FROM THE EDITOR:

These past two years of my editorship have been very enjoyable for me and I thank the members for re-electing me. I would especially like to thank Rebecca Valentine and my husband, Kevin, for their help in proofreading. And I would like to remind readers that this publication also comes in digital form, which contains color maps and photos. Please let me know if you want it this way in addition to, or instead of the regular hard copy form.

JUNEAU’S U.A.S. CAVING CLUB HAPPENINGS

by David Love

This past year, UAS student Louis Hoock and fellow students at the University of Alaska Southeast Juneau campus organized the university-sanctioned University of Alaska Southeast Caving Club (UAS Caving Club). In conjunction with active membership of the Glacier Grotto, UAS Caving Club members have organized several rope practices, a cave mapping seminar and several Glacier Grotto presentations.

The UAS Caving Club is a student organization with the intent of teaching students about Archeology, Geology, Hydrology, Speleology, Caving Methods and Safety and Cave Conservation through expeditionary environmental studies. The UAS Caving Club brings Southeast Alaska's caving and geological experts (The Glacier Grotto membership, UAS Geology and Anthropology professors Dr. Cathy Connor and Dr. Daniel Monteith, and friends) together to give students the opportunity to get hands-on experience mapping, exploring and researching cave and karst systems in Southeast Alaska. Approximately 12 to 24 students and Glacier Grotto members participate in meetings held on the UAS campus. To date, UAS and Glacier Grotto-Juneau have been fortunate to have Kevin and Carlene Allred travel to Juneau to speak (continues on page 14)
In April 2006, the NSS gave us a Sara Corrie $250 grant to aid in reaching and exploring a virgin cave lead in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park in eastern Alaska. The grant was shared equally among the five participants (Kevin Allred, Donald Davis, Steve Lewis, Nick Olmsted, and Pete Smith) to partly defray transportation, food and equipment costs. Below is a summary of the results.

Our reasons for the expedition, as stated in my grant application:

"You may recall my article in the NSS News of August 1996 about a winter visit to Whispering Cave in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve. What I did not mention in that article (in order to forestall "scooping") was a large frost-rimmed entrance, in a ledge directly above the Whispering entrance but hundreds of feet higher, that we saw from the airplane as we were being flown out at the end of the trip. [See Fig. 1.]

"Whispering Cave ends in a sump, but had strong inhaling airflow during our winter visit. This wind was going up an impenetrably narrow fissure above the main passage before the sump. It probably goes to a "fossil" upper-level gallery whose entrance is the big lead we saw from the air. Cave moisture freezing as the rising "chimney effect" cave airflow exits this hole would account for the frost ringing the opening.

"If the respective entrance sizes are any indication, this upper cave may be a larger passage than Whispering Cave, and (because its stream has been pirated to the Whispering level below) may be faster and easier to explore, and is expected to bypass the Whispering terminal sump. Once the entrance has been reached (it will probably take some technical climbing), large passage could continue for miles toward glaciers above the cave ridge, and possibly beneath the glaciers, in the manner of Castleguard Cave, Canada. The geomorphology here suggests potential for the longest cave in Alaska (if not in the entire Far North!)"

Figure 1. Whispering Cave area from below. Triangular entrance is Upper Sheep Cave (a blind grotto), with Frost Ring Cave to its right; Whispering Cave is directly below Frost Ring. Photo by Nick Olmsted.

Figure 2. Main public use cabin at Peavine Bar backcountry airstrip (expedition HQ). Photo by Nick Olmsted.

After assembling at McCarthy, we flew to the Peavine Bar airstrip in the Chitistone valley on Aug. 28, 2006, spent the following eight full days based there at a free public-use cabin (Fig. 2), and flew back out Sept. 6. During that time, Kevin, Pete and Steve reached the cave lead (~150 feet directly above Whispering Cave up a sheer cliff; more than 200′ above the cliff base) via a difficult three-day rock climb (Figs. 3, 4). They then rigged a rope for survey teams, and Kevin, Pete, Steve and I returned to survey on Sept. 2.

The exploration verified some of our original observations and working assumptions. The entrance (continues on page 4)
Beyond the entrance chamber, however, the reality began to diverge from our best-case scenario. Only 30 feet in, the passage funneled into a passage about 15 feet wide, but frost-wedging shattering had created so much rubble that some digging was required to move aside enough rocks to permit belly-crawling through (Fig. 6). After 30 feet, the passage opened further, becoming a dry (but locally drippy) phreatic tube (Fig. 7) undulating gently up and down (more down than up). On the upward jogs, there were some

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