

# Northeastern Cave Conservancy News

Volume 16, Number 1

March 2014

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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The *Northeastern Cave Conservancy News* 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:

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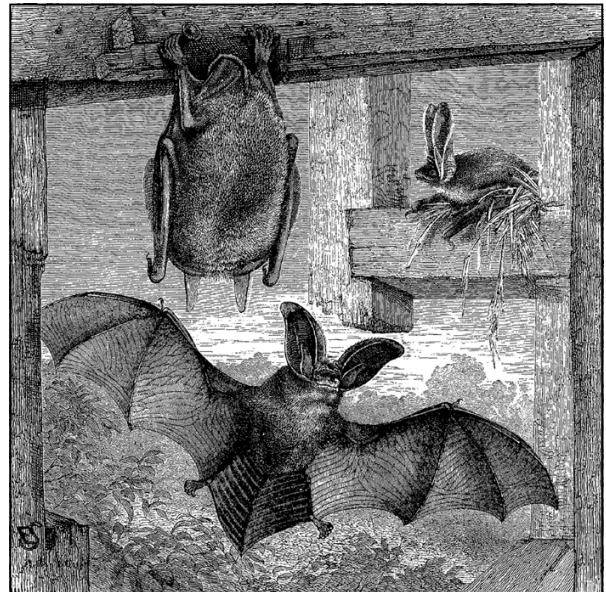
[www.necaveconservancy.org](http://www.necaveconservancy.org)

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**Next Board Meeting**

**Sunday, March 9, 10:00 am at HRP Associates  
 197 Scott Swamp Rd., Farmington, CT 06032**



**NOMINATING COMMITTEE SEEKS BOARD CANDIDATES**

The Nominating Committee is soliciting nominations for candidates for the NCC Board for 2014. Each year, three of the nine board seats come up for election to be seated at the June meeting. If you would like to be considered for candidacy, know of someone that would make a good candidate, or are simply curious, please contact Bob Simmons, Nominating Committee Chair, at [rwsimmons1@gmail.com](mailto:rwsimmons1@gmail.com) or call me at 860-620-2055. You can also speak to any Board member or officer with no obligations.

In addition to the Board elections each year, the Nominating Committee is also looking for volunteers for various positions and committees within the NCC, such as Fundraising Chair or assisting with one of the cave-preserve management teams. Contact me or any NCC board member or officer about these opportunities to give back to the caves that are so important to us all.

## DIRECTIONS TO MARCH 9, 2014 BOARD MEETING

The March Board meeting will be held at HRP Associates, Inc. (Bob Simmons' offices) at 197 Scott Swamp Road in Farmington, CT, on Sunday March 9<sup>th</sup> beginning at 10:00 am. The public is always welcome, and there will be opportunities throughout the meeting for your comments and input. If you'd like to see what it is all about—how the sausage gets made—please come on by. There will be coffee, tea, and pastries available in the morning, and arrangements will be made for a light lunch later in the meeting.

