

April 2016 Camp Trip Summary

On April 28th, 2016, Dan Austin, Chris Pelczarski and Blase LaSala entered Jewel Cave for an exploration camp trip to the western branch. The trip began with a 4.5 hour journey from the elevator entrance to West Camp, hauling heavy camp packs. Once at West Camp, they unpacked their camp gear, and travelled another 45 minutes to begin their survey. The goal was to find a shortcut from the *wp* to the *jr* surveys. Normally a 2.5 hour trip around the long way, a connection would save over an hour of travel time.

Poking around in numerous lower-level leads, the explorers had little luck in finding a connection, but at an upper level they did find a series of passages with noticeable airflow. The team surveyed about 300 feet south, and then west, before reaching the end of the passage. Before leaving, they tried to climb into a larger passage above. Dan went first, and found that the passage ended in small chert crawls. Cutting the day a little short, they returned to West Camp to prepare for a big day the following morning.

The team awoke early the next day and travelled from West Camp to the lakes. This normally takes about 4 hours, but with a newly marked trail and only three cavers, it took just over 3 hours. After filling their water bottles, the explorers continued another 40 minutes to the southernmost point in the cave, and began another day of survey. The passage they entered was jumbled with breakdown, and confusing. It was hard to find a way through. They passed dozens of other passages in and around the breakdown, and continued to the southeast. Eventually, the passage opened up into a 50-foot high, 40-foot-wide passage called "Heinous Hall," because of the extreme difficulty of reaching the passage. Unfortunately it only goes a few hundred feet, so the team backed up and found a pit that connected to a lower level passage with airflow. At the bottom, a passage goes southeast, and there the team surveyed several hundred feet in high, narrow fissures that looked very similar to the passages near the lakes. To their dismay, the fissures narrowed to constrictions that were too tight to enter. The cavers called it a day and retreated to West Camp after surveying about 1,500 feet of passages.

The next morning, everyone agreed to make it a shorter survey day, and decided to explore a little closer to camp: High Country is about 2 hours southeast of the camp site, and has many leads that hadn't been checked on a trip last October. One of the leads is a deep pit. The team climbed down and mapped a few hundred feet to the northeast before encountering a very tight constriction. Chris was able to make the squeeze, and reported a walking-sized passage on the other side, but it was too difficult for the others to follow. So the team returned to the top of the pit and investigated another northeast-trending passage at an upper level. There, the cavers discovered one of the most decorated passages ever found in Jewel Cave. The floor is covered in a thick white layer of moon milk, so they named the large passage "The Moonwalk." There are popcorn stalagmites at numerous locations throughout the passage, along with frostwork, gypsum, and rims – often indicative of air flow. After surveying several hundred feet, the cavers abruptly encountered a 6-inch wide fissure with rims surrounding the opening. They could see through the crack another 10 feet, where a larger passage continued on the other side. After some searching, they found a way to squeeze into the crack from the bottom. This required a difficult 90-degree bend into the crack, and then contorting from a sitting

position to a sideways belly crawl. It was one of the more memorable constrictions in Jewel Cave. Through the passage on the far side is large, the team soon encountered a confusing jumble of breakdown. It seemed that most of the air was going up into a 50-foot high chimney, and it was clear that a climb wouldn't be possible on this trip. Continuing the space theme, this area is called, "The Outer Limits," and has many passages that will be explored on a future visit. Altogether, about 1,400 feet of passages were mapped that day.

On the morning of May 1st the explorers woke at noon, packed up, and returned to the surface. The total amount surveyed was 3,358.9 feet, making Jewel Cave 181.89 miles long.

It was a memorable trip, and everyone is anxiously awaiting a return trip in the near future.



