

21 June 2015 Miller Cave Passage Improvement by Dave Everton

I was unable to go caving on Saturday June 20 due to playing music at a wedding reception. However, I decided on fairly short notice (earlier that week) to do passage improvement in Miller on Sunday. I met David Schaefer at our regular meeting spot in Judah, then followed him back to his nearby home so his wife could use his vehicle, and we headed to Corydon, arriving at Dairy Queen around 9:45 to eat breakfast. We then picked up the drill and related supplies from the Rand-E-Vous Inn, making it most of the way up the hill in the Pumpkin, but having to back down after reaching loose rock and losing momentum. We parked at the bottom and walked up and back. Laura was waiting for us in her folding chair when we arrived at the parking area, which looks very different without the carport in back of the garage.

The weather was partly cloudy and hot by 11:20 as we headed toward the cave entrance, which was nice and cool, and I was greatly impressed with the removal of the obstacles just inside the entrance. Wow! As we proceeded further in, I was impressed with all of the recent improvements, and we all loved the t-rex 'fossil' setting on a large rock on the right side as we filed in. We took a very short rest in the sit-up dome; I'm always pretty hot by that time, and my glasses are fogged up pretty well. Putting them back on does no good until I've cooled down considerably, so I put them in the drill case and we continued ahead.

Arriving at the area I wanted to work, I explained my intention of moving the large rock (or part of it) at the bottom of the climbdown in what I call Cairn Hall, from my understanding of the Norm Pace description (I don't believe it is marked on his map). I could tell Laura was a little bit concerned that the rock I wanted to move might be holding up the ceiling in the area, but I really didn't believe it was. David and Laura went past me and started trenching the floor shortly beyond. I did some testing by prying, which reinforced my belief, but decided I'd be conservative and try to take out the right side (while facing it from the bottom). Let me explain that this particular spot has long been an insulting one to me, especially with a pack, and especially after long trips. At its best, it has always been a bottleneck, causing a wait while each person goes through. I've always taken my pack off because it was the kind of spot that the pack would just catch on the rock if one tried to drag it. It has never been a high priority for me to do anything with the rock, but now that we were in good shape with other parts of the crawl, and since there was another spot in this section that I wanted to remove some offending large rocks, this was going to be the day I worked on it. The last time we'd brought a drill into this part of the cave was on 16 March 2013, one week after establishing a connection with the Blowing Hole section of Binkley Cave, when we'd done some enlargement of the connection, which only Tim McLain had gone through on the previous Saturday.

On this day, I'd forgotten a belt, so I removed the 2-inch webbing on the drill case which Rand had put there, to use as one. Not ideal, but I would have been an unhappy camper had I not used something to hold up my britches!!! Even without a way to drag it though, the drill case was pretty easy to deal with, thanks to the wonderful recent passage improvement trips by Pat Burns, Kevin Romanak & CCIU cavers, Gary Roberson and his Indiana Caverns partner Rob, Dave Black, and John Benton. I drilled two holes in the right side of the large rock, but one shot out of the hole, and the other didn't go off (after two tries). I did two more holes, and once again only one went off, but this time it cracked the rock. After digging around it and using my wonder bar (I'd intentionally not brought my friend the Crowbar), I got it moved partially out of the way. David came over and with his help, although it was awkward, we got it completely moved out of the way. I did some more grooming around the area, and wow! When I later

went up and out, it was a breeze!! I believe others are going to greatly enjoy that improvement. As far as I was concerned, that spot alone made the entire trip worthwhile. But wait, there's more!!!

Meanwhile, Laura and David had been working away, trenching, chipping, banging, etc. After finishing in the big rock area, I took the liberty of 'grooming' (thanks John Benton for using that word in your recent report!!) a bit of what they'd already done, explaining to the others that I hoped their feelings weren't hurt. Additionally, I'd brought a hammer and was using it; they'd been working without one. I caught up to them at one of the 'bad' spots I wanted to see improved; they were each at one end of it. Since we had the drill, I looked to see two large rocks which might benefit from reducing and relocating. David agreed to try his hand at the process, so after my bossing him around, he proceeded to drill. Unfortunately, the charges did nothing. In fact, I had to laugh because when they went off, the average fart is louder!! It was a very faint 'poof'. I don't know what happened; I've never experienced them doing that. However, after switching batteries and trying one more time with not good success, by this time, I'd stolen Laura's spot when she went to have a snack, and started attacking the large rock on her side. I managed to get it moved, and by this time, Laura was talking about starting to head out. David and I decided to make it a mission to move this last rock, and felt we could dig it out and relocate it without the drill. However, I explained that it is hard to get me to stop when I'm on a mission, and therefore I had no idea when we'd be done. Laura therefore decided to leave to go visit her Dad before going home, and volunteered to take the drill out, so we packed it up and bade her farewell. I loved her exclamation of delight when she reached the spot where the large rock had been at the base of the climb up!