### Directions:

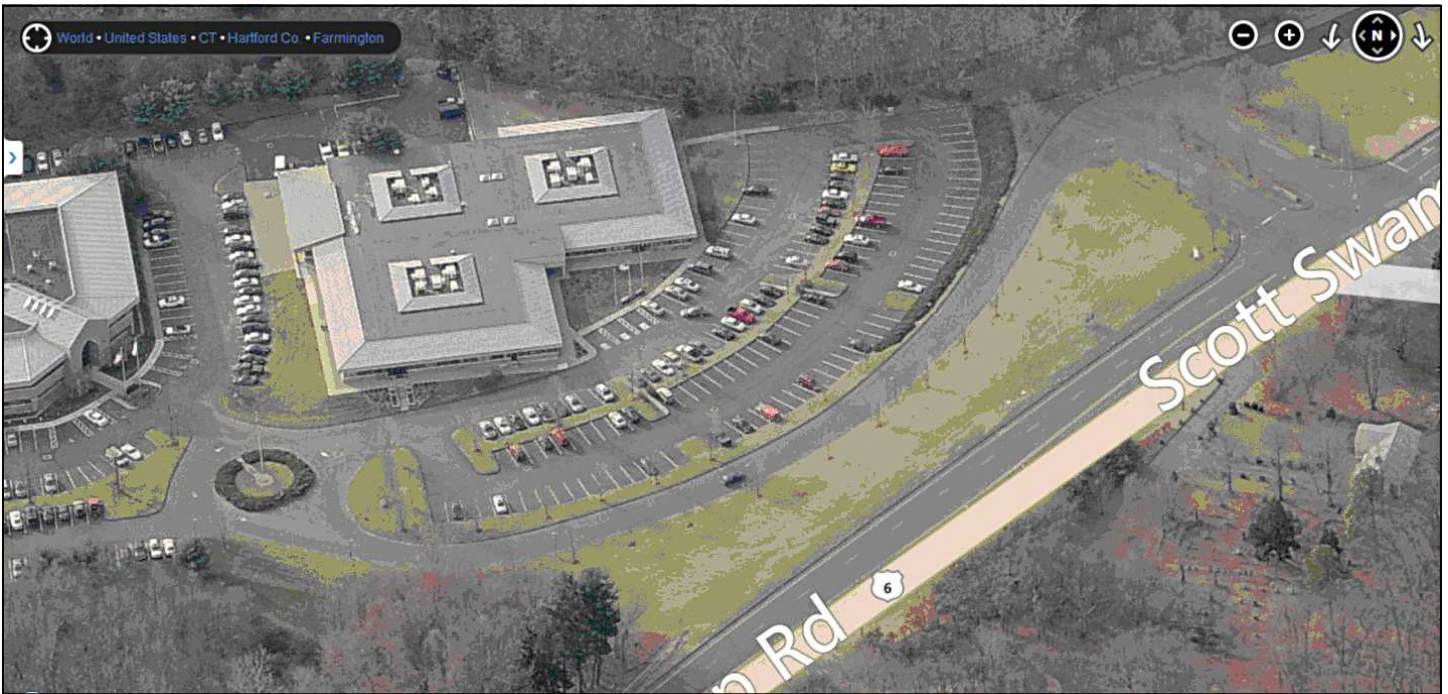
Google maps and other GPS programs do a good job at locating us and providing directions. If you get lost or turned around, call Bob Simmons at 860-620-2055 (cell) as the office phones at HRP roll over directly to voice mail on the weekends.

### Easiest Routes to the Office:

From upstate New York or northern and eastern New England, the simplest route is the Mass Pike (I-90) to I-91 at Springfield Mass. Take I-91 south to Hartford, then I-84 west to Exit 38 US Route 6 towards Bristol. Stay on Route 6 for approximately 4.5 miles and the location will be on the left. The low brick sign reads Farmington Business Center, 195 to 199 Scott Swamp Road. There is a traffic light at the entrance to the Farmington Business Center.

From downstate New York, NYC, New Jersey, etc., use I-87, I-684 or whichever route is easiest to I-84 east. Take Exit 33 CT Route 72 west towards Bristol (**note: this is a left-hand exit**). Then take Exit 1 CT Route 177 North Washington Street (keep right coming down the exit ramp). Turn right (north) onto Route 177 and follow it north for approximately 2 miles to US Route 6 (Scott Swamp Road). Turn right onto Route 6 and the location will be on your right at the second traffic light.

Once on the driveway into the Farmington Business Center (see screen shots on following page), turn left at the stop sign and proceed downhill to a rotary. Take the first possible exit out of the rotary and proceed to the vicinity of the flagpoles on your left. Park anywhere that is convenient. The front of the building is "L-Shaped" and the entrance to HRP is at the very inside corner of the "L." The doors will be unlocked. Come in through the outer hall to the left-hand door, walk around the reception area and turn right. We will be meeting in the first room on the right. Again, any problems, call Bob Simmons at 860-620-2055.



**NORTHEASTERN CAVE CONSERVANCY, INC.**  
**December Minutes - Summary**

Nominating Committee Chairman Bob Simmons announces the results of the Officers' election search. The Board re-elected the standing officers.

President’s Report – Bob Addis: see Attachment A

Vice President’s Report – Vince Kappler: see Attachment B

- Waiting on liability issues numbers for adding in Benson’s.

Secretary’s Report – Christa Hay:

- Helped with setting up baseline and also with the survey for Benson’s.
- Electronic vote
- Addis moved up to \$1,000 is allotted for a land survey of the Benson's property prior to donation acquisition.

