



Text Box: Northeastern

### Next Meeting

Sunday, December 8th, 2002, 10AM  
Howe Caverns  
(backup site is Foxwood Nature Center)

### Notes from the Last Meeting

- 1) In attendance were Bob Addis, Bill Folsom, Joe Levinson, Christa Hay, Jon Allison, Craig Cantello, Vince Kappler, Ed Lucas, Paul Murphy, Tom Rider, Steve McLuckie, Mike Warner, and Al Lehmann.
  - 2) Bob Simmons, the Nominating Committee Chair, asked who was willing to stay on the Executive board and has sent out an email seeking officer and committee chairs.
  - 3) Thom Engel noted that the Onesquethaw Cave Preserve has scene regular use. It has been a dry year with no closures (due to water release) from Albany County. The neighbor continues to mow around edge of field.
  - 4) Bill Folsom is looking for help with the NCC website.
  - 5) Chuck Porter reported that he has heard nothing on South Bethlehem Cave.
  - 6) Joe Levinson reported that the New Jersey Cave Conservancy would like to align with another conservancy - needs resources - Addis, Kappler, and Levinson will meet with them.
  - 7) Bob Addis saw that the land near Knox Cave has newer For Sale sign up. There is a possibility that Ella Armstrong Cave is on the property being sold. Addis will research.
  - 8) Thom Engel said that he has been given permission to survey the caves in Thatcher Park.
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- 9) Thom Engel also said that the NSS is moving towards the thought that local conservancies should own the caves.
  - 10) Vince Kappler suggested that the NCC should try to get a "prize cave" or a cave that is known to a larger group than just local area caves for the purpose of attracting attention to the NCC.
  - 11) The NCC volunteered to host the Spring 2003 NRO. See article later in newsletter.
  - 12) The NCC is going to request in writing an exclusive dig site adjacent to the entrance to old Howes Cave from its owners, Cobleskill Stone Products (CSP). The purposes of this dig will be to:
    - Assist CSP in their efforts to restore that portion of Howes Cave for future visitation,
    - Conduct a meaningful archeological excavation and offer advice,
    - Maintain a presence for the NCC in this endeavor.
 The Executive Committee will appoint a Dig Leader subject to Board confirmation at the following meeting.
  - 13) The Board passed several by-law changes.

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Deadline for next issue – 1/15/2003	

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[www.caves.org/conservancy/ncc/](http://www.caves.org/conservancy/ncc/)

### **Time for Reflection**

Wow, 2002 is almost over! The NCC is stronger than ever and when we look back on our accomplishments over this past year, we have much to be proud of...

**Membership** - In 2001, we had a goal to reach 100 members by the end of that year. Well, we've added approximately 50% to that number since January 2002. Our membership is now 149 strong including 2 exchanger memberships. Of that number, 34 need to pay their dues (so if your one of the delinquents – get your money in now) and 6 are donors whom are not members.

**Fundraising** – 2002 saw lots of fundraising efforts at various caving events such as Spring and Fall NROs, the 2002 Maine Convention, and OTR. Including sales of our promotional items and donations, we managed to bring in over \$6000.

**Preserves** – Probably the biggest news here is our acquisition of the Sellecks Karst Preserve in Carlisle, NY. The preserve consists of a little over 12 acres and contains Sellecks Cave, Cave 575, Natural Bridge, and numerous other sinks. We also pursued (or are pursuing) potential opportunities with South Bethlehem Cave, Church and Wagon Wheel Caves, Westfall Spring Cave, Van Fliets Cave, and ANC.

**Volunteerism** – Many thanks go to all the volunteers who have come out to support the NCC at the various caving events and the cleanup and maintenance at the Sellecks Karst Preserve.

As we look towards 2003 let's reflect on our accomplishments of this past year and approach this next year with greater zeal than ever before!

### **Looking for Volunteers!**

The following positions are currently open. If you have the energy to spare, please consider donating your time to this worthy organization that benefits all current and future generations of cavers.

Currently these functions are being handled by existing board members as best as they can, with everyone pitching in a little. But, having a point person to head up each of these activities will allow the NCC to be more efficient and timely and ultimately preserve more caves before landowners close them.

- Fundraising Chair
- Conservation Chair
- Membership Chair

### **For Sale at the NCC Store**

Lanyards are available for \$4 ea. NCC stickers are available for \$2 ea. or free with a \$50 donation and NCC t-shirts are available in tan or light blue for \$12 ea (M to XL) and \$14 ea (XXL and larger). Please send check payable to: The Northeastern Cave Conservancy, P.O. Box 254, Schoharie, N.Y. 12157.

**Spring 2003 NRO**  
*by Bill Folsom*

In case you weren't aware, the NCC is hosting the upcoming Spring NRO in 2003. The dates of the event are May 9, 10, 11 or May 16, 17, 18, depending on possible coordination with MAR.

