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The Exploration of Pot Springs

by Guy Bryant

Last year Steve Gerrard had asked me to write a series of articles for the NACD newsletter about many of the springs I explored and surveyed along the Withlacoochee River. I thought I would start first with Pot Springs and follow with another spring every newsletter. The springs I will be writing about are little known to most of the diving community. The two most popular springs along the Withlacoochee River are Madison Blue Spring and Suwanacoochee Spring. Many of you will never have heard of most of these other springs, for they are not very extensive and are usually only accessible by boat. Now, let's get on to Pot Springs.

I first saw Pot Springs in 1978 when Court Smith, Hal Davis, Buddy Sanders and I made a canoe trip down the Withlacoochee River from Madison Blue Springs to the Suwannee River. Our main purpose was to try to locate possible springs that would accommodate us with the line laying experience. Pot Springs was the first we saw. After putting in the river at Madison Blue, we canoed down river for about 20 minutes and came upon a nice looking spring on the left bank of the river. It was a nice large circle of blue water on the river's edge with no run, and it dropped down to 12 feet with a small opening at the bottom. Judging from the size of the boil we figured it had quite a current coming out of the small opening. We were also very excited because the water clarity was equal to that of Madison Blue.

Shortly after our canoe trip, Court Smith, Buddy Sanders and Doug Douglas, who was visiting Court from Missouri, dived the spring. Court said that the entrance was small with quite a current, but it is possible to pull oneself in for about 4 feet where it quickly opens up to a nice size tunnel. All three divers got inside the entrance where they discovered no line, so Court whipped out his reel and they ran off about 300 feet of line. At

this point they stopped because of a restriction and turned the dive.

I kept thinking about this spring and decided to have a look at it myself. So I contacted Lee Sams, whom no longer dives, but in the past has helped me add thousands of feet of line in various caves. Lee and I loaded up a canoe on August 17, 1980 and set off to have a look at Pot Springs. Since Court had told us the line came to a restriction after 300 feet, we decided to use dual 80's for this dive. When we arrived at the spring, we eagerly geared up with line in hand, hoping to add some more, and proceeded on through the small entrance and on back to the end of the line. At the end of the line, Lee and I looked on through the restriction and decided that we could easily fit through. So I got out my reel, spliced into Court's line and away we went. The restriction quickly opened back up to nice size tunnel about 5 feet high and 7 feet wide. After laying about 50 feet of line we came to a fork in the tunnel, with the left fork being much bigger than the right fork, so naturally we chose the left fork. Almost immediately the bottom became very silty, so we had to be very careful not to stir anymore than we could help. After about 50-75 feet we came into a nice little room at a depth of 60 feet. The ceiling went up to our left at a depth of about 45 feet but to our right the tunnel dropped down into a small pit with a very large boulder blocking the tunnel at 70 feet depth. We could look around the boulder and see tunnel continuing on, but there was no way we could fit through to the other side. I then tied off my line and we decided to check the right fork we had seen earlier.

At the right fork we spliced into our line and proceeded to add line. This tunnel was much smaller than the main tunnel. For those familiar with the Rocky Horror of Madison, it is just like it. We slowly worked our way through this small tunnel carefully adding line until about 300 feet *con't on page 37*

Pot Springs con't from 36

in, where we were forced to stop -- being we were out of line. We turned and surveyed all that we had done on our way out, with plans to return soon.

