; since we went through all that water does the cave ever fill up? Our guide answered, well, if it's raining outside you would never know it being a couple hundred feet under

the earth and the cave water levels can rise so we can't get out but it's ok because we're higher than the water table and you just have to wait for the water to recede. "How long do you have to wait?" someone asked. Not more than 24 to 36 hours usually!)

Start reading backwards to find out how we got out. Don't ask me what time it was when we got out, but the birds were singing and the sun was peaking over the horizon.

*(We hiked the ½ mile back to the vans and drove 2 hours back to our tents. 45 minutes of sleep and we were back on the starting line of the men's C2 Sunday race. After collecting trophies, Mr. Diebold drove us back home to Illinois while we all slept. I assume he went back to work with no rest the next morning since he was the owner of his custom cabinet business in Chicago – Mrs. Diebold took all our clothes, which were all one color (mud gray) and washed them. After 8 washings and almost destroying her washer she threw the clothes out)*