Beside the date, I think the first thing to figure out for Spring NRO is the site. Assuming we hold the event in either Schoharie or Albany counties, I think we could make more money if we hosted it on a caver-friendly farmer's property. My dream would be to find a barn with electricity for a band, etc. So as to keep the "anti-band" contingent happy, we can have a separate tarped area to show cave videos, etc in. Any ideas spring to mind for location?

Here is my checklist of to-do's so far:

1. publicity - NSS News, NEcaver, reg. form, email, website
2. registration
3. NCC guidebook w\ads
4. t-shirts
5. raffle for all those attending - vendor prizes
6. 50\50 raffle
7. vendors - Speleobooks, IMO, Karst Sports, NCC?
8. security
9. speleolympics
10. squeeze boxes
11. vertical contest\training
12. photo salon
13. two breakfasts
14. dinner
15. NCC auction
16. barn
17. electricity
18. mugs
19. beer - Sam Adams\Molson (the concept is one "good" beer to start out, then going to a cheaper beer -- anyone got a good beer connection upstate NY?)
20. band - Brickenhead?
21. cave videos
22. tarps
23. water
24. showers
25. toilets
26. recycling
27. hot tub\sauna w/privacy barrier & benches
28. trip board - coordinator needed
29. geology field trip cave clean-up activity (Tufa?)
30. safety\first aid tent

Am I missing anything?

With sufficient PR and planning, I believe we can break the magic level of attendees: 300. 300 people should raise a lot of cash for the NCC and be a great time for all!

Input from hypercritical types will be more likely to be heeded IF you actually volunteer to take responsibility for some aspect of the event. In order for this event to be successful, NCC members will need to help out in all areas.

Thoughts?

**The End of The "Golden Age" of Caving**  
*editorial by Lloyd Swartz,*  
*first printed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the CaveDiggers.Com Magazine,*  
*reprinted with permission*

This article is meant as a wake up call to cavers across the country about the threat to the future of caving and cave exploration. What I write is meant as a general introduction to a major issue that cavers are facing today: closure of caves to all, forever. My primary goal is to share my concern, and hopefully generate interest in a completely new cave protection agenda.

Over the last 10+ years of caving I have witnessed some extraordinary changes in caving, almost wholly revolving around conservation practices. Many good ideas, practices and attitudes were the result. These include designating trails through heavily traveled areas and delicate areas, better resource inventory and study, improved methods for handling delicate areas, better and increased cave gating, permit systems as well as increased cave protection laws, to name a few.

At some point, things began to go horribly wrong in the world of cave conservation ideals. Entrance permits over time became more, and more difficult to get, and either eliminated for "overly sensitive" caves or caves with "important resources". Even if "important resources" were studied by qualified scientists, the cave simply remained permanently closed. Dig permits were made nearly impossible or impossible to get, with red tape involved to simply move rock and dirt. Most new discoveries were closed immediately and future exploration placed in doubt. The most spectacular and some of the largest caves in New Mexico are limited to a few permits a year, to only those with the political power to procure them.

What exactly are the root causes of this shift to the extreme preservation? A good start is the conflict between preservation and conservation. Those ideals are coming to a major collision. It is my opinion that most modern environmental groups advocate preservation, which is restoring environments to pre-man conditions and no longer allowing humans in the area, a concept that can be traced back many decades.

The reality is, those that enjoy the outdoors, including active cavers generally fall under the conservation oriented umbrella. We use, enjoy, respect, and at the same time conserve and protect public lands. Caves are no different. Are cave gating, permit restrictions, and qualifications for some caves responsible management? Absolutely! Are there any caves for which 0-5 permits a year are reasonable? Should access be tied to politics, work party only trips, restoration only trips, science only trips, etc.? Should recreational caving trips not be allowed, or unreasonably restricted? Should some caves with limited cave formations or resources not be allowed for more open, un-restricted caving and digging than other more delicate, decorated caves? These are just a few of the questions cavers need to start asking themselves about the management of their caves on public lands.

Other subtle hints of the future exist. Everyone is aware of the famous old "Leave nothing but footprints, take nothing but pictures" motto we all adhere to when recreational caving. But how many noticed its change to "Leave nothing but CAREFULLY placed footprints, take nothing but pictures"? Seemed perfectly reasonable, though a little obvious to me. But, now what is it? Something like "Leave no Foot Prints, take carefully set up photos"?

One has to be reasonable. For a bat, cricket, or man to pass, some sort of impact has to occur. The question is, what is reasonable, and what truly is an unacceptable impact? How much impact is environmental, and how much is really just visual or perceived? I don't think these questions are being answered via common sense, nor science, and the current tendency is to lean toward the extreme.

Most recently, I experienced events so disturbing, and begun to recognize the dire future of caving on public lands, that I have hung up my helmet, at least for now, after 15 years of caving. I consider myself a well-seasoned cave digger, capable of exceptional production.