Membership Committee – Peter Youngbaer:

- As of information reported to me by November 13, 2013, our current membership stands as follows, compared to the baseline of April 22, 2012:

September 22, 2013	April 22, 2012
Life: 29	Life: 18
Family Life: 0	Family Life: 0
Benefactor: 12	Benefactor: 10
Regular: 95	Regular: 88
Family: 16	Family: 16
Student: 3	Student: 0
Institutional: 7	Institutional: 3
<b>TOTAL: 162</b>	<b>TOTAL: 135</b>

Special and Group Use Coordinators – Thom Engel:

- A year-end report will be sent after January 1. As of 12/08 for the entire year, 318 groups had been issued permits; 248 (80%) were for NCC caves. The remaining 63 were fore NSS caves. Clarksville was the busiest, with 202 (65%). Knox was a distant second, with 33. The greatest percentage at Clarksville are summer camps (52%), even though most of those are issued for the period 7/1 to 8/6. Secondary schools are a distant second with 16%.

Legal Committee – Open

Volunteer Value Committee – Vince Kappler:

- Year to date totals: 11,633.5 hours of volunteer work have been reported and members drove 16,890 miles for a total value of \$58,807.

Thacher Park Committee – Thom Engel

- Permit as been renewed. OPRHP has indicated an interest in entering into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the NCC regarding the caves and cave management in the park.

**Committee of Whole – Discussions:**

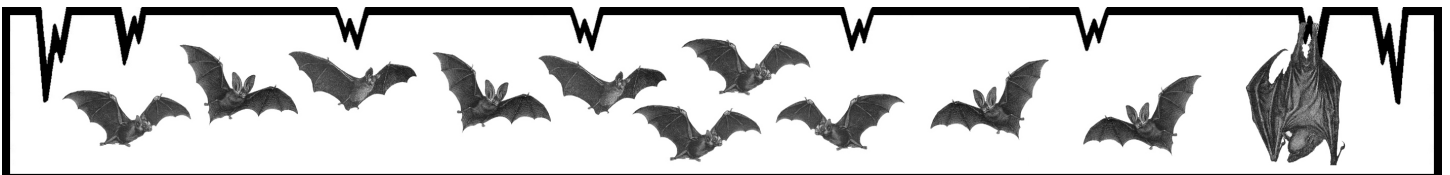
- Engel – Thacher Park. The state issued their final report. Discussion on outcome; we are hoping all concerns are worked out during the MOU process.
- Benson’s draft management plan was discussed in detail. Management plans are living documents and we can re address issues at any time.

- Folsom moved that the NCC accept the 2014 budget as presented at the 12/09/12 Board meeting.
- Addis moved to accept the Benson's management plan as discussed.
- Addis moved to accept the donation of the Benson's parcel subject to no problems resulting from the survey and title search. The President will sign at the closing.
- Addis moved to create the Benson's Cave Preserve Committee. Addis appoints Luke Mazza as interim Preserve Manager. The position will be also be advertised and voted on at the next Board meeting.
- Addis moved that the next NCC Board meeting will be March 9<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 am at HRP Associates, 197 Scott Swamp Rd., Farmington, CT.
- Addis moved to thank Mike and Emily for hosting the meeting.

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### Attachment A – PRESIDENT'S REPORT

