

Fool's Gold Resurvey

Summary

On August 30, 2014, Hope Brooks, Eric Pelkey, Bob Alderson, and Tony Canike (reporting) entered Butler Cave to resurvey the Fool's Gold section beyond Penn State Lake. We surveyed a total of 810.5 feet, and over 700 feet of that will be added to the current computed length of Butler Cave. Average shot length was 20.6 feet, with the longest shot being 57.6 feet. We are planning a return trip to survey a side loop, push the end of the passage, examine a potential bolt climb, and clean up a few leads and loop-backs.

Objective

On the most recent map of Butler Cave, the late 1980's maps by Les Good, the Fool's Gold section is shown as sketched, not surveyed, and the Compass data file for Butler contains no data for this section. And the December 2013 and March 2014 "Butler Survey Data Parties" did not uncover the missing data, though it may still be in the files. So, we don't have data for what appears to be almost 1000' of passage in Butler Cave.

After the recent connection between Butler Cave and Boundless Cave, we now have a proper relationship established between Boundless and Butler. So the proximity of Fool's Gold to Boundless Cave became more interesting and increased the priority of resurveying Fool's Gold.

Observations from the August 30, 2014 Survey Trip

While preparing to enter Butler, and on the trip to Penn State Lake, we theorized about the history of the survey(s) of Fool's Gold, as there were a number of indications that the history was not straightforward (more on this later.) We also joked that the passage must not be very friendly, as the survey of this section had not been completed and properly documented in 50-some years.

We entered the cave at 10:30, eagerly anticipating the wavy wet wade across Penn State Lake (PSL). We took the "new" route to PSL: SOFA Entrance, Sand Canyon, Natural Bridge, Upstream Maze, Wind Dig Shortcut, Rotunda Room, and Cathy's Crawl. This route seems much easier and faster than the historic route to the lake, which involved taking the left after the Natural Bridge, passing by the turn off to Awesome Orange, down the Rolling Sumps¹ (which often need to be dug out), the Right Hand Turn¹, and up to the other side of Cathy's Crawl.

Each of us had planned our individual "clothing strategy" so we would be relatively dry after crossing PSL. On my past traverses of PSL, I just waded through and gotten wet, as our objectives then had been well past the lake and my clothing would have time to partially dry as we travelled. However, Fool's

¹ While the names "Rolling Sump" and "Right Hand Turn" are not commonly currently used, these places need names, as they are often discussed. Jack Igoe used these names for these places in a report for a trip on Expedition 26, on April 28, 1979, in the BCCS News Vol. 5, 1979, p. 6.

Gold is at the top of the Up Climb, very close to PSL, so there would not be time to dry out. This trip, my approach was to cross PSL in synthetic boxer shorts, a short sleeve top, and rubber boots without socks. Dry base layer long bottoms were in my pack, and my cave suit and socks went into a trash bag to keep them dry for the crossing. Across the lake I drained my boots, put on dry socks and dry bottoms, and donned my suit. I was dry and happy. Others had different approaches which appeared to work well for them.



Photo 1 - Changing after crossing Penn State Lake

After we were all re-dressed, we quickly moved to the base of the Up Climb. I free climbed to the top and began hauling packs. Once all the packs were up, I set off to find Fool's Gold while the others finished climbing. I was happily surprised to find the passage off the top of the Up Climb to be large, dry, and comfortable. On arriving at a junction, I dropped my pack and ran ahead for a few minutes. For once I could run ahead of the survey team and not be chastised for scooping!

I returned and met everyone at the junction. We pulled out maps to find a tie-in, which we quickly found as station 13. Hope setup the book, and Eric, Bob, and I readied instruments and station marking materials. We first surveyed a small loop from 13, to the start of Fool's Gold proper, through a small unsurveyed dome, and back very close to 13. There appeared to be two sets of pre-existing stations marked in carbide in this area, one set marked with low two-digit numbers, and another set without numbers.

