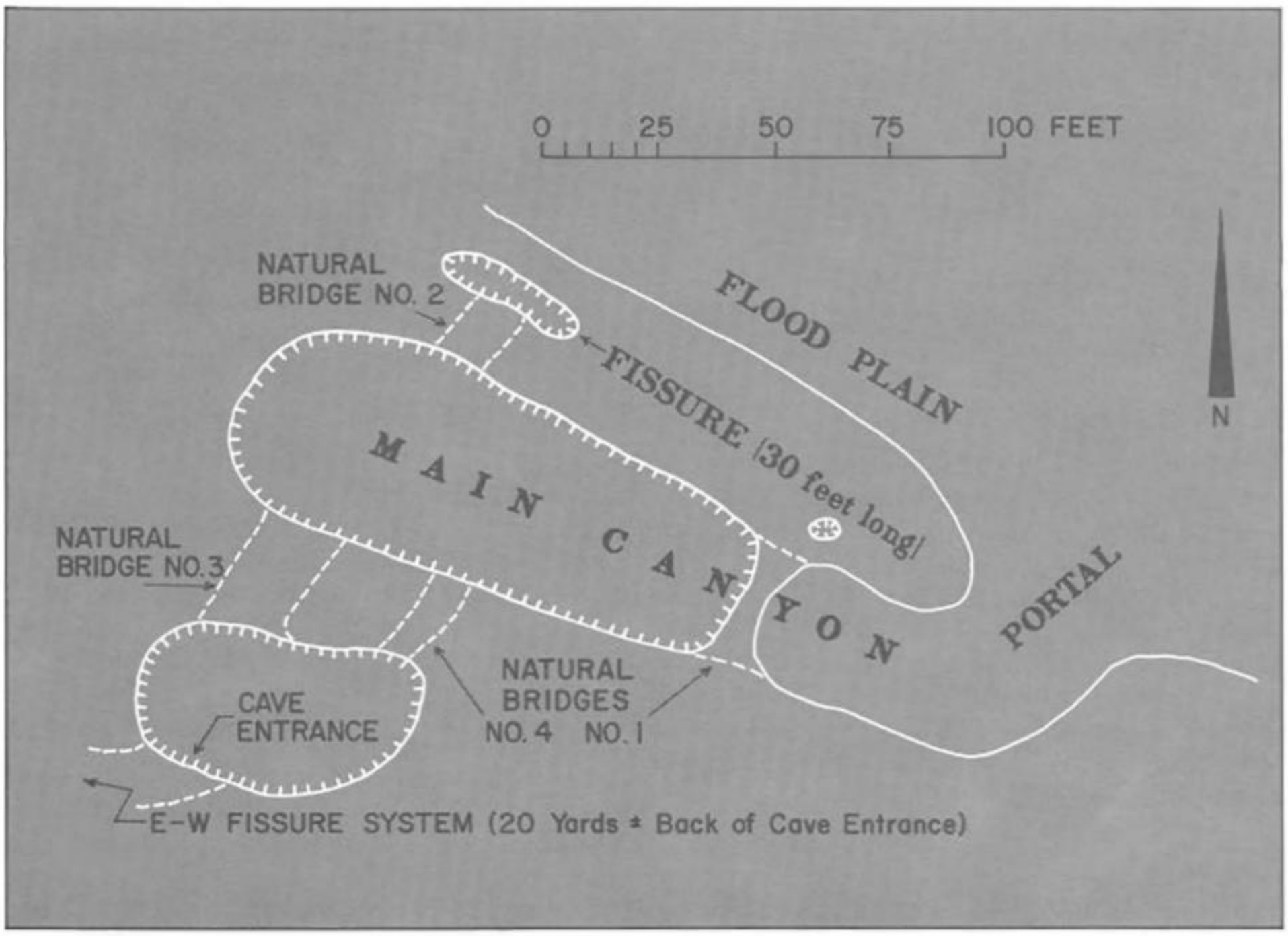


Figure 151

Kassel Cave Natural Bridges.

342. RATCLIFF CAVE SUNKEN GARDEN

Laclede County, 1 mile southeast of Phillipsburg, in SW¼ SW¼ SW¼ sec. 26, T. 33 N., R. 17 W., Phillipsburg 7½-minute Quadrangle.

The Sunken Garden is a cave system which has collapsed in part to produce an underground lake, natural tunnel and bridges, and a main atrium where the roof has been destroyed, leaving a depression 25 feet deep and 35 feet in diameter and encircled by sheer to overhung walls. Stone steps and walls constructed long ago for utilitarian purposes have acquired a patina compatible with the surroundings. Entrance is made down the stone steps at the east edge of the depression (fig. 152).

At the bottom of the steps the visitor may bear either hard right or hard left to large natural niches which have been walled to form a fr t cellar on the south side of the steps and an additional cellar on the north side. To the northeast of the steps across the Sunken Garden, a natural portal passes under a slot in the roof or natural arch and continues north and west to an underground lake approximately 25 feet in diameter. Artificial lighting is needed for viewing this lake (fig. 153).

