

# Northeastern Cave Conservancy News

Volume 23, Number 4

December 2021



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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 \$20 (Regular), \$5 (Additional Family), \$50 (Benefactor), \$100 (Institutional), \$125 (Family Life Membership), and \$400 (Life Membership). All checks made payable and sent to:

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**Next Board Meeting**

**Sunday, December 5, 2021 at 10:00 am  
Speleobooks - Schoharie, New York**

**Spring Board Meeting**

**Date and Location To Be Determined**

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.

The NCC programs are focused mainly on the preservation of caves and karst. Outreach includes education in schools and local communities, establishment of park spaces on karstlands, and educational messages about the significance of groundwater pollution on this sensitive underground ecosystem.

NCC members assist in the exploration, survey, and protection of these natural resources, and manage them so you can explore them yourself.

NCC logo design by Christa Hay



## THE THOOK — Leslie Hatfield —

I will preface this story by claiming that I have taken a little creative license with some of the facts, mainly because my memory is horrible.

Where do I begin? Do I begin when my partner, Ellen, and I were looking for houses in the spring of 1994? One realtor took us to a rather low, rectangular structure, which used to be a lawn-tractor sales-and-service shop that was now being sold as a house with “lots of room for the horses.” We didn’t own any horses, nor did we foresee any in our future. It also still looked a lot like a mower repair shop, minus the mowers. This may also have been the property where I was bitten by a very nice chihuahua. Ellen has confirmed that, yes, this was the house with the chihuahua.

Should I start with the property in the Catskills that had a bong on the refrigerator, along with a shotgun leaning against the same refrigerator, both behind the entrance door? The basement of that house had a very—and I mean very—securely locked room with a lot of electrical wires going in. We were told the owner had been growing tomatoes. Everyone in New York grows their tomatoes in the basement without sunlight! The seller was rumored to work at Coxsackie Correctional. Hmmmm...

Perhaps I should start with the realtor that showed us an expandable, two-bedroom bungalow in Clarksville. The property came with 31.3 acres and, oh yeah, there’s a cave out back. “How cool is that?” I asked myself. The homeowner seemed unaware of the cave on her property. This may have been because she thought a cave would scare us away. On the contrary, it was one of the key selling points. Buying points? So, Ellen and I purchased the Gregory’s house and proceeded, over the years, to expand the bungalow.

I guess I should actually go back in time, back to the early nineties. Ellen and I went to the New York State Museum in Albany to hear a caver talk about her experience when she broke her leg while exploring Lechuguilla Cave. I was mesmerized by the beauty of this enormous cave, wow! For some reason I loved the frankness of the speaker, Emily Davis, and couldn’t wait to speak with her after the talk. One young boy in the audience asked Emily a question. He was so excited, he was squirming in his seat. “Have you ever been cave diving?” he asked. Emily’s response, “Those people are crazy!” This was someone I had to meet. More about Emily later.

Wow, 31.3 acres! As newly, self-anointed baronesses, we explored our vast acreage.

We discovered there were many trails, somewhat criss-crossing through the property that had clearly been used

for a variety of motor sports. In fact, we discovered an upside-down Honda just to the side of one of the trails. Oh, to prevent confusion, it was a sedan, not a generator or a motorcycle. Apparently, the driver wasn’t too familiar with the trail system. There was also a rather dilapidated structure that housed a variety of old Ford, Model T and Model A parts? Next to this structure were the skeletal (vanadium?) remains of a Model T. Years later, one of the Gregory’s sons would tow this vehicle to his house.

The trails led us towards the back of the property, where we discovered our cave entrance. Yes, we owned the entrance to a cave! Again, how cool is that? As I remember it, on one of our walks we encountered a bearded man, who looked very much the part of a scientist, in the vicinity of the Thook entrance, our entrance. He sat on the rock perched over the opening and proceeded to tell us the story of the Thook. Once upon a time, many years earlier, as he was cross-country skiing on the property, he noticed a misty cloud coming up through the snow. This was something he was going to have to investigate further. By his account, he returned another day and was poking at the hole with a metal rod of some sort. When it slipped from his hand and struck the bottom, it made a “thook” sound. Thus, the entrance was crowned the Thook. This may not be a verbatim account. Remember, creative license. It’s official, we owned the Thook entrance, one of the three known entrances to the Clarksville Cave. I am still unclear as to why they are referred to as “entrances” and not “exits.” Access points? Portals?

Shortly after buying our house, we came across a bunch of guys digging at the Ladder Dig. As we walked towards them, they nervously asked, “Is this your property?” Now, I don’t know a lot about digging a cave, but it seems like permission of the landowner is somewhere ahead of pack the shovel and buckets. Hmmmm... shouldn’t you be aware of who the owners are if you are digging a 20-foot-deep hole in the ground encircled with a nicely built stone wall? The stone wall was being constructed by the guy who was claustrophobic, so he remained on the surface. I suppose he had to do something constructive with his time, other than just drink the bourbon. Many, no names, would argue that the bourbon was a perfect use of his time.

One day I came across Ed McNab in the field to the west of our property and I made some comment about him owning the cave. He replied, “The good Lord owns it, I just pay the taxes on it.” That might also explain why, when I mentioned to my brother that we had purchased a house with a cave, he said, “Been there with a case of beer and a radio.” Mr. McNab got a little closer to the Lord and his three daughters inherited the property containing the Ward entrance to Clarksville Cave, a.k.a. The Sinkhole. From our house, we could hear all kinds of parties and goings-on at the cave. We would run into all kinds of people, some equipped, some not, going into the cave. Let’s just say that we were very relieved when the NCC was able to purchase the land with the sinkhole

(Ward) entrance and some time later acquire the Gregory entrance, as well.