The entrance to Fool's Gold is high above a four-way junction of two canyons with at least three levels of passage, so Eric rigged a hand line for safety. We climbed up and we were off to the races.

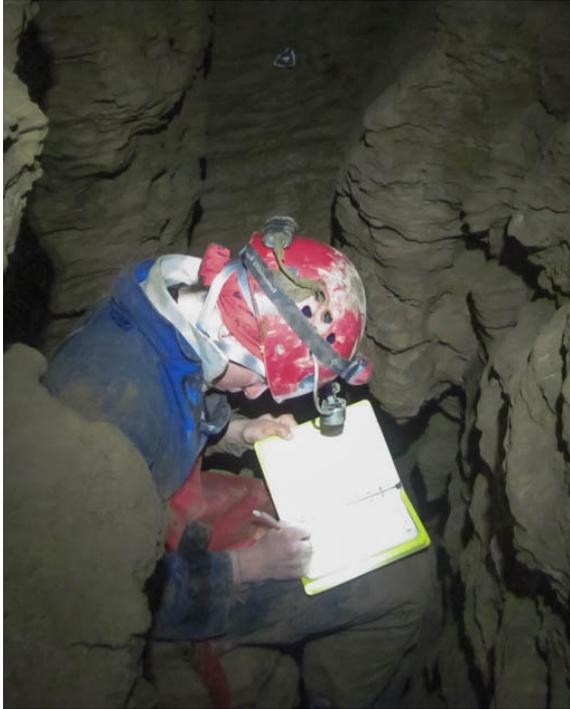


Photo 2 - Hope on book.



Photo 3 - Eric on clino and Hope on book.



Photo 4 - Bob in canyon passage.

After about 100' of hands and knees, most of the passage was dry and walking, a partially-filled canyon with a dirt floor. Now we noticed two sets of stations set in carbide, one in the low 2-digits, and one in the low three digits (in the form "11x"). Both sets decreasing as we progressed into Fool's Gold, so both teams apparently surveyed out. We located two junctions (FG15, FG20) to a central side loop shown on the map, but we did not survey it.

We located a high lead that initially looked like a 25' bolt climb, but it can be accessed via a steep mud slope and traversed to via a mud bridge, giving a much shorter climb, probably about 15' of traversing and 10 feet of climbing. Perhaps.

We surveyed some more, and noted another high lead between FG26 and FG27. Eventually the flat dry walking passage ended. We found an old carbide station A1 – just what you expect to find a few hours into a survey trip well into the cave. We also found an historic cave artifact, shown in Photo 5.



Photo 5 - Historic artifact, presumably to fill a carbide lamp.

At this point we began climbing up through sleazy mud-covered breakdown. We surveyed for a while, getting a little slimed as we balanced on muddy slopes and breakdown 30' above the floor. The last station we set was FG35. We weren't overjoyed at the thought of downclimbing back the way we climbed, so another way was found down, and we ended up coming down the previously noted high lead between FG26 and FG27.

We packed up and heading out, gathering gear stashed around Fool's Gold, the start of our survey, and at Penn State Lake. While we were packing up, I was wondering why my Stenlight was so dim (see Photo 6.)