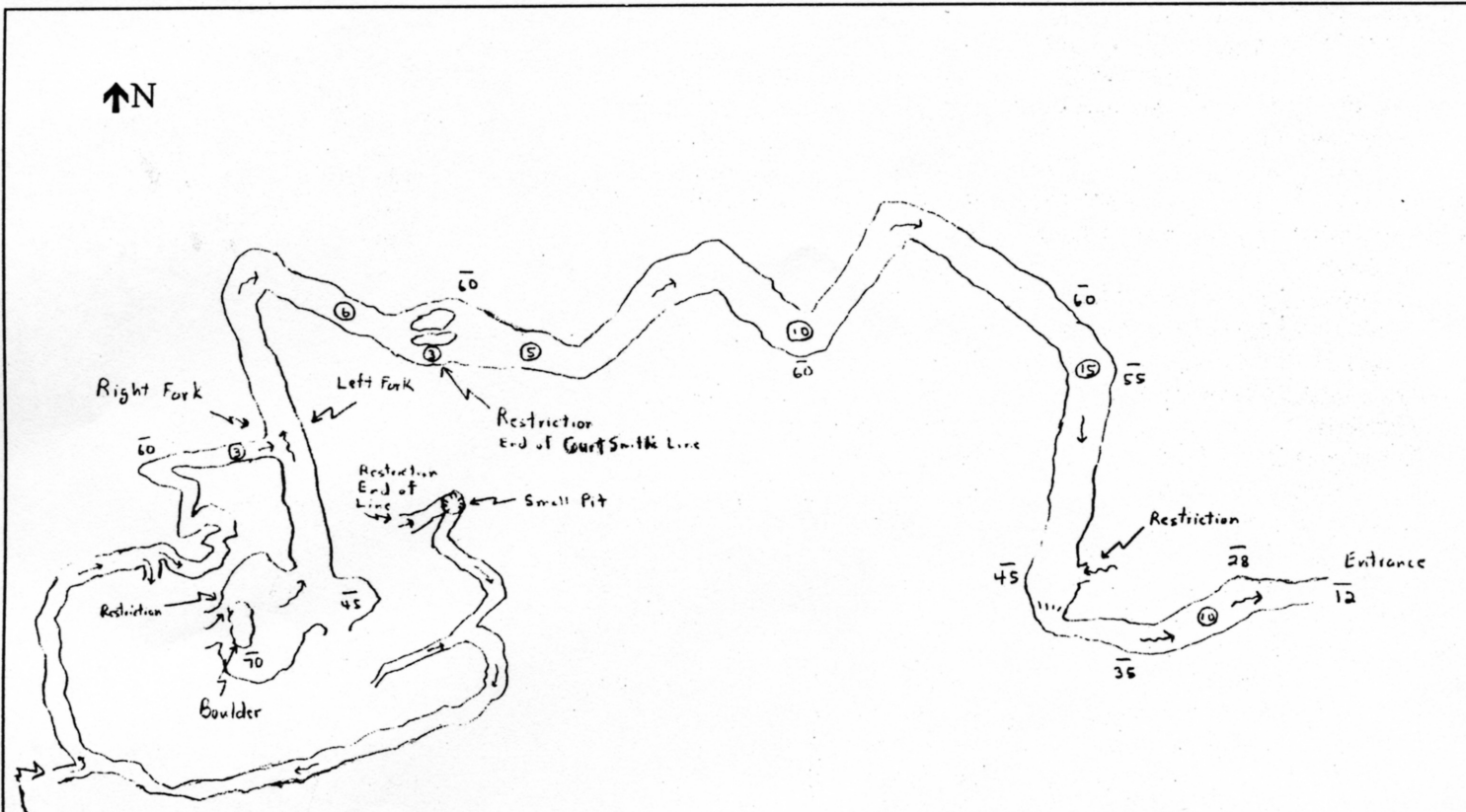
On September 21, 1980 Lee Sams and I returned to add more line. This time we used dual 104's in case the cave kept going. We made our way back to the end of our line in the right fork and proceeded to add more. About 300 feet later I found myself at another fork with the left fork being extremely small. I decided to check the left first since I didn't think it would go far, and sure enough I was right. I went about 15 feet before the tunnel got so small I was almost wedged. I tied off the line and backed out while surveying at the same time. It was just too small to turn around. We then went to the right and went about 50 feet before it dropped down from 60 feet to 70 feet depth into a small room with the water issuing from two small cracks. We then turned and mapped on the way out. At this point we had a total of 537 feet of line in the Right Fork of this cave with all of it being about the size of the Rocky Horror of Madison Blue.

A month later on October 5, 1980, Lee Sams and I went back to Pot Springs again to wrap up some loose ends on our survey. We again went back into the right fork and in the process of tying up the loose ends of our survey, we noticed a small upstream tunnel on the left as we were coming out. Lee decided to check out this tunnel, so he got out his reel and pro-ceeded on in, with me waiting on the main line. After a few seconds I couldn't see much of anything due to all the silt coming out behind Lee. A few minutes later I could hear the banging of tanks on the cave ceiling. Then to my surprise some steel 104's came at me out of the silt. Lee had gotten himself so tightly wedged into the small tunnel that he couldn't turn or back out. So he loosened his tanks and slipped out from under them, then he was able to turn and push them back out into the tunnel where I was waiting. He then put his tanks back on and we headed on out to plot our survey data.

Once I had plotted the survey data, I noticed that all the tunnels ended pointing in the same direction with the current all coming from the same direction as well. I then theorized that the tunnels may all

come back together on the other side of the boulder in the pit room. We decided that one day we should go to the pit room with a sledge hammer and see if we could open the tunnel enough to slip through with a single tank to confirm as to whether the tunnel continued or not.

