

Northeastern Cave Conservancy News

Volume 15, Number 2

June 2013

The Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (NCC) is a not-for-profit corporation committed to the conservation, study, management, and acquisition of caves and karst areas having significant geological, hydrological, biological, recreational, historical, or aesthetic features. To these ends, the NCC combines the resources and expertise of affiliated cave explorers, educators, scientists, landowners, and conservation officials.



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<p>The <i>Northeastern Cave Conservancy News</i> is published quarterly by the Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. The Northeastern Cave Conservancy promotes the study and preservation of speleologically significant properties in the northeastern United States. Annual membership is \$15 (Regular), \$5 additional (Family), \$10 (student), \$50 (Benefactor), \$100 (Institutional), and \$300 (Lifetime). All checks made payable and sent to:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. P.O. Box 254 Schoharie, N.Y. 12157</p> <p style="text-align: center;">www.necaveconservancy.org</p>		

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Next Board Meeting

Sunday, June 9, 10:00 am at Kerhonkson, NY

Notes from March 3, 2013 Board Meeting

Science Committee - Larry Davis

Recommendations for encouraging research among secondary school, Jr. College, and university undergraduate students is stressed, but with an eye on appropriate supervision and conservation of both biotic and abiotic components of the cave. The need for approval of potential projects by respective property managers and for obtaining the assistance of the science coordinator is considered. Comments regarding student research projects address streamlining the approval process. The appropriate level of scientific rigor required for proposed projects is discussed, and placed in perspective to the potential value of encouraging students to ask meaningful questions while gaining an appreciation for the scientific method.

Publications/Publicity Committee - Christa Hay

It has been decided that we will try to get grant money to create a professional brochure.

Merlins Cave Preserve - Morgan Ingalls

I'll be holding another leader training session after the cave opens in May. The BOD voted to approve the conservation easement for Merlins Cave Preserve. An attorney will be consulted regarding suitable language.

Membership Committee - Peter Youngbaer

Suggested several changes in membership notification in order to encourage renewals. The Central Connecticut Grotto responded to a request to give a lecture on WNS and talk about the NCC (Editor's Note: see excerpted pages from *The Underground Movement*).

Volunteer Value Committee - Vince Kappler

Volunteer Value totals for 2012 are 1483.5 hours of work and 13,951 miles driven to/from projects, for a total value of \$51,605.00.

Committee of the Whole - Issues Considered

- Merlins Cave Preserve conservation easement
- Constitution gas pipeline
- Gregory entrance cleanup
- Clarksville snow plowing
- Collection of speleothems for paleoclimatology research
- Legal liability at Barton Hill Mine
- A Vote of Thanks to Mike Chu for his contributions to the NCC and his work on the NCC Newsletter

RECENT NCC ACTIVITY

— Bob Addis, President —

Naked vs. Clothed. Now that I have your attention, I'm going to talk about a really boring subject: NCC landowner liability. It's not boring to me. After all, I wrote an MBA thesis about it—and even got a degree! And it could be argued that this effort was the start of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy back in 1978, along with the acquisition of Knox Cave, Albany County, when the National Speleological Society turned down the donation because of the perceived liability issues in New York State. With the assistance of attorneys and paralegals, I studied the issue quite thoroughly and it became the “meat” of my thesis. We discovered that NYS, like nearly every state in the Union, had a landowner liability law on the books, the so-called Sportsman's Law. In NYS, it basically said, then and today, that a landowner can allow all forms of recreation on his/her property, with or without their knowledge, and not be held liable if participants suffer injuries. Section 9-103 of the General Obligations Law gives a rather long but specific list of relevant recreational activities, including snowmobiling and gleaning (look that one up!). Thanks to the efforts of some local cavers, “speleological activities” are also included. Of course, anybody can sue anyone for anything at any time, so landowners might still have to shoulder the expense of defending themselves. Under this NYS law, it appears that no landowner has ever successfully been sued and been found guilty of negligence in the past 30 or 40 years although there is a margin of doubt about such a definitive statement—it could be researched further.

The Naked Approach. Shortly after the NCC became a membership organization and established an elected board of directors (1999), the NCC Board paid an attorney to study NYS' Sportsman's Law and write a legal opinion. Basically, he said that we didn't need liability insurance and that we were protected under Section 9-103. Go naked, if you will. That opinion and Section 9-103 are found in our Board Manual.