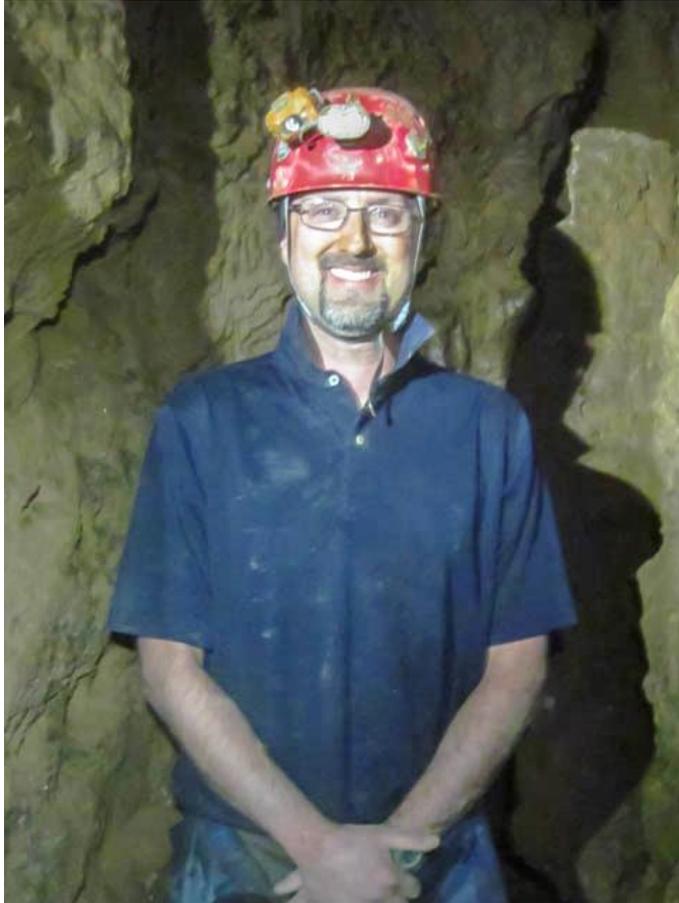


Photo 6 - Tony with mud-covered Stenlight.

It took us about two hours at an easy pace to get to the SOFA exit from Fool's Gold. On the way out we talked how nice it was going to be to come out to a homestead full of good friends, coolers of cold beer, a bonfire, and maybe even a hot shower. Alas, when we exited, the homestead was cold, dark, quiet, and empty; the only soul to greet us was the very lonely dog Maggie.

A Little History of Fool's Gold Surveys

Fool's Gold appears on four maps and is mentioned in three BCCS Newsletters, to the best of my knowledge.

On the most recent map, the October 1987 Section 4 of the Les Good maps, Fool's Gold has been shown as sketched in (dashed lines). But the passage was in surprising detail for being not surveyed and "just" sketched, as you can see in Figure 1. So many people conjectured that it must have been surveyed at some point.

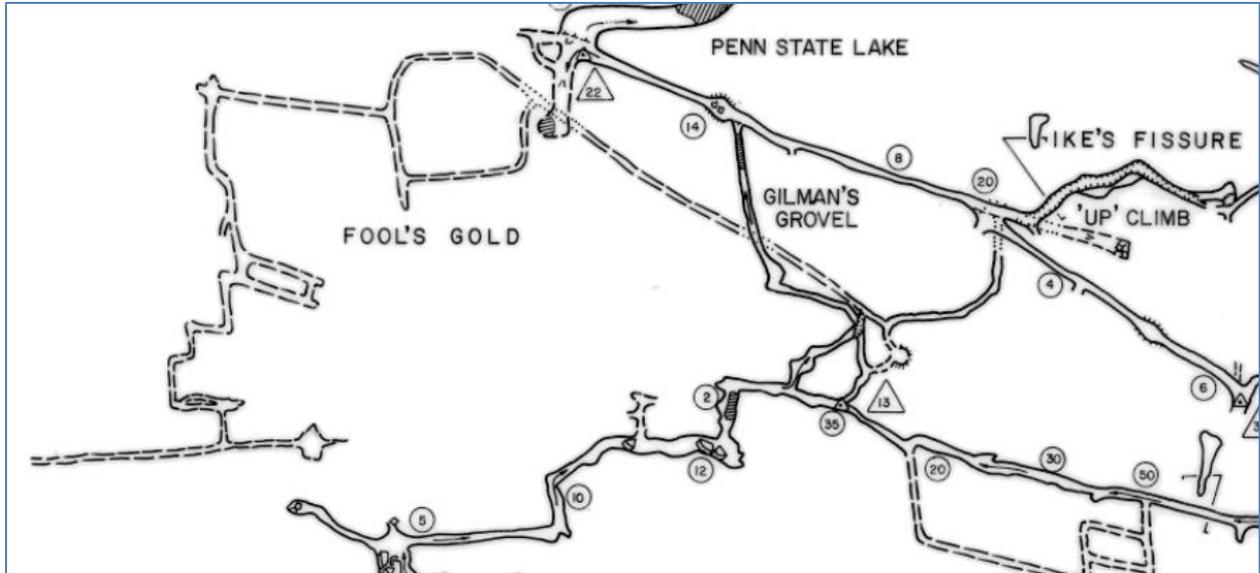


Figure 1 - Portion of the October 1987 Les Good Section 4 map of Butler Cave.

