

# Publishers' Diary: Greig's Caves

Photographs by Mike Davis Written by Gloria Hildebrandt

Time for a confession. I really like the 1980s' film *Quest for Fire*: the tribal relationships, the created languages, the woolly mammoths, the cannibalism, the fire making, the vast scenery of untouched nature. And Mike likes caving. He has explored underground networks of caves since 1983, in Australia, Canada, the U.S., Mexico and Cuba. For many years, he was a member of the Toronto Caving Group and the National Speleological Society in the U.S. When we learned that Greig's Caves near Lion's Head was the location for some of the scenes for *Quest for Fire*, both our interests came together. It was natural that we should check them out.

A shaft of sunlight probes a cave entrance, showing rock fall that resembles steps. ▶



▲ Gloria at one of Greig's Caves, dwarfed by massive rocks.

The truth is that it's impossible to tell which of the 10 caves were used for the movie, and while the caves are fascinating, they don't offer much for the true caving enthusiast used to vast underground openings.

"The caves are showy, with spectacular entrances but are generally shallow," is how Mike describes them. For the general population which doesn't know much about caving, these are an impressive introduction to large, accessible caves. They look like one-room chambers suitable to live in. The Flintstones would be right at home here. One cave even has what looks like a window beside the front opening!





▲ Greig's Caves, although shallow, invite exploration.

We've heard that some readers keep our issues for reference for when they travel through the Niagara Escarpment, deciding to visit places we've featured. For this reason we should be clear that you have to be fairly fit to see the caves. They're at the end of a trail through Escarpment woods, which takes about an hour to walk. You must sign a waiver first. Hiking boots or running shoes are required. Walking sticks are offered and are good to use. There is a well-worn path all the way to the caves and right past them, but it is naturally uneven, rocky and steep in places. The rocks may also be somewhat slippery. Exploring

these caves is a mild workout.

It is also challenging to move around inside the caves, because the "floors" are covered with rock fall. Some are large boulders while others are smaller with sharp edges. Some rocks wobble underfoot when you put weight on them. This is not meant to discourage you from experiencing the interior of the caves, which is cool, quiet and sheltered. And as some of Mike's photos show, the views from inside the caves looking out, can be unforgettable.

This is likely an ancient cedar clinging to life on a cliff face. ▶



**How They Were Formed**

For information about how the Escarpment came to be, we can find no better reference than Dr. Walter Tovell's 1992 book *Guide to the Geology of the Niagara Escarpment*.

Describing Greig's Caves, Tovell writes "The wave-cut of 'sea caves' are above the shore of Barrow Bay. They were formed by waves in Proglacial Lake Algonquin... The rock is Amabel dolostone." This sent

me looking up his explanation of Lake Algonquin.