Get Clothed. Times change, Board members change; and in 2011, the Board decided to further study the liability issue and also to get liability insurance for protection, which it did. Then, the topic of granting and paying to grant conservation easements to other land trusts/conservancies came up. At first, this may seem to be completely unrelated to the issue of landowner liability, but some members of the Board had a vague sense that conservation easements offered some form of liability protection. In 2013, in an attempt to resolve this issue—or at least to put several topics into perspective—the Board hired an attorney who specializes in sportsman laws, con-

servation easements, and liability insurance. That attorney's opinion is about to be issued and will be a major talking point at the June 9 Board meeting in Clarksville, NY (10:00 am). So I have brought you all this way on a boring topic only to say, “To be continued”! Slick of me, huh? If you can't make the meeting, watch for a summary in this newsletter and, if adopted, the full text of his opinion in our Board Manual.

Merlins Cave Preserve & the Spring 2013 NRO. Several guided trips went into Merlins Cave over the weekend and it appears that many enjoyed themselves. Thanks go out to the managers and trip leaders for the excellent job of organizing and implementing the trips. Please note that future Merlins trips require the permission of the Preserve Manager (merlins@necaveconservancy.org) and, at this time, must be work trips (surveying, photography, maintenance, etc.) with an experienced guide.

Gregorys Property at Clarksville. April 20 saw several volunteers help clean up the Gregory parcel, which had been severely damaged by the floods of Irene. Basically, we pulled debris out of the piles and cut fallen trees. But future re-shaping of the intermittent drainage ditch will require the use of heavy equipment.

Thacher State Park Survey. Big News! After several years of negotiating, the NCC has a formal written agreement to survey the caves and karst of the park—both above- and belowground. NCC members should set aside June 8 as the first work day; it will be fun! As the project progresses through the months and perhaps years, this will afford many opportunities to learn or sharpen your cave-surveying skills.

Thom Engel writes, “We are set for June 8. People should meet at the Hop Field Picnic area. (This is the first area on the left when coming up St Rte 157 from St Rte 85). There is no charge for entering this area, which is why we are meeting here. Groups will be given a sheet. This will list the goals of the project as well as the rules set forth by the state. It will also serve as a pass to get into parking areas free of charge.

“Since this is the first session, all efforts will be made to accommodate projects that individuals may wish to do. If anyone wants to survey in Hailes, that is fine, but should contact me ahead of time so that I can bring the old survey notes. For those coming who do not have a project planned, I can make recommendations or assignments, as they wish.

“People should bring GPS units if they have them, cave gear, etc. The state is requiring decon BEFORE entering the caves, so people should come with clean cave gear. I

strongly recommend those wanting to go caving to have their gear in a pack, so that we are not wandering about in cave gear. This might give patrons of the park the wrong idea.

“People may contact me ahead of time if they have questions. For liability reasons, this work day is exclusively for NCC members, but others may join or renew on that day.”

Future Activities. What would you, the membership, like

to see as future NCC activities? Contact me, a Board member, or the newsletter editor with suggestions and ideas. Your Board can't think of everything, so input is requested. Of course, the Thacher Survey will be a large, ongoing project. Other suggestions include general trail maintenance around the preserves; guided trips, which may include underground visits or science-related surface walks; or photography trips to upgrade our publications. One of our members is an electronic wizard and recently showed me an instant method of not only mapping a cave but plotting it as you go! Interested in learning more?



Exploring the Lower Loop passage in Merlins Cave, NY. Note the highly sculpted walls, associated with banded marble pendants, fins, jug handles, and solution pockets. Photo by John Dunham.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE NORTHEASTERN CAVE CONSERVANCY BYLAWS

Peter Youngbaer moves that the Bylaws be amended in Article III Membership, Sec. 2. Categories of Membership, by adding a new subsection:

g. Family Life: have all privileges of Family membership and may receive publications digitally when available. Family Life memberships are available to family members of a Life member joined by marriage or civil union, and to children of a Life member until the age of 18. Family Life members pay a one-time membership fee determined by the Board. If the Life member dies, the Family Life member shall automatically be converted to regular Life membership. If the marriage or civil union is dissolved, the Family Life member may convert to full Life by paying the difference in dues amount currently in force.

And further moves that Act 23-1 be amended as follows:

The annual membership dues are as follows:

- Regular \$15
- Family \$ 5
- Student \$10
- Benefactor \$50
- Institutional \$100
- Life \$300
- Family Life \$100

The Life and Family Life Membership fees may be paid over three (3) years in equal installments in addition to paying the basic Regular or Family dues fee, respectively.