Alarm bells have been blaring for years, with all recent cave discoveries locked up and no one allowed in. I thought, "...well that is just ridiculous... surely my group working closely with the BLM (not FS or NPS) under a supervised dig permit that took years to obtain, and contains specific conditions won't have any trouble... Heck, we are the CRF!"

However, on Labor Day Weekend of last year (2001) we had a break through under one of the authorized dig sites in a known cave. After a short, 1200 ft survey we encountered a discovery of epic proportions, with booming borehole going in multiple directions. I average multiple breakthroughs year, but this was a life discovery. However as the cave required special gear to safely pass formations as well as consideration of the requirement of consultation with BLM required under permit, we left the cave.

Understand also this dig was started in the 70s, dug hundreds of feet through breakdown over a decade, then a river came up making access impossible. The water went down and I fell in love with the airflow. Such a daunting, extreme, long dig resulted in 2 trips by myself, 2 on one trip, 3 on one, 4 on one, 5 on one, and finally 4 on one. There was no other help. Within 3 days the nightmare began. The local head of the CRF who had no involvement in the cave, or project, showed up knocking on the BLM door with all kinds of ideas.

Question: Should all caves in Carlsbad National Park be closed to all cavers? Folks, this is not a joke! At the next trip to the cave the local CRF head showed up with BLM in tow, and buddies and changed and locked the cave up. We were told not to go back. Then a major meeting took place shortly thereafter, with an obvious agenda to COMPLETELY CLOSE THE CAVE FOREVER! I nearly fainted, and drove home depressed and upset.

At Thanksgiving the discovery team had a private, last ditch meeting with the Resource Specialist to change the ugly direction of things to come, and revert back to the Dig Permit requirements instead. Later we were to hear another EA was going to be done, with

of course primary input from my 2 little friends. Its now anticipated it will be done in the next year or so and one science trip allowed in. The cave was THE LAST CAVE IN NEW MEXICO most cavers could reasonably get a permit for... now there are none.

I am left feeling somewhat ashamed, and plenty of cavers think I am partly responsible for locking up the last open cave. This is truly disgusting, mismanagement, and misguided management of a valuable public land recreational resource. Unfortunately there seem to be no laws protecting the recreational value of caves, i.e. to keep them open for recreational purposes.

I am a land use advocate in the Western US and I am sickened by these events, and am working hard as ever to keep surface public lands open to multi-use, and responsible conservation. My warning is this: while this is obviously a Public Land Issue, and most of you cave on private land (lucky dogs) you must be aware that this WILL come to your public lands one day, in your area. THEY EVEN discussed that at the BLM meeting I went to!!! This is TERRIFYING FOLKS!

The first rule of having a problem is recognizing the problem, and understanding it. This can be a real struggle at first, bucking the trend, shattering illusions and bringing people back toward the middle of the road, then getting them involved. Just like most groups persecuted by the modern preservation movement, they never thought they would be next. OHVs, Fourwheelers, Snow Mobiles, Mountain Bikes, Horse Back Riders, Hang Gliders, Fisherman.....AND, the scary part is the large numbers of misguided Cavers devastating their OWN SPORT! That simply does not happen nearly as much in other outdoor sports/hobbies.

I have considered starting an activist organization to promote and protect cave access, because I believe the caving community is ready. After posting a single post, on the CaveDiggers.Com forum, I was pleasantly surprised to receive several e-mails from cavers across the country, including New Mexico, and including some well-known, and respected cavers. And, although it's obvious New Mexico is one of the greatest cave states in the US, and the access situation here is coming to a head, it was interesting to hear the beginnings of these problems in a number of other states, and some, while different stories from mine, were truly shocking.

Some ideas I have are:

1. Consider private land issues as well as public lands, and involve more cavers in the discussions.
2. Get involved in management plan development, on all levels.
3. Involve qualified, and concerned scientists, and conduct scientific studies related to cave management, exploration and "Real World" impact of cavers.
4. Work on new, more fair permit systems and develop alternate plans, with definable, and credible, as well as, more reasonable numbers and requirements.
5. Look at laws that might help protect access to caves.
6. Advocate a return to responsible cave conservation.
7. Address surface access issues as they specifically relate to cave access.
8. Advocate landowner education and partnership.

I sincerely hope this is an eye-opening article to some, and gets the juices pumping for others. I hope to publish similar articles as opportunities present themselves, and promote these ideas. Since my early, vocal advocacy will mean little or no caving in the near future, I volunteer to start the ball rolling, collect names, and begin early organization, and minimize others' exposure for now. I can be contacted at [rs2477ut@mindspring.com](mailto:rs2477ut@mindspring.com), and I will automatically add you to an interested-parties list. Eventual involvement in numbers is critical to precipitate change. Remember, the cave you save may be your own!