- 1) **Benson's Cave Preserve #8:** In late October, a call came offering to donate Benson's Cave and the surrounding 6.5 Acres to the NCC. Acting quickly, since it is a first-step requirement, a Management Plan has been drafted. It is being reviewed by the Board, and a motion to pass it will be on December's agenda. Following that will be a motion to accept the donation of the property, subject to a land survey and no conflicting landowner disputes or other issues.
- 2) **Thacher State Park:** Working under a permit with the NYS Office of Parks and Recreation, the NCC was asked to locate, inventory, and mail them information about all caves in the Park. September 14 was the second project days in 2013, and this will be an ongoing effort for NCC members. As well, several NCC members assisted in the construction of a bat-friendly gate for Hailes Cave. After our input at a public hearing, the Thacher Park Master Plan came out in November and the NCC was named as leading the Cave Management section. This partnership between the NCC and a State agency is a significant accomplishment and one which will forward our Mission Statement in new areas.
- 3) **Parks & Trails Grant Application:** I believe that this is the NCC's first competitive venture seeking public grant money. In October, we submitted an application asking for \$5,000 for two items of educational purpose: 1) 10,000 - 20,000 new NCC brochures designed by a non-caver graphic-design person to target the non-caver population, seeking membership and donations (recent studies have indicated that many non-cavers are using our Preserves and we should reach out to them), and 2) We want two of the smaller, more mobile display units, which pull up from a base unit. We will hear about the grant request in mid-January 2014.
- 4) **Merlins Preserve Conservation Easement:** As a requirement of the original purchase contract, the NCC had a closing for this on September 25 and paid its share of the continuing maintenance and annual survey costs to the Columbia Land Conservancy. An unexpected benefit of this has been a heightened awareness of the obligation to offer our Preserves to the public and what kind of outdoors person might be hiking on our lands. This has lead to a plan of action for a new NCC brochure (see #3 above).
- 5) **Events/Activities - Outreach:**
  - Old Timers Reunion booth
  - 9/28: Thacher Fall Fest table
  - 9/28: Knox Barn Dance fundraiser
  - 10/4 - 10/5: EMS Club Days table
  - 10/26: Hollyhock Halloween table