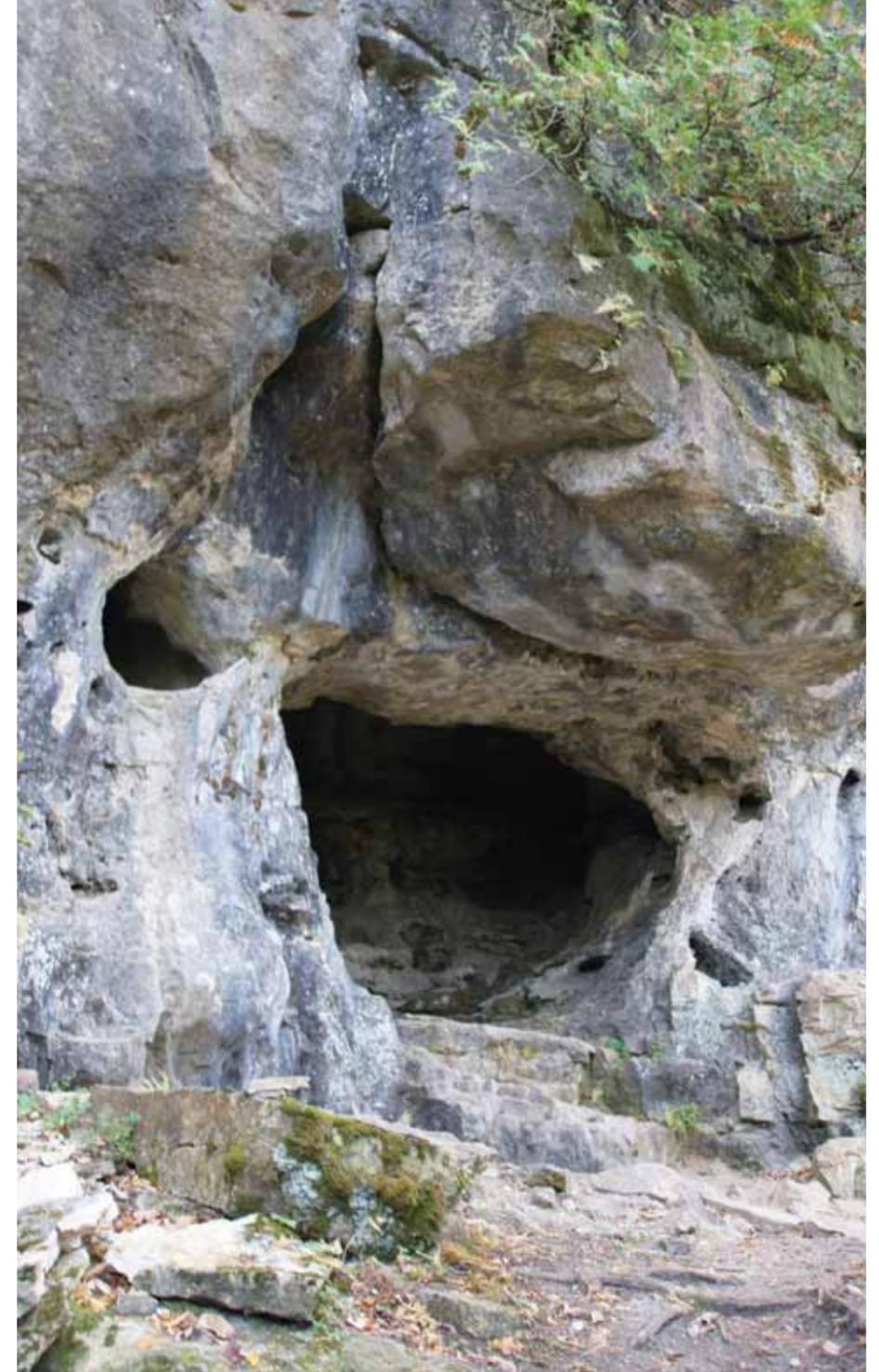
"The Great Lakes formed from the melting of glacial ice beginning about 14,000 years ago," he writes. "As the ice receded, the lakes went through a series of stages. About 11,500 years ago, a huge lake, known as Proglacial Lake Algonquin, covered much of what is now southern Ontario. As the ice receded, new outlets were



opened, and Lake Algonquin drained away, leaving low level stages in the Huron and Georgian Bay Basins. These were followed by the Nipissing Great Lakes... These waters partially flooded the Bruce Peninsula."

In other words, the waves of ancient lakes wore

◀ Flowstone formations can be seen at the inside walls of some of the caves.



▲ "Fred Flintstone's house" with a window beside the entry.

away and eroded the softer rock formations of previous shorelines, leaving caves high on the Escarpment bluffs today.

**Flowstone**

Some of the cave "walls" show unusual rock formations as if the rock had melted and