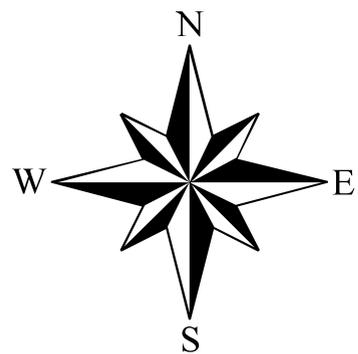
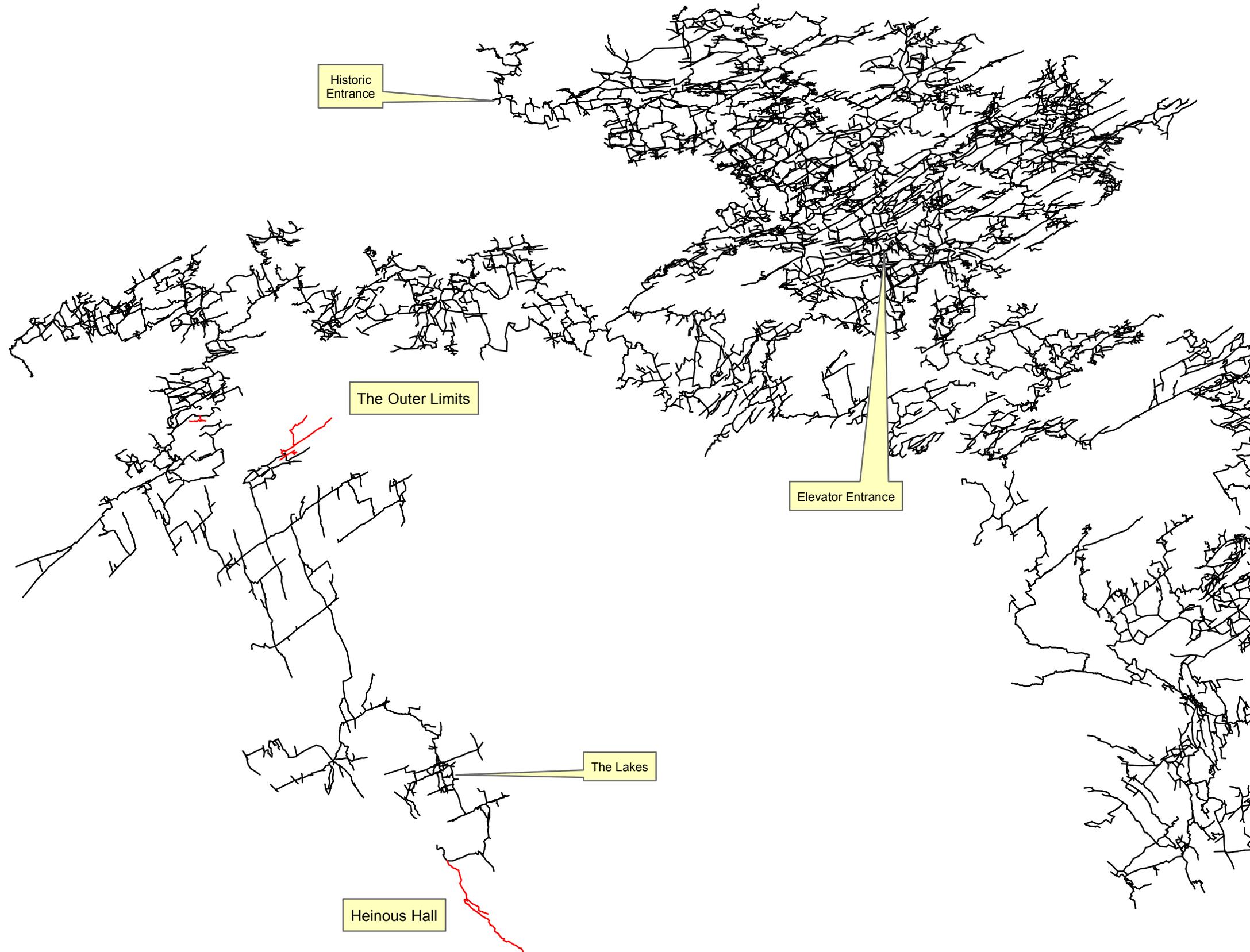
Above: Dan Austin makes the 90 degree bend into the tight spot at the end of the Moonwalk



Above: Chris Pelczarski illuminates spectacular 2" long aragonite needles near the Moonwalk



Above: Chris Pelczarski surveying in the newly discovered Moonwalk



Legend

- Jewel Cave Survey
- New survey added in April

