

Video reveals hidden Florida

Wekiva: Legacy or Loss? offers a glimpse into the watery world beneath us.

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Florida is a land of water, surrounded by ocean, dotted with lakes and crisscrossed by rivers. But hidden below, seeping through the sand-covered limestone, is another watery world — one few get the chance to see.

Recently, more than 100 people crowded into the community room at the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Longwood for a closer look at this mysterious world as seen through the eyes of local documentary filmmakers Bill Belleville and Bob Giguere.

The 90-minute program included outtakes from their Emmy-winning documentary, *Wekiva: Legacy or Loss?*, which has been broadcast by PBS affiliates throughout Florida.

The footage included video of divers and videographers working on the production of the program as well as never-before-released video of the underwater caves that exist behind the vents of popular local springs.

The video focused on portions of the complex system that feeds the Wekiva River, including Rock Springs, Wekiwa Springs and Island Spring, which is near the middle of the river, just upstream of the former Katie's Landing canoe livery.

The outtakes also included video of the Apopka Blue Sink, a sinkhole that provides a window on what is essentially an underground river.

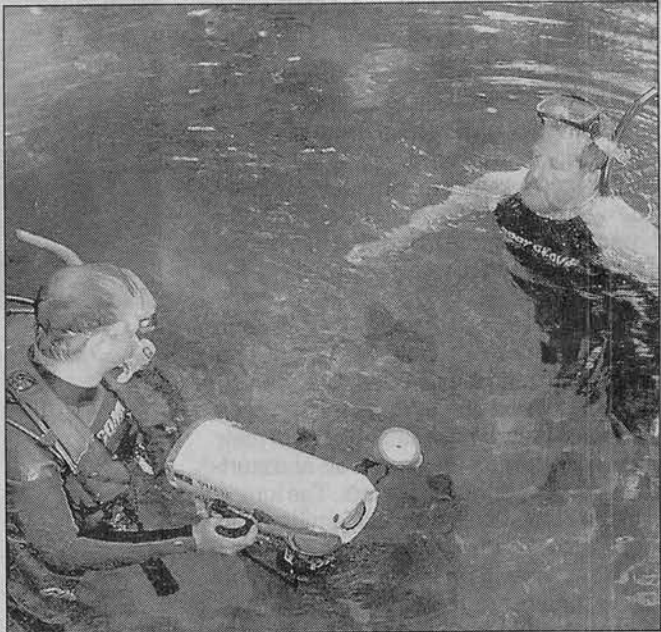
The effort has helped to map underground areas that had never before been explored.

"This is like beyond the maps," Belleville said. "It's like, 'Here be dragons.'"

In addition to mapping the caves, the filmmakers also made some interesting discoveries, including a fossilized woolly mammoth or mastodon tooth the size of a toaster.

The producers sprinkled the clips with commentary about the difficulty of filming in dark and the often-dangerous conditions, and they emphasized how little is known about the complexities of the underground world that serves as a bank for the water upon which Florida depends.

"It's like the moon," Giguere



DENNIS WALL/SENTINEL ARCHIVE

Explorers. Bob Giguere (left) and Bill Belleville, producers of a video documentary on the Wekiva River Basin, work on getting footage 2 years ago at Wekiwa Springs State Park.

Filmmakers' goal: Boost awareness

AQUIFER FROM J1

said. "Until you get up there and look at it, it's all just theory."

The project was created under the auspices of the not-for-profit Equinox Documentaries Inc., which was formed by the producers last year to create educational films that focus on the environment and natural history in Florida and the surrounding area.

Giguere, who also is an executive producer at WMFE, worked as underwater cinematographer for the project, while Belleville, author of *River of Lakes: A Journey on Florida's St. Johns River*, served as writer and safety diver.

The footage drew gasps, cringes and nervous laughter from audience members as they watched divers from the nonprofit Cambrian Foundation of Winter Park wriggle through tight underwater openings at Wekiwa Springs.

The divers used a no-mount system that allowed them to push their tanks in front so they could squeeze through the crevices.

"It was claustrophobic," Belleville said of the experience.

"You can't go straight up

'We want . . . to help build an appreciation for the underwater world.'

— FILMMAKER BILL BELLEVILLE

if there's a problem."

Belleville said the focus on these subterranean landscapes is designed to educate people about the importance of the aquifer and the springs that provide peepholes into that secret world.

"We want to take people below the surface to help build an appreciation for the underwater world — for the places they can't see," he said.

"And, maybe, from that will come an ethic and a sense of responsibility."

The producers are currently working on several other projects, including a series of programs for the Sunshine Network called *Off the Map*, which will take viewers along as they explore the state by kayak.

For information on upcoming projects, check out the Equinox Web site at www.equinoxdocumentaries.org.