Going backwards chronologically, Fool's Gold next appears on Jack Igoe's 1980 working map "Beyond Penn State Lake", shown in Figure 2. Note that the passage at the far end of Fool's Gold is not shown on this map, so presumably this passage was not known in 1980. Also, the large central loop in Fool's Gold is not closed on the 1980 map. So apparently some exploration was done between 1980 and 1987.

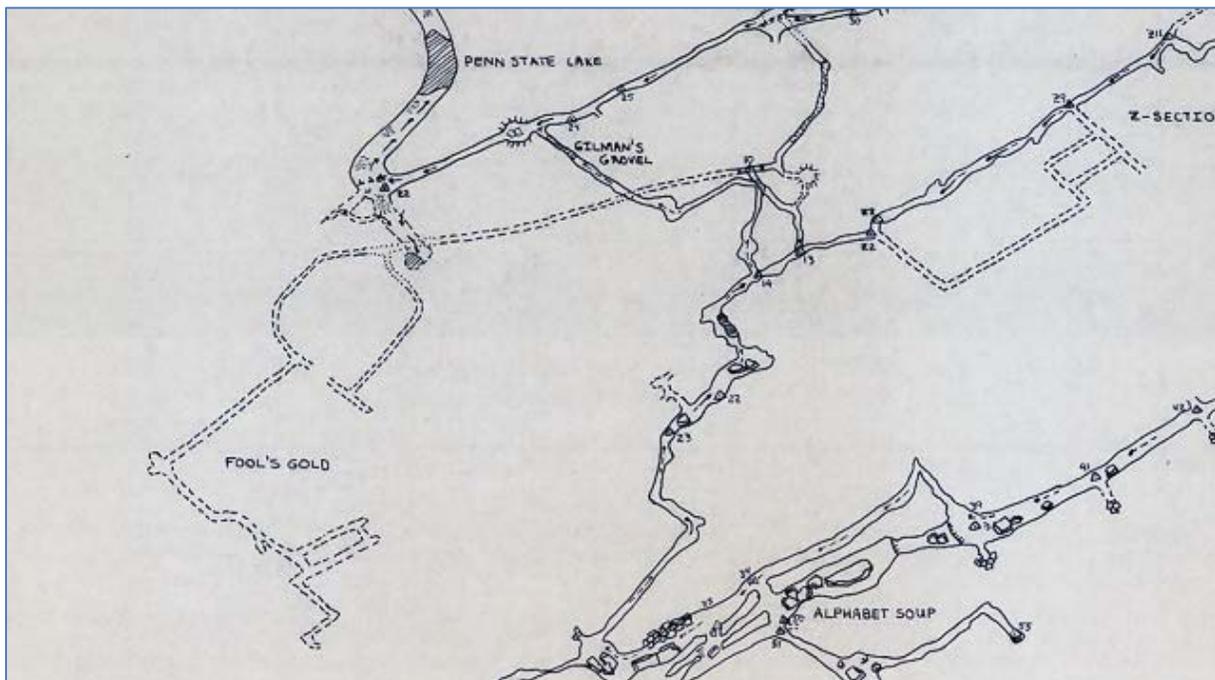


Figure 2 - Portion of the September 1980 Jack Igoe working map "Beyond Penn State Lake".

Nevin suggested we look at his 1971 map, a copy of which hangs in the homestead; you can see the relevant portion of this map in Figure 3. Interestingly, on the 1971 map, the far section of Fool's Gold is shown as surveyed. Interestingly, the large central loop is closed on the 1971 map.