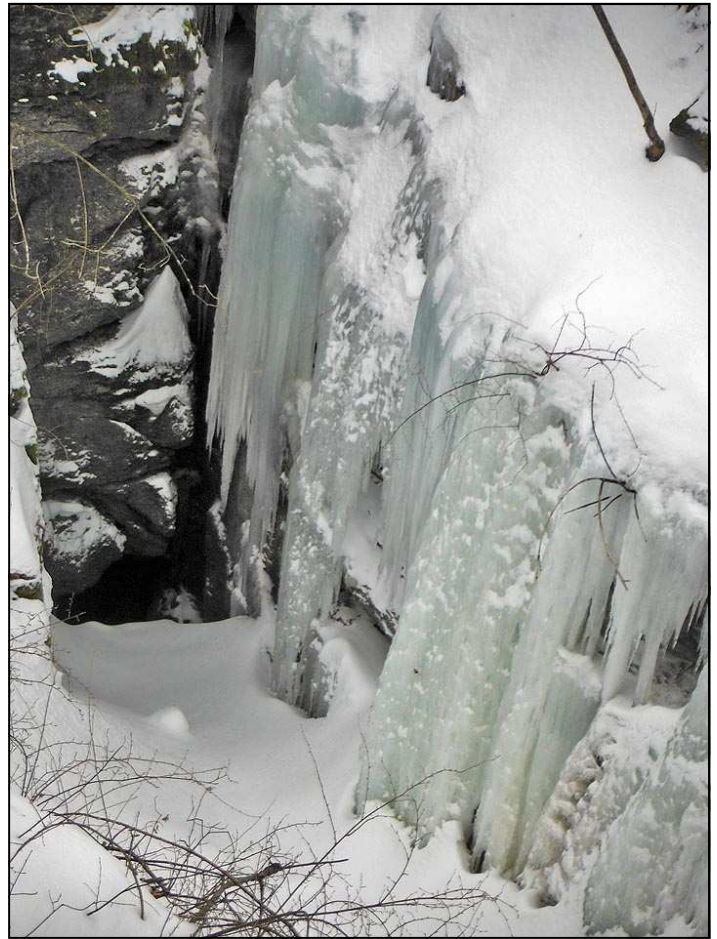
Discussion: While sending out the most recent batch of membership renewals and thank yous, one NCC member inquired if there was a Family Life membership option. I had to tell him that we currently do not have such a thing.

However, we have a number of couples where one is a Regular member, the other Family. If the Regular member chose to become a Life member (\$300 or 20 x the annual membership fee), they would still have to continue paying an annual \$5 fee to continue the Family membership for their significant other or minor children. I can easily see where, simply as a matter of convenience, they would like to also make a one-time payment to have a Life Family member as well. If we did the same math (\$5 x 20), we'd have a fee of \$100 for this new category. The question then becomes what to do when the underlying Life member dies or the parties break up. It seems a nice gesture to transfer the full Life voting privileges to the survivor ... plus, we already have the money. If the couple breaks up, the former Family Life member can simply pay the difference and become a Life member (in this case, paying the additional \$200). But maybe they won't want to. Alternatively, they could simply join as a Regular member. Or, maybe they won't want to remain a member at all. I don't think either of these scenarios needs to be addressed in the Bylaws. So I propose the bylaw and Act amendments for consideration.

ICE CONDITIONS AT KNOX CAVE

— Bob Addis —

Conditions are best for gathering sap to boil down for maple syrup when there is a repeated freeze at night followed by a daytime thaw. These conditions were present this past winter and resulted in formation of the infamous Knox Ice. This year's crop of ice in the Knox sinkhole was the most abundant seen in many years and, unfortunately, will delay opening of the cave. Not only is the ice nearly closing the entrance but a substantial amount is above the entrance and, according to the laws of the seasons and physics, it must fall. In 1975, a block of ice weighing several tons fell during May, killing one caver and permanently injuring another as they entered the cave. Details of this accident as well as 1960s vintage



photos of the Knox Ice by Art Palmer can be found in *A Study for the National Speleological Society: Knox Cave, Albany County, New York* by Robert P. Addis (1978).

