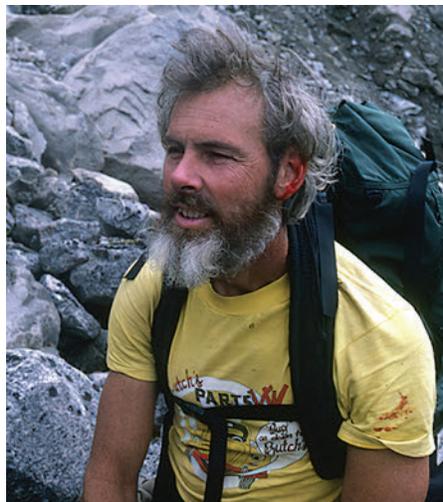


OBITUARIES

Youmans. Jim's life is celebrated most by his friendship to his friends and his thoughtful consideration of others. Arthur Champion said it best. "He was a tower of strength, courageous, and compassionate and fun to be with. He deserved much respect." He was good man and as my mentor in caving and second father I surely miss him. Jim in his day was a tough cave explorer and ardent vertical caver. He would demand the most out of his caving partners. He spent most of his working life on rope as a high rise window washer and water proofing contactor. Jim was a member of the Rock Eater Grotto and former president of the Dogwood City Grotto. Jim routinely led the grotto vertical caving trips to north Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee. Jim was also known as "Iron Man" because of his physique and he climbed rope using the Texas climbing system in vertical caves and on cliff faces, requiring great upper body strength. Even when a waterfall crashed into his chest he pumped up the rope. Later in life he switched to a rope walker, which he used commercially and on the tallest cliffs.

He started cavers rappelling and rope climbing the 660 foot drop on Whiteside Mountain, North Carolina. His specialty was rigging and bolting and his anchors are used today on Whitesides and recently in Ellison's Cave and in many TAG caves. Jim was the John Henry of bolting and placing the perfect anchor for a free rappel was his forte. Jim loved rope work and rappelled and climbed El Capitan (2,650 feet) in Yosemite, California; Royal Gorge Bridge (1,020 feet), Black Canyon of the Gunnison (1,500 feet), The Diamond on Longs Peak (1,000 feet) in Colorado and Mt Thor, the world's longest rappel at over 3,200 feet, in Auyuittuq, Baffin Island, Canada. In Mexico, Jim also climbed Texas up Golondrinas (1,094), El Sotano de Barro (1,200 feet) and Sotanito de Ahuacatlan (970 feet), and Hoya de Guaguas (720 feet) and Pozo de Gavalan (400 feet).

In 1974, Jim participated on a French/Italian expedition to bottom the Gouffre Berger at 1,141 meters deep, second deepest cave in the world. The day after getting off the airplane, he bottomed the cave wearing a wetsuit, on a 30-hour trip. Jim and Jim Smith were the only two on the expedition to reach Sump I because they wore wetsuits. The swims stopped the other cavers. Inspired by Peter Lord (UK), he advised us to wear wetsuits when exploring deep wet caves, as did the British. The wetsuit caving done in Europe opened a whole new era of cave exploration in TAG during the 70s. No longer did waterfall



James E. Youmans

(aka "Iron Man")

NSS7004 FR

Jim Youmans passed away May 20, 2021, at his home and is survived by his partner of 37 years Kathleen Mackay and brother and sister in-law Phil and Lee

rappels and long low air space water crawls mean the end of the cave and an explosion of new deep multiple drop caves (400-500 feet deep), affectionately called “horror holes” were explored.

Jim spearheaded ridgewalking in Jackson County, Alabama, and Crow Creek Valley, Tennessee, every weekend during winter months as miles of ridges in Jackson County and Franklin County were still virgin. He ridgewalked with Tommy Thurman (deceased 2020), ET Davis, Jim Smith and others. He was involved in the exploration and mapping of Stoned Well, Teddy Bear Well, Lacy Pot, Langstons Cave, Bell Well, Elmos Canyon, Illiad and Odyessy Cave, Mandy’s Pit, to name a few. In Georgia he was involved in exploring caves in Johnson Crook in Johnson Crook Cave and on Fox Mountain Cemetery Pit, Byers Cave, Rockeater Pit, etc. In Tennessee, he mapped and explored Wilkerson Hollow Horror Hole. He caved all over TAG and was the first to set out to do 1,000 foot rope-work weekends in dropping different pits and climbing the mountain five or six times to reach the shafts 500 feet above the valley floor fueled by just an RC Cola and a moon pie. His favorite caving buddies also included Mark Lassiter, Buddy Lane, Smokey Caldwell, Kent Ballew, Trick Howard, Elwin Hannah, and others. His favorite pits were Fantastic Pit (585 feet) in Ellisons Cave, Surprise Pit (404 feet) in Fern Cave, Neversink (164 feet), Greens Well (226 feet, Valhalla (224 feet), Balcony Sinks (130 feet), Four Wells (130 feet), and Mystery Falls (284 feet). He loved wet caves like Stamps River Cave and Dancing Fern Cave.

In 1975, Jim co-led the successful expedition to the Gouffre de la Pierre Saint Martin (PSM), the world’s deepest cave in France, after having laid the groundwork the year before in a meeting with Rubin Gomez and Max Cosyns of the Association pour la Recherche Speleogique Internationale a la Pierre Saint Martin (ARSIP) in Sainte-Engrace, France. The ARSIP set the goals for the expedition and the main goal was the survey of the connection between the Affluent Larumbe above Eldon Cascade and M3. The goal was accomplished by surveying over 400 meters of windy, cold, wet crawling through potholes and up cascades through tubes to the connection chamber. Jim Youmans, Arthur Champion (UK), Fred Wefer and Jim Smith enjoyed the French Champagne left by the French cavers from M3, a new higher entrance. After exiting the camp via the Tete Sauvage entrance, two British cavers (Graham Wilton Jones and John Dukes) who camped next to us on the Col Du Pescamo invited the US team to help them explore SC3 (Gouffre Beffroi), having just been discovered on the Soum

Coy. The shaft series was explored to a depth of 340 meters and connected into the Affluent Bessabukaro of the PSM for a new higher entrance and a world depth record of 1332 meters that lasted until a higher entrance M31 was connected in 1982. It’s the only time so far that American Cavers have been involved in setting a world depth record in caving.

The last expedition caving Jim Youmans was involved in was the 1985 Expedition to Sistema Huautla. Jim worked in Sotano San Agustin and had to wait out high water in a shaft series in flood after a heavy rain. His major contribution to the expedition along with two other TAG cavers (Richard Schrieber and Frank Bogle) was in the discovery and exploration of Nita Ntau and Nita Nido near San Andreas. Both cave entrances connected to the top of the 136-meter-deep TAG Shaft. Sotano Agua de Carrizo was connected into the top of the TAG Shaft in 2018, and a crack in the bottom of the TAG shaft was enlarged and 300 meters of shafts connected into LaGrieta, adding at least four more entrances to Sistema Huautla. Jim said that 1985 was the last year he physically could have made a real contribution to the expedition. Jim had problems with his knees and several knee replacements cut back his caving. Eventually he was wheel chair bound. He continued to pass his knowledge on to younger cavers. He was an inspiration and teacher to many cavers. His memory will live on and we, his many friends, many not named, shall miss him. As Mark Lassiter stated, “The passing of Iron Man is the end of an era”.

Jim Smith NSS14529FLB