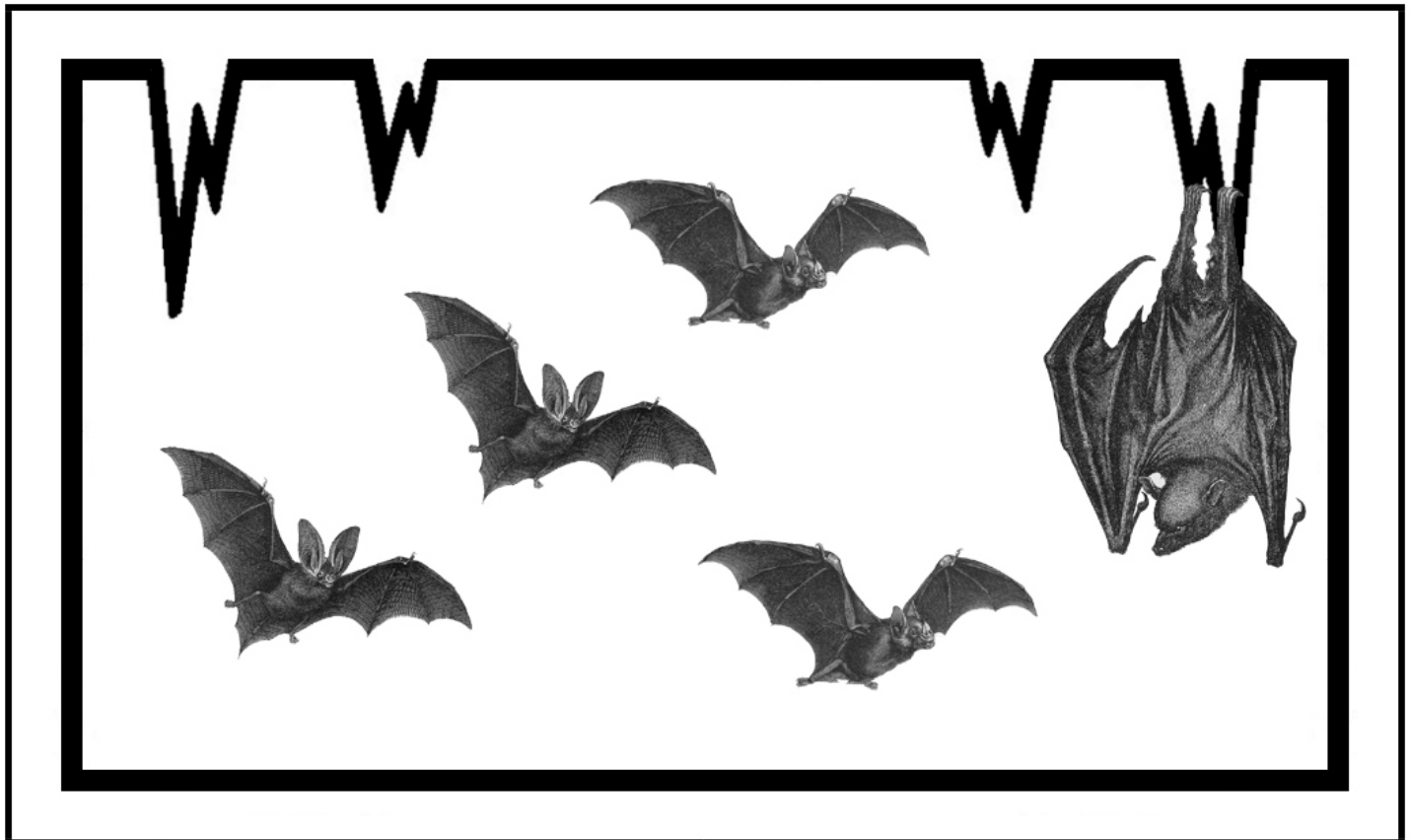


**Attachment B – VICE PRESIDENT’S REPORT**

- 1) **NCC Manual:** Edits were made to the manual to reflect actions taken by the Board at the September meeting. The updated version of the manual was sent to Mike C. on October 1 and was posted on the website.
- 2) **EC Conference Call 11/13:** The recent EC conference call touched on many topics, ranging from the end-of-year President’s Report to parking at Merlins. The most time was spent discussing the Benson’s acquisition and how to move the process of acquiring that property forward. The discussion was long and wide ranging and included, need for a property survey, possible inaccuracy in the deed description, hiring an attorney, cave gating, the management plan, property taxes, property cleanup, a DEC bat count, and getting the property covered on our liability policy. During the conference call, during which at least three Board members joined the EC, the consensus decision was to start the formal process to acquire the property.

Since the EC call, I participated in multiple follow-up email threads, which discussed different aspects of the Bensons proposal. As a result of those discussions, several preliminary steps necessary to start the acquisition process have been taken: a motion and online vote to approve funds for survey/legal work was conducted, an attorney has been retained, a draft management plan has been circulated (many thanks to Thom for preparing the draft MP), and a contract to transfer the property to the NCC has been prepared.

- 3) **Liability Insurance:** I contacted our insurance broker and inquired about adding the Bensons property to our policy. After several email exchanges, the broker has the information necessary to work up a quote to add the new preserve to our policy.



## THE OTHER WORLD OF BENTLEY'S CAVE

— Mike Kelsey —

There is a subterranean world with approximately 750 feet of passage to be explored off Rt. 22 in Berlin, NY, near the New York/Massachusetts/Vermont border. Although the trail to the cave is marked by a large kiosk and trail markers lead to the cave entrance, Bentley's Cave is largely unknown, as all otherworldly places should be. The entrance is high on a hill, which means a brisk uphill hike to reach it.

It's a mid-winter day, but abnormal temperatures have turned snowfall into rain. The trail is a sloppy mess of snow, mud, and ice. All eight of us are soaked to the skin by the time we arrive at the rabbit hole that takes us to the geological wonderland below.

One by one, we squeeze down a seven-foot-deep slot that opens in the ground. The cave is dark, save for the headlamps each of us wears on our helmet. We power up our lights to see long spears of ice hanging from the ceiling, as water drippings form ice stalagmites on the marble floor.

Careful not to slip on ice patches, we boulder below a rock outcropping. Our path ascends through a narrow fissure, hemmed in by walls that sometimes rise as high as 33 feet. Walking upright, I gaze upwards to observe metallic flecks splattered across the ceiling. They glitter like gold when my light shines on them. It's a bacterial colony known as actinomycetes, which cavers affectionately call "cave silver." Science teaches that underground cave bacteria have likely been in existence for billions of years. I imagine the level of human activity that these single-celled microbial organisms may have "witnessed" over the years.

The cave was first discovered in 1769 by Caleb Bentley, who owned the land when burglars from a textile mill stashed their bounty inside. Bentley purchased the land in 1769, but didn't discover the cave until the activities of these burglars. Today, it's frequented by cavers like us out for a day of excitement underground. Access is available thanks to the Northeastern Cave Conservancy (NCC), which acquired the land from Robert and the late Eleanor Bentley, through their daughter Randi. In 2009, the NCC opened the cave to the public. Legend has it that Bentley's Cave had been was a stop on the Underground

Michael Kelsey has wandering in his blood and writes about his adventures at [www.MikeKelseyAdventures.com](http://www.MikeKelseyAdventures.com). Write him at [KelseyADK@yahoo.com](mailto:KelseyADK@yahoo.com).