David and I started digging around the rock we had tried to reduce to size, and weren't at it long when it yielded to our persistence. The main reason I'd tried to break it apart first was because we had the tools with us to do it, although I'd brought the drill primarily with the first huge rock in mind. Regardless, we got it out of the way, and I figured I could easily spend quite a bit more time grooming, so we tidied up and started heading out. I half expected to catch up to Laura; we'd told her to just leave the Pelican case in the middle of the trail if she got tired of dealing with it, but we got all the way out and never heard her ahead of us, nor did we see the distinctly noticeable orange case. I was first to arrive at the entrance, and was very intrigued with what I saw as I stood at the base of the short climb at the entrance.

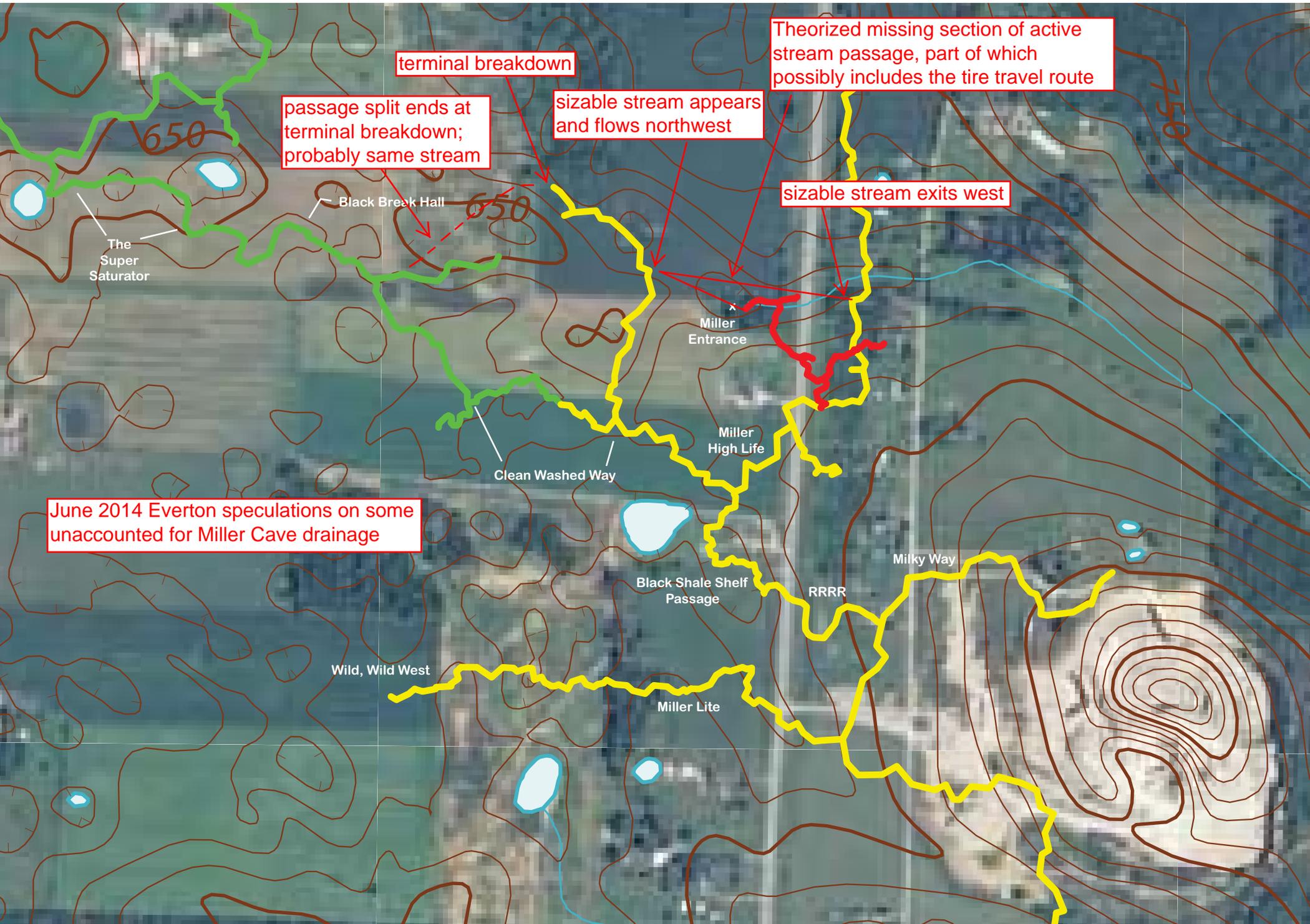
On the opposite side of the room from me, where the vertical shaft to the surface is on the left and the horizontal main entrance is on the right, there was a very noticeable fog going from left to right out the right entrance. Perhaps conditions were just right, but I've never noticed anything like it. I was so intrigued by it, I had David take my place and he saw it as well. I don't believe it was coming from the area we'd just exited. Although certainly cooler, the summertime air flow isn't strong exiting the cave. Further, when I got to near ceiling level, it was immediately hot! I headed toward the opposite wall near the air movement, and was surprised to see a very low crawlway extending off. I'd never noticed it before! In fact, I don't recall seeing evidence of anything on that side. David shone his bright light into it, and then crawled toward it. It was too small to proceed into without moving anything, but it appeared to both of us to be a passage. He could also sense some air movement coming toward him, although it seemed somewhat intermittent. However, I have no doubt about what I saw, although I'm not saying all that air was coming from that opening.