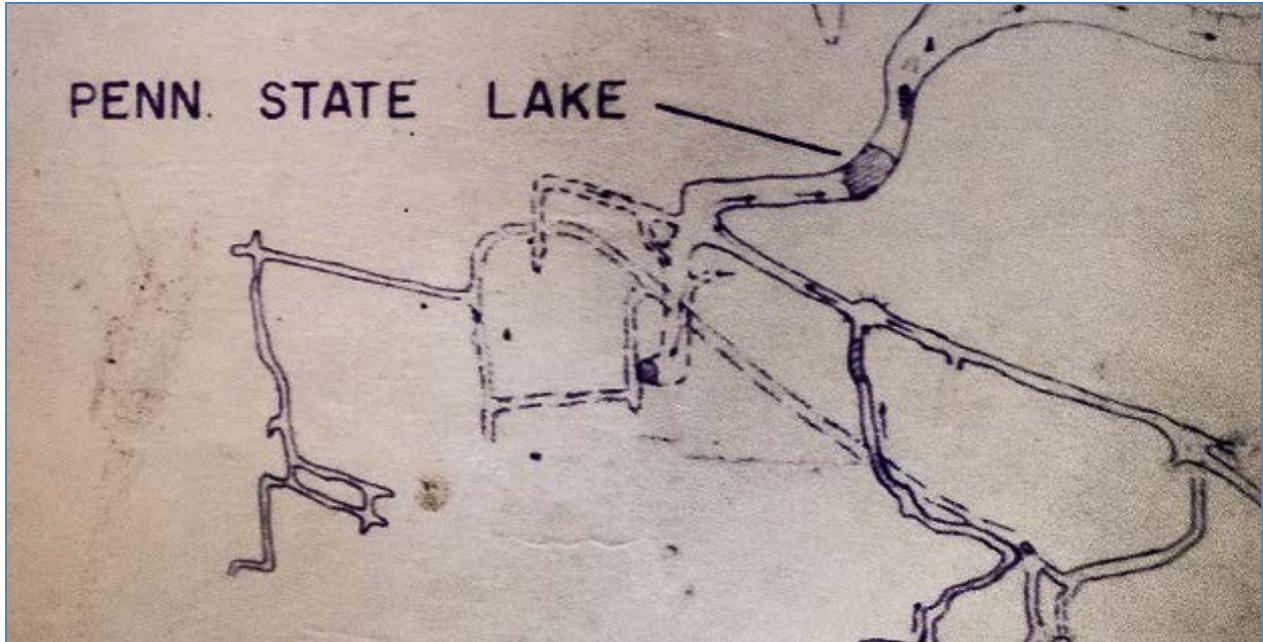


Figure 3 - Portion of the 1971 Nevin Davis map of Butler Cave.

Finally, to continue going back in time, how does Fool's Gold appear on the map by Mike Nicholson and Mike Hamilton (the copy I have is undated.) Well, as you can see in Figure 4, it's shown as fully surveyed!