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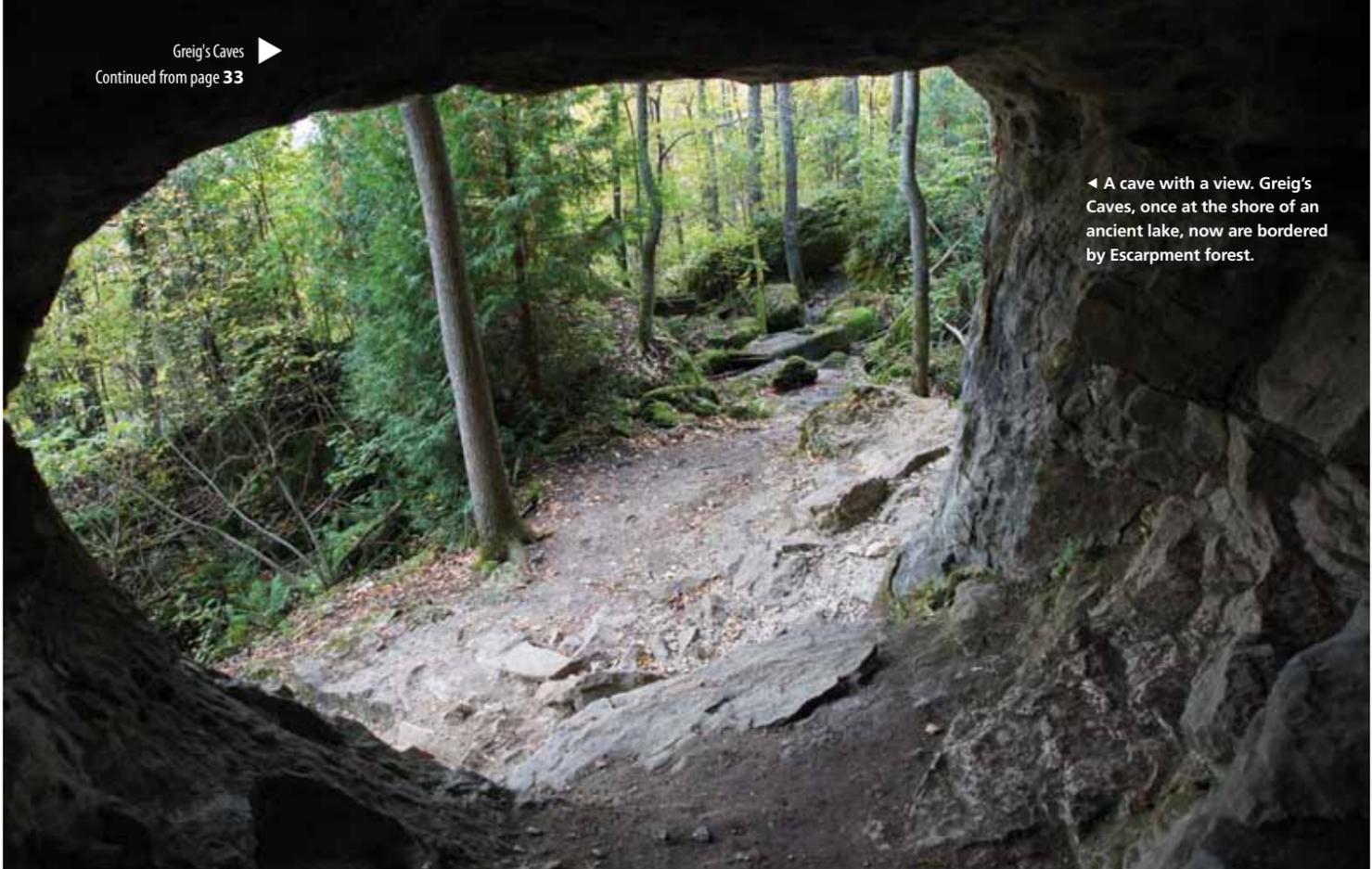
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A cave with a view. Greig's Caves, once at the shore of an ancient lake, now are bordered by Escarpment forest.

hardened again. These are called flowstone.
'Flowstone starts with acidic groundwater flowing through cracks in the overlying limestone rock,' says Mike. 'It dissolves some of the calcium carbonate (CaCO3) in the rock, then flows further down and in some cases pops out to cave walls or ceilings. Once in

the air the groundwater releases some carbon dioxide gas. Becoming less acidic, the water becomes super-saturated forcing the CaCO3 to precipitate out as solid rock or other speleothems, which are cave formations. This can take a very long time in some cases. They can be very delicate and can be damaged if you even touch them.'

Mike goes on to explain 'What fascinates me about caves are their ancient ages, lives measured in geological time frames coupled with incredible fragility where the slightest touch or a single breath can break a speleothem and change it forever.'
Give yourself a good couple of hours to enjoy this excursion. NEV

For more about local caves, see our feature 'Beginner Caves on the Escarpment,' photographed and written by Mike and me, December 2008.



Trees and a rock pillar are framed by the stone walls of a cave.

Greig's Caves
407 Scenic Cave Rd. east of Bruce Road 9 south of Lion's Head
519.377.8762
greigscaves.ca

Toronto Caving Group offers beginner caving trips to local Niagara Escarpment caves: 647.892.5240 or orbonline.net/~tcg
National Speleological Society: caves.org

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