Railroad for runaway slaves on their way to freedom. A century earlier, it served as a hideout for Hessian Mercenaries on the run following the American victory at Saratoga.

Just past the "cave silver," the passage quickly slopes downhill. Here, the walls and ceiling close in as a stream seeps across the cave floor. It exits through a mouse hole only two feet high, through which we too must pass. In single file, we drop to the floor. I wait until the tread of the boots of the guy in front of me disappears around a bend in the tunnel before I follow.

I try my best to keep my midsection raised, trying to shimmy forward on knees and elbows. But the low ceiling forces my baby-crawl into a belly-crawl. I'm dressed in layers, wearing knee pads and gloves, but none are impervious to the cold water beneath me as I drag myself across the streambed.

The channel meanders to and fro like a snake, which is appropriate since a slithering snake is exactly how my body now feels. I see light coming in at the next bend, which tells me I have one more right-angle turn to maneuver through. The tunnel terminates at the Great Hall, or the Big Room as it has come to be known.

Here, we can finally stand again. After we regroup, we encounter two other cavers in the system; however, they are unfamiliar with the various passages that branch off. Fortunately for them—and for us—our lead caver, Jose, knows this cave well. He shows us where to go in, where we will come out, and sends us on our way—telling us that the squeeze ahead is too narrow for his large frame to fit through. Doubt begins to creep in.

Following Jose's directions, we chimney down a narrow chute with our backs against the wall. We lower ourselves until our feet hit bottom. This puts us at the start of a small interconnecting tunnel system, with crawls that fluctuate between two and six feet high.

I lead feet first into the narrowest tunnel. It slopes downward, so this keeps the blood from rushing to my face. With only the feel of my boots to guide me, I shimmy along on my back with my arms pinned close to my sides. I move quickly so as not to let the confinement lead to panic. After I feel the floor let out beneath my feet, I inch along slowly until solid ground is again found.

Here, stooped low in a chasm, I turn and waddle in a squatting position. I pause a moment, turn off my light, and reflect a while in the silent blackness. Underground, I'm now immersed in a cavity amid mankind's worst fears: darkness, tight spaces, heights, bacteria, cold, and



isolation. I tell myself that fear is natural, but that courage is supernatural. I think of the slaves on their way to freedom, or the Hessians fearing for their lives—both without benefit of modern headlamps—and I realize that the difficulty of my journey pales in comparison. I turn the light back on and continue through the rock vein.

Our last obstacle, before we rejoining Jose in the Big Room, is a squeeze so narrow that I can hear the helmets of those ahead of me scraping the rock as they pass. When it's my turn, I reach up to the ledge above and pull myself up. I can now hear the continuation of the stream we crawled through before and see Jose's headlamp on

the other side.

What lay between is a pinch so tight that the only way I can pass is on my side. Fully extending my lower arm as if doing the sidestroke I wiggle my torso like a worm and slowly pass through. Once my shoulders are clear, I know I've succeeded. My coveralls receive a couple of rips in the process. I'm also covered in dirt and mud, but nothing that the won't be remedied by the wet crawl on the way out—not to mention the steady rain outside which we have been oblivious of for the last two hours. I guess it's true, when you go caving you really do enter a different world.



Traveling through the narrow corridors of Bentley's Cave is both exciting and challenging. Photos by Mike Kelsey (©).



Our party gathers together for a group picture. Photo by Mike Kelsey (©).



Even short climbs can sometimes be a bit daunting. Photo by Mike Kelsey (©).



Ice formations near the entrance of Bentley's Cave. Photo by Mike Kelsey (©).



A variety of obstacles, including wet crawls in cold water, face the winter caver in Bentley's Cave. Photo by Mike Kelsey (©).



Approaching difficult locations with a positive attitude is the best way to enjoy oneself underground. Photo by Mike Kelsey (©).



Passage configurations come in a range of sizes and shapes. Photo by Mike Kelsey (©).



Ice formations can be every bit as intricate and beautiful as speleothems. Photo by Mike Kelsey (©).



Mike Kelsey admiring a group of ice stalactites in Bentley's Cave. Photo by Jose Martinez (©).