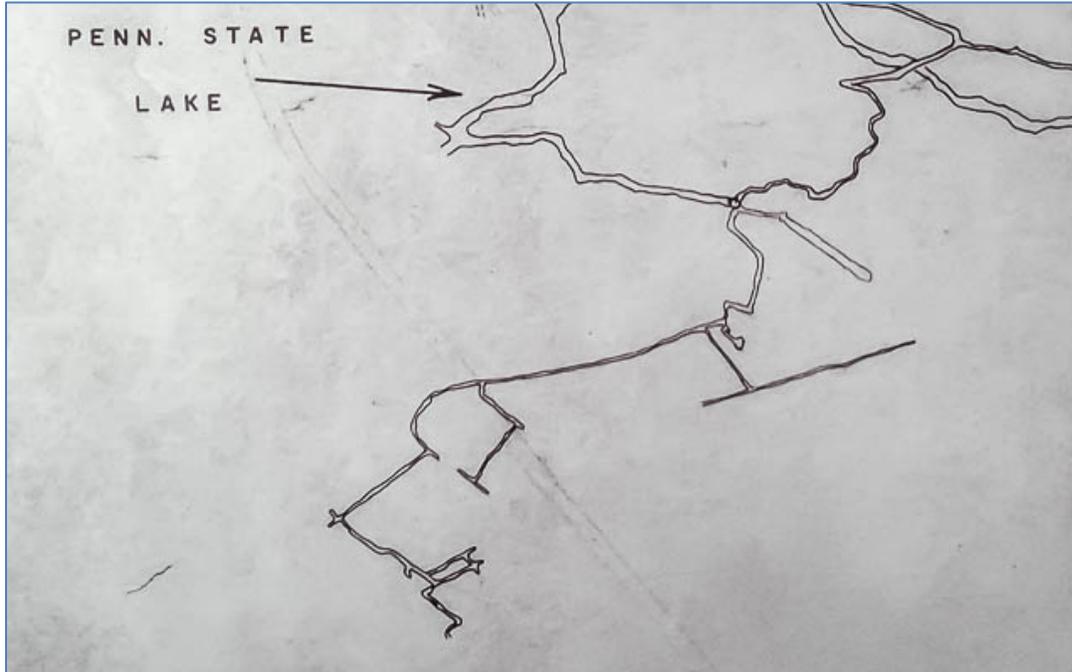


Figure 4 Portion of the Nicholson and Hamilton map of Butler Cave.

Moving from the maps to the Newsletter, I was able to find three references to Fool's Gold in the BCCS News.

1. There is a trip report of Fool's Gold being surveyed during Expedition 32 (July 19-20, 1980) by Toni Williams, Keith Arnold, Scott Jones, Ted Plunket in the BCCS News, Vol. 6, 1980, pp. 10-11.
2. There is a trip report of high lead checking and pushing "a tortuous lead to an impassable squeeze" during Expedition 37 (September 19, 1981) by Rod Riley, Buddy Jackson, Robbie Nicholson, Mike Artz, and Bob Carts in the BCCS News, Vol. 7, 1981, pp. 15-16.
3. Finally, the story of the origin of the name "Fool's Gold", which mentions Jack Igoe is given in the BCCS News, Vol. 10, 1984, p. 64.

So while the July 1980 trip report says it was surveyed, the data is not in the Compass file and the notes are not in the inventory of the survey files we compiled in December 2013.

Future Work

We plan a trip back to:

1. Survey the central side loop (FG15->FG20),
2. Do the bolt climb at FG23,
3. Survey from our last station (FG35) down to FG27.
4. Surveying the passage on we found near FG29, and
5. Push the "tortuous lead to an impassable squeeze" as reported in 1981. Perhaps the squeeze will have some air.

Epilogue

As background, Fred Wefer assigned each survey trip a unique identifier, a combination of the year and a letter of the alphabet. And I've continued using Fred's system; for example, this 8/30/2014 survey has been designated "2014H".

While reviewing our 2013 inventory, I noticed a gap in the identifiers in 1980. Referring to a thick printout that Fred made from his Vax computer files, I found reference to an "80D" survey with a July 19, 1980 date, but the printout stated that it was not tied into anything. That led me to another binder, where Fred kept the notes from surveys he was unable to use. I found the survey notes, labeled "80D", with a note "Don't know how to tie in, ask Toni." The station names on the paper notes were not "11x" like we thought we saw in carbide in-cave, but "!!x". (We love punctuation characters in survey names. Just ask Hope Brooks.) And on reviewing the notes, the survey didn't either didn't proceed far enough out of the cave to reach a known tie-in (there are a multitude of old stations in Fool's Gold), or some of the pages were lost².

One of the mysteries has been solved. But a few remain. They will probably never be resolved, unless you consider "just resurvey it" a resolution. I do.

TC

² See the BCCS News, Vol. 6, 1980, page 11, first paragraph.