The southwest part of the Sunken Garden has an exit through a natural tunnel leading out of the depression to the south and west with an additional anteroom to the east of the tunnel. This anteroom, in turn, is connected with the Garden by a natural tunnel which is now a slot

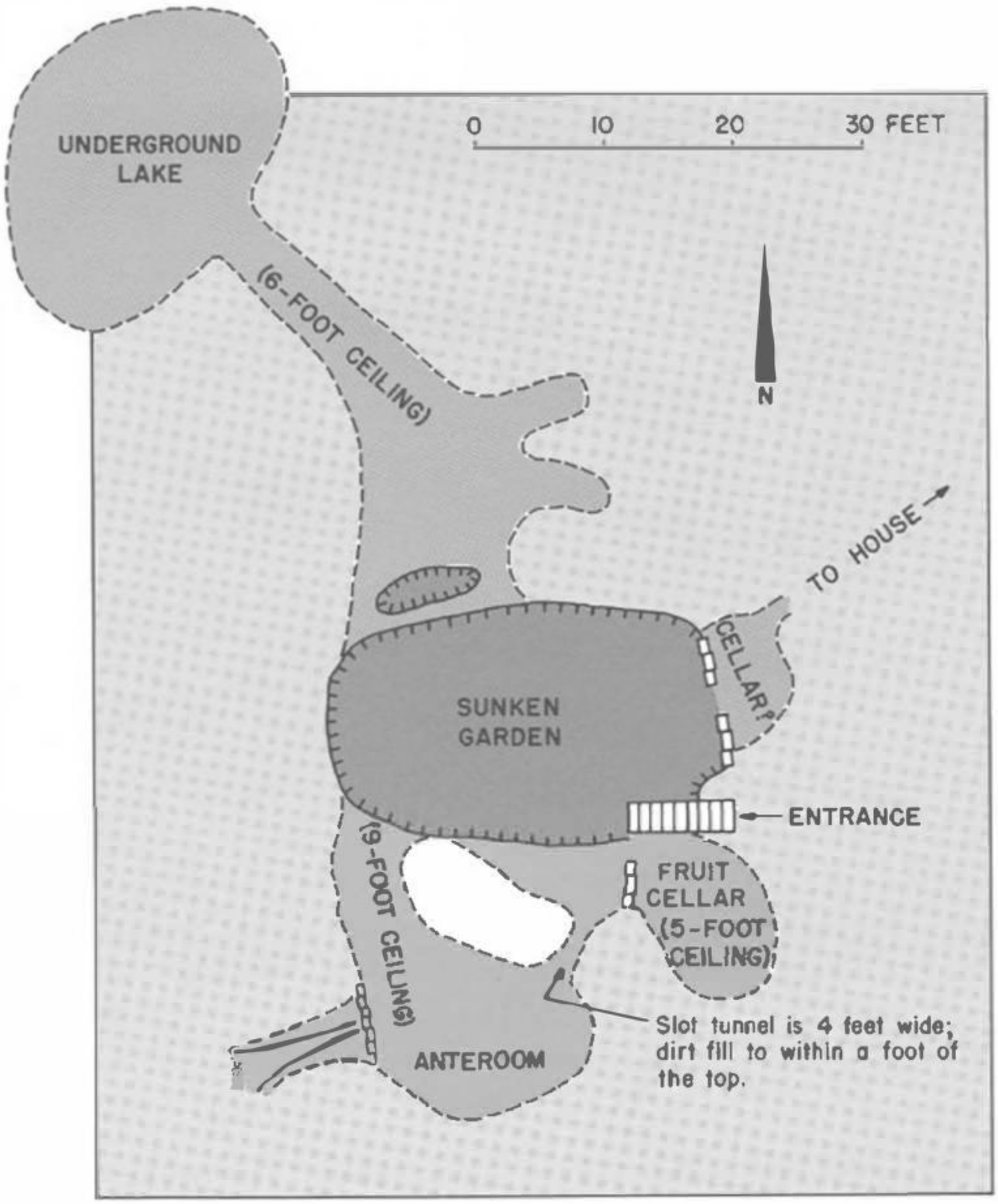


Figure 152

Ratcliff Cave Sunken Garden.

about 4 feet wide as a result of a natural dirt fill which comes within a foot of the top. Excavation of this fill would make the slot a natural tunnel which might be traversable on foot. Ferns flank the entrance steps and columbines would certainly flourish in the dark, moist environment of the Garden.

This site is southwestern Missouri's competition to southeastern Missouri's Kassel Cave (No. 341), both of them being prime examples of small-scale cave collapse with roof remnants forming natural tunnels and bridges. Because more of the roof of Kassel Cave has been destroyed, the natural tunnels and bridges are more easily photographed, but the lack of good daylight photography in the Sunken Garden is compensated by the charm of the atrium and underground lake. In addition, the large walled niches create an atmosphere of ancient ruins despite their relatively modern vintage. The site is a gem crying for some attention by a landscape architect or rock gardener!

Ratcliff Cave is developed in the lower part of the Jefferson City Dolomite. Fractures control



Figure 153

Ratcliff Cave Sunken Garden, this underground lake, a natural tunnel, and natural bridges were formed by the partial collapse of a cave system. Photo by Jerry D. Vineyard.

the trend of the voids with a conspicuous northerly grain and a secondary northwesterly elongation of passageways.

The site was reached by the following route (first obtain access permission):

Miles

0.0 *From Phillipsburg junction overpass on I-44, 11 miles southwest of Lebanon, follow Highway C southeast into Phillipsburg.*

0.45 *Turn right off "C."*

0.5 *Cross tracks and bear right and then left.*

0.95 *Straight ahead at T-junction.*

1.45 *Turn left (east) into lane.*

1.65 *Lane T-junction. Park and take lane to left (north). About 150 yards north of gate, take right-hand fork toward house. Sunken Garden is on left-hand side of lane, 40 yards southwest of house.*