Let's just say that we were very relieved when the NCC was able to purchase the cave.

Over the years, we would occasionally—unintentionally of course—surprise cavers as they made their way out of the Thook. They thought they were in the middle of the woods and how strange to have these people looking down at them, when the Thook was actually on one of our trails. Our dogs, as they surveyed their kingdom, would always peer down into the Thook to see who might emerge, all wet and muddy. They were thrilled that they had finally found another species that enjoyed playing in the mud as much as they did.

I made it my mission to find out who these cavers were and, more specifically, from whence they came. Their responses included Pennsylvania, Syracuse University Outing Club, Ontario, Quebec, Ohio, Vermont, Connecticut, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and "The City." To our 94-year-old neighbor on North Road, "The City" meant Albany. Presumably, Sauron's cave trolls were referring to New York City, not Mordor, Moria, or Albany. The list goes on, New Jersey, MET Grotto, Massachusetts, Boston Grotto, and on, and on. It was interesting, not everyone was keen on speaking with me though most were. I get it. They were wet, muddy, and in need of a porta-john or hungry. And where the heck did I come from, why was I interrogating them, and where is the parking lot?

I can't recall anyone—families, grottos, camps, scout troops (until we banished them)—asking us for permission to go caving on our property. Oh, no, I stand corrected. The cave-rescue folks ask permission. When the Boy Scouts of America decided to take a hard stance on gay kids and counselors, banishing them from the organization, we did our part (an eye for an eye and all that). Then came the troop that we encountered in the cave parking lot. We nicely explained to them that until the Boy Scouts changed their policies around gay scouts, they were not permitted on our property. The troop leader said, "Don't worry, we're from Ithaca and we get it. We don't follow that mandate." We let them use the Thook.

Every so often, we would look out our kitchen window to see really muddy people carrying helmets and flashlights and walking on the trail between the ponds towards the house. We would inquire if they were lost, which was an obvious conclusion, yet we would ask anyway. We would redirect them to the parking lot behind the diner.

Prior to buying our house in Clarksville and becoming a baroness, I had only been in one cave in my life: Howe Caverns. Ellen and I would later enjoy Ape Cave, a lava tube in the Pacific Northwest courtesy of Mt. St. Helens, and walk through more lava tubes in Ecuador and the Galapagos. And yes, we would explore Clarksville Cave. I

have to admit, I have never been through the Thook. I have climbed down into the Thook from the surface but have never traversed the entire length of this passageway, either to or from the main section of the cave. I do remember, quite vividly, attempting to traverse the passage from the main cave to exit to the surface through the Thook. In trying to contort my finely sculpted physique so it could fit into a T-shaped passage, I could only think, "I am going to be so embarrassed, if I have to be rescued from my own cave!" It was daunting enough to know I would have to go through the "chest compressor." So, I backed out and returned to the main passage. Navigating the Thook would have to wait for another day. Or lifetime.

Enter Emily - I don't really remember the first time I went in Clarksville, though I'm sure I was wearing a bike helmet with a headlamp and a lot of duct tape. I also think Emily and Mike Warner were in this part of the movie, not sure what scene was their first, they were in so many. Em and M have been in the cave with us, probably a hundred times (creative license), with our children, our friends, our relatives, my students, and our children again, and more students! The sinkhole to the lake room and back.

I taught Earth science at Albany High School and had the great pleasure of introducing my students to the finer points of living in Clarksville and owning a cave. I would take them over to Stove Pipe Road; to Tommell's Livestock Farm, so they could see and smell real cows (cattle); and then to Clarksville Cave. Chuck Porter, Mike Chu, Em, and M (and I'm sure there were many others), would assist in taking my 'city kids' into the underworld. In the words of one of my students, "That was waaay cool. I AM NEVER DOING THAT AGAIN!" Who knows? Maybe one or two are still caving or maybe even studying speleothems.

At one point, many years ago, I did go from the main room out through the sump to exit through the Gregory. I was on a field trip with a group of geologists. I was at that point where you squeeze through a very narrow section while standing neck (chest) deep in water and then duck your head into the water a bit to duck under the ceiling to find yourself in a much larger room where you can walk out of the water. Just prior to this, there is a section where I really had to squeeze myself through, with this rock pushing on my chest. One of the other cavers said, "I usually go a bit higher, where it's not so tight." This information would have been much more useful 30 seconds sooner. Well, as I contemplated turning around and heading back from whence I came, a hand appeared from the water, from the 'other side', and 'pulled me' under and through. I had made it to the other side. As I stood there, thrilled to be alive, "I did it!" I heard a voice, not mine this time, say, "If you come over here, you'll be out of the water." I snapped back to reality and followed their suggestion and walked out of the water. No, I was not really pulled through.

Skip ahead a few years. Emily asked if I would like to help with a barn dance fundraiser that the NCC was having. Sure. I went around to local businesses and asked for a donation of a gift certificate for a raffle prize. We would have held out 12th annual barn dance in 2020, but it was cancelled due to Covid; 2021 would have been our 12th barn dance. Let's hope that 2022