It wasn't until about 3 years later on November 19, 1983 that I decided to take a crack at opening the tunnel around the boulder in the pit room. I recruited the help of Court Smith and Lamar English for this project. We took a small hand held hatchet and a sledge hammer for our cave widening project and once at the pit room we eagerly began. First I held the hatchet to a small section of rock and Court struck it with the sledge hammer. Only a very small piece of rock came off. Man, was this hard rock. I started to doubt this would work but we kept at it alternating with the sledge hammer. We stirred up so much silt that you could hardly see two feet. Lamar got tired of waiting on us, so he signaled that he was leaving and took off. Court and I continued to pound and pound until after 64 minutes we had the opening big enough to slip through with a



Sketch of Pot Springs
Hamilton County, Florida
Surveyed by Guy Bryant and Lee Sams
Total Surveyed Tunnel 1538 feet

38
single tank. We then turned and slowly exited the cave in 6 inch visibility. We never saw each other on the way out. Court would go a few feet and wait for me to bump into him, then proceed again. We spent 23 minutes at 10 feet and still the visibility was bad at about 3 feet.

Shortly after that dive, the rains came, raising the river, thus destroying the visibility of the spring. We then planned to try slipping past the pit room boulder in the spring when the river normally recedes. However, as things go, I became involved in other projects and never got back to Pot Springs. It wasn't until September 19, 1987 that I finally got back to tackling the unknown tunnel beyond the pit room. Lamar English and I made this attempt. Lamar wore single 72 side mounts so he could squeeze through the restriction. I used dual 104's and was going to wait at the restriction for Lamar to do his thing.

We geared up and proceeded on to the pit room eagerly anticipating what might lay waiting for us on the other side. I was leading the dive and when I came into the pit room and glanced over at the boulder and restriction I could not believe what I saw. Fresh WHITE line running through the restriction. My only thought was "I HAVE BEEN SCOOPED!". Needless to say our excitement was dampened. Lamar said the tunnel was about 4-6 feet high and about 6 feet wide. He went about 150 feet before turning and reported that the tunnel was still going.

A few weeks after this dive we found out that Woody Jasper and Tom Morris were the one's who has scooped us. Well, that's what happens when you drag your feet on projects.

Last September, Rick Green and I loaded up my canoe and set out from Madison Blue to dive Pot Springs. The spring was nice and clear with lots of current. We went on through the entrance and about 300 feet back, where Court Smith had originally ended his line, we found it broken. We quickly repaired the line and continued on to the it room. When we entered the pit room I was really surprised. The boulder had slid and was completely blocking the tunnel! There was a crack about 3 feet in length and 6 inches long. We looked through the crack, but that was all we could do. There was no way to get through without moving the boulder. The line Woody and Tom had put through the restriction was now disappearing into rock.

After looking around the pit room we went back to the fork and took the right fork through the small "Rocky Horror" looking tunnel. I let Rick lead the way so he could see the tunnel better without having to eat my silt. Shortly after we started down this tunnel, Rick paused to make a right turn in a very small area, so I settled to the bottom to wait for him to push on through. As I was waiting I just happened to glance to my left and saw a tunnel sucking some of Rick's silt. I thought to myself, "I don't remember this tunnel!". I must have missed it on my earlier dives because the tunnel was always full of silt when exiting, thus limiting my visibility. Also the position of the tunnel would make it impossible to see on the way in unless you looked behind yourself. I quickly marked the line so that Rick and I could check it on the way out.

We made it to the end of the line, then headed back toward the new tunnel I had just seen. Once there, I whipped out my trusty reel, tied off to the main line and started slowly, inching my way down the tunnel with Rick close behind. We shortly passed our silt and were in clear water again. Ninety feet later we came to a pit. I wrapped the line on a projection at the top of the pit and started dropping with silt following close behind. It was a rather narrow silty pit. I dropped from a depth of 57 feet to 81 feet into an upstream-downstream tunnel. I then noticed a line running down it. I guessed that I had just found a way around the pit room boulder! I quickly went downstream and sure enough my guess was correct. I then quickly went back to the pit, but Rick was still waiting at the top due to so much silt. I waited a few seconds and he began to drop on down. Once down the pit we headed upstream in a very silty tunnel about 4-5 feet high and 6 feet wide. We went about 150 feet then turned because we were at thirds on our air.

I still need to return, but since this last dive, the rains came again. I plan to go back to map my new route around the pit room and tunnel that Woody Jasper and Tom Morris put line in. Who knows, perhaps I will find another virgin tunnel here. □

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