Since we started making frequent visits in that entrance after the 9 March 2013 breakthrough, we have learned quite a bit about how the cave reacts to flooding of various stages. We learned that a certain amount of water goes partway into Miller Cave and sinks in more than one location. We also learned

from surveying the lower level that it plots out very close to the entrance area, but 70 plus feet below it. We know that the majority of flood water going further into the cave ends up in that lower level. We also don't know where it joins in at base level, although I have my suspicion where it might come in. Nevertheless, I have for a while suspected there is a 'missing segment' of Miller Cave, although I do not have good reason to believe it is extensive. Could this recently revealed opening lead to a continuation of the cave and that missing segment? See the graphic further on in this report (which I had created last year) regarding my speculation about some of the drainage. The tire I refer to on that graphic was at one time in the lower level, but when Gary Roberson, David Schaefer, and I were there last year, it was gone. The lower level isn't shown on that graphic.

We chatted with a couple of Chris Mathes' tenants, who were mowing the lawn. It was good to hear the man say that Chris had told him about the cavers, saying if they saw a bunch of (or any) cars out by the field, to just know it was the cavers, and not to worry about it. I asked the man if he had visited Indiana Caverns and he said no, and I encouraged him to go visit. By the time we left the property, it was past 6, and I figured Indiana Caverns was already closed, so we didn't go by there. The air had really cleared up; although it was very hot. Nearly all of the ice in my small cooler had melted, although the beverages were nice and cold. However, the humidity had gone down; David checked his phone later to find it was at 47%. Woo-hoo!! We ate at Beef O' Brady's, where our waiter Rudy kindly gave me a father's day discount before knowing whether I was a dad or not (I used to be a step-dad). After great food and drink there and a gas stop up the road, we headed back to our homes, arriving before dark.

In spite of not doing a long hard trip on Sunday, I could still tell I did something, and perhaps the fitful sleep on Saturday night contributed to me being tired most of the day on Monday. However, I was very, very pleased with the result of our efforts, and consider that we have redone perhaps 90% of what the huge 7-inch spring rain caused in the old Miller portion of cave. The remaining 10% is beyond where we stopped, mainly in the section beyond the junction with one passage leading to Pat's Dig and the other to the Blowing Hole section connection. I actually believe the flooding will have made it easier to do some more improvement in that area still needing work, so it is all good. It was yet another wonderful day underneath the sinkhole plain south of Corydon!



terminal breakdown

passage split ends at terminal breakdown; probably same stream

sizable stream appears and flows northwest

Theorized missing section of active stream passage, part of which possibly includes the tire travel route

sizable stream exits west

June 2014 Everton speculations on some unaccounted for Miller Cave drainage

The Super Saturator

Black Break Hall

Miller Entrance

Miller High Life

Clean Washed Way

Black Shale Shelf Passage

RRRR

Milky Way

Wild, Wild West

Miller Lite