Arguably, the massive piece of limestone blocking the lower half of the entrance is also a culprit—it wasn't there in Palmer's photo—and means that less ice is needed today to block the entrance. This would be a good argument for removing that block. Suggestions to the Knox Cave Committee and the NCC for doing this are welcome. None of this mitigates the sobering fact that the ice above the Knox entrance must fall sometime and that the cave can't be opened for visitation until that occurs. The Committee monitors this and will update the caving community. Thank you for avoiding the cave until a "green light" is given.



Photos by Mike Warner.



CLARKSVILLE CLEANUP

— Peter Youngbaer —

On April 20, a clear and dry spring day, some 23 cavers came from all directions to do some much-needed cleanup work on the Clarksville Cave Preserve. Some of the work was the usual wear and tear repair that a popular cave destination experiences, but most was due to the ravages of Hurricane Irene a year and a half earlier.

On August 30, 2011, Irene wreaked havoc upon the northeastern U.S., causing extensive damage in many states and resulting in Presidential disaster declarations. The devastation is still quite visible in many places.

Northeastern cavers have been very involved in helping with the cleanup. In Schoharie County, NY, in particular, we've raised thousands of dollars for the relief effort, donned helmets and lights to clear out mud-filled basements, cooked meals, and otherwise tried to repay in some small way, a community whose landowners have graciously allowed us to visit caves on their land over the years.

But now, we had our own work to do. At the lower, Gregory's entrance to Clarksville Cave, an overflow surface streambed did the most damage. Debris from dozens of households upstream washed down and settled in the roughly parcel abutting the cave entrance and the road through the center of the village of Clarksville.

The force of the water turned soil to mud, caused landslides, and literally moved boulders, resulting in a mess with all sorts of metal and rubbish half-buried and unsightly—not exactly the image a natural preserve wants to put forth.

Last summer and fall, the Clarksville Cave managers and several trustees were able to dislodge a large piece of culvert that had been completely torn apart and partially reburied. This was removed, setting the stage for a large work day. This winter at the March quarterly NCC Board Meeting, the trustees and managers planned the spring cleanup.

At 10:00 am, about a dozen cavers were already on site, pulling chain saws, pry bars, and contractor bags from their vehicles. Organically organized, one crew headed up into the preserve to work near the Ward's entrance, where some trees had fallen and debris had been dumped into the surface sink. Another crew went to work repairing the changing rooms, but most headed down to the Gregory's entrance area, which showed the most visible storm and debris damage.

The air soon filled with the sound of four chainsaws going to work on the many felled and leaning trees. Bags were soon filled with garbage and a staging area was established next to the road. An old milk can, bed springs, soaked carpets, a children's swimming pool, all sorts of broken wooden boards, and even a full car bumper were extracted and staged for removal. And there was plenty of trash.

While working, we all kept looking at the water gushing out of the cave. Irene had changed the shape of the entrance, scraping off pieces of the cliff and causing a large landslide. The night before the cleanup, over an inch of rain fell, and on top of the usual spring-saturated ground; the cave simply couldn't hold all the water. Indeed, the water was right up to the entrance, and the cave unenterable from this end.

Work continued steadily for four hours, with people taking short breaks to eat a sandwich or munch some cookies brought by Emily Davis. At about 1:00 pm, the pile by the road had grown quite large, and it was time to make some runs to the transfer station.

Mike Chu had brought his old van (we're amazed this thing still runs, but hey, he's an engineer, right?), and we filled the first load with contractor bags. A second load was mostly wooden debris and more rubbish. Mike was going to leave the metal for a later day, when he could add some metal from his farm and make a full run of it, but we decided to put it in now. The remaining debris was put on top and one final run was made.

Cavers came from New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Quebec. Even Wayne and Julie Russell's German shepherd got into the act, carrying one cut log after another to the woodpile. Some after photos were taken, and the place looks, well, natural again.

Trustee Vince Kappler, Volunteer Value Manager for the NCC, wrote me later that 18 of the 23 cavers signed in and logged 72 hours of work on site, plus 33 hours of driving and 1578 miles to and from Clarksville. He calculated the value to the NCC as just under \$3500. More than that value, however, was the outreach effect on the Clarksville community. One of the neighbors across the road commented that this was a terrific effort. As the preserve is so visible, and the local traffic passing by all day clearly saw the effort and its results, a lot of good will was built.

Clarksville Cave is the most visited wild cave in the Northeast, with thousands passing through it each year. It's the NCC's most visible face to the community. Our trails, interpretive kiosk, changing rooms, and parking

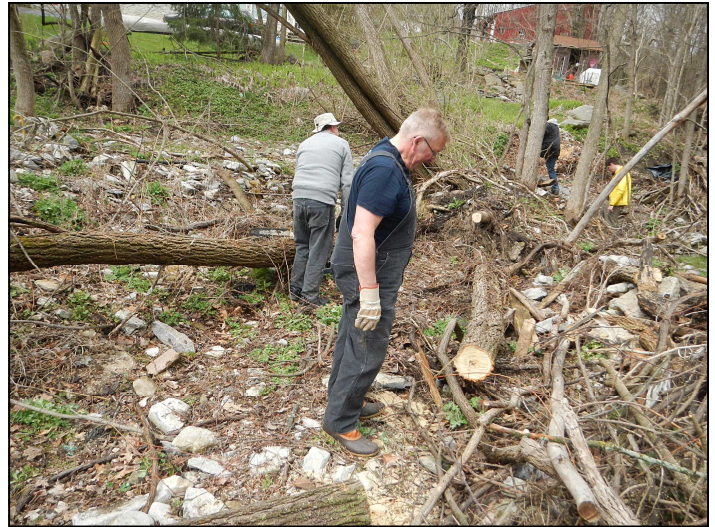
area make it a destination for many youth groups and, of course, cavers from throughout the region and beyond. This day's work was important—both to the preserve and

to the community.

For all who helped with the cleanup, the NCC thanks you!



Cavers from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and even Quebec gather for the cleanup at Clarksville Cave. Photo by Peter Youngbaer.



Bob Addis enjoys a rare moment of contemplation before getting down to the serious business of hauling away logs. Photo by Mike Warner.



Vince Kappler dragging debris from the area of the cave. Photo by Peter Youngbaer.



Bob Addis and other volunteers hauling logs. Photo by Peter Youngbaer.



Being cavers, before and after pictures are always the order of the day. Left photo by Peter Youngbaer; Right photo by Mike Warner.



Hmm, this might look good on my back porch. Photo by Mike Warner.



I might be able to build a bookcase out of this thing. Photo by Mike Warner.



Meanwhile, the woodpile continues to grow. Photo by Mike Warner.



Contemplating the enormity of the cleanup project. Photo by Mike Warner.



In preparation for hauling material to the transfer station, Mike Chu's old van was filled with a wide array of trash from the Clarksville cleanup site. Photo by Peter Youngbaer.



Mike's van is quickly filled to near-overflowing capacity. Hopefully, he wouldn't be needing his rear-view mirror. Photo by Mike Warner.



Of course it will fit. Just push hard. Photo by Mike Warner.



Mike Chu mans the chain saw as he continues to cut up what seems like an almost endless supply of fallen tree limbs. The ever-growing woodpile will provide considerable firewood for someone during the coming winter months. In the meantime, it is likely to provide a potential haven for bats, rodents, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and a host of other small creatures. Photo by Peter Youngbaer.



Surely, I can squeeze one more thing in. Photo by Mike Warner.

WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME AND THE FUTURE OF BATS IN THE NORTH-EAST

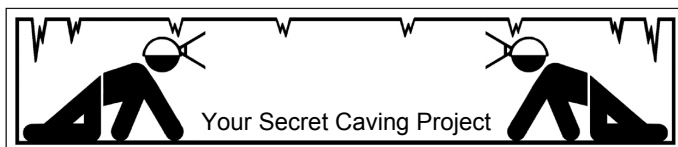
— A Lecture by Peter Youngbaer —

On March 9, the Central Connecticut Grotto and the Hamden Land Conservation Trust welcomed Peter Youngbaer, who will be traveling to grottos across the Northeast over the next few years to talk about white-nose syndrome and recent efforts of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy.

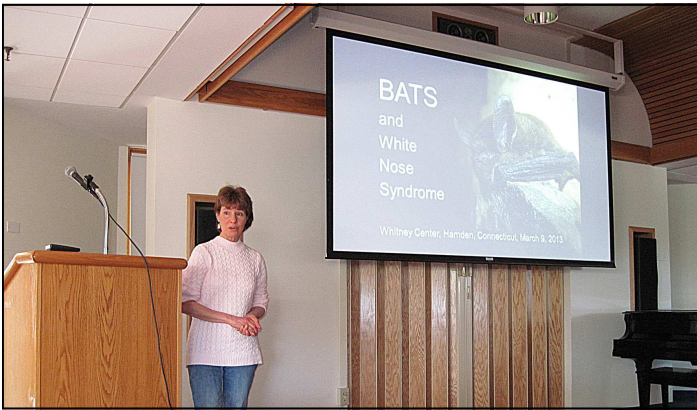
Peter has been caving for over 40 years. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy and is a Past President of the Vermont Cavers Association. Peter is widely involved in various aspects of the National Speleological Society's national response to white-nose syndrome.

The National Speleological Society (NSS) continues to provide grants that fund various areas of critical research on white-nose syndrome through its Rapid Response Fund, which Peter administers. He also maintains the NSS white-nose page, one of the most comprehensive and up-to-date websites on white-nose syndrome available (please see <http://www.caves.org/WNS/>). In his capacity as the white-nose syndrome liaison for the NSS, Peter interacts with cavers, conservation organizations, scientists, and legislators at local, state, and Federal levels on a regular basis. He has served on several committees of the White-Nose Task Force, which is part of the National Response organized by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service to help understand white-nose syndrome and develop and implement its structured management plan. In addition to serving on the Surveillance, Mitigation, and Control Committees of this task force, he also chaired the working group on Human Intervention and Cave Closures. Peter has twice been invited to testify before Congress, helping to put both the impact of this disease and the National Speleological Society's response to it into a context that legislators would understand.

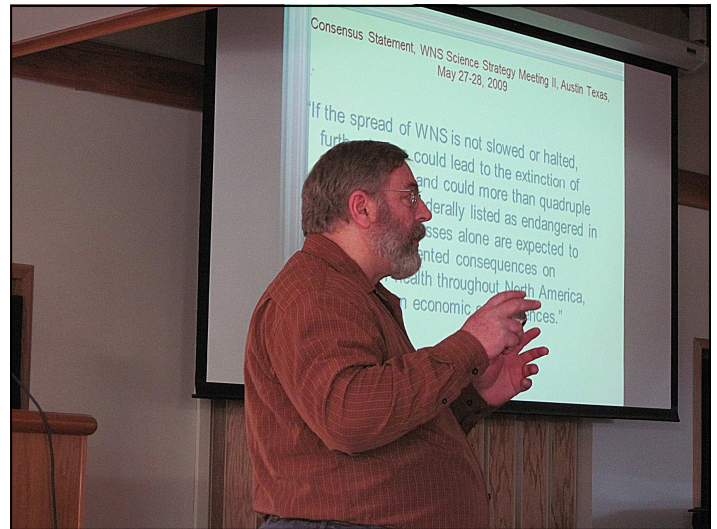
Peter has been intimately involved in the NSS' response to white-nose syndrome since its first discovery in 2006 and is in a unique position to discuss the impact that this emerging fungal disease has had on bats as well as the caving community.



This short article and the accompanying photographs were reprinted from the April, 2013 issue of *The Underground Movement* (Vol. 13 No. 4), the newsletter of the Central Connecticut Grotto.



Gail Cameron introduces the Hamden Land Conservation Trust and Peter Youngbaer gives an animated and informative talk on White-Nose Syndrome and the Future of Bats in the Northeast. All photos on pages 11 and 12 by Norm Berg.



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TRAIL MAINTENANCE AT THE ELLA ARMSTRONG CAVE PRESERVE

— Mitchell Berger —

As we talked about at the Board meeting, I was out at Ella yesterday with another MIT trip leader and an MIT beginner vertical group. We brought along a chainsaw and a bow saw to deal with the fallen tree at the kiosk that was blocking the trail. As it turned out, the bow saw was sufficient. The path is now cleared, with the fallen section of the tree moved off to the side.

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

July 6 - 13: NCRC Cave Rescue Operations and Management Seminar, Schoharie, NY (for additional information, see www.ncrc.info).

July 12 - 14: Karst-O-Rama 2013. Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve, Mt. Vernon, KY (for additional information, see <http://karstorama.com/>).

August 5 - 9: NSS Annual Convention, Shippensburg, PA.

Various grottos in the Northeast may also sponsor activities of interest to NCC members. Links to homepages of NSS grottos can be found at the NSS website (www.nssio.org/Find_Grotto.cfm).



Ian Martin makes quick work of a downed tree at the Ella Armstrong Cave Preserve. Photos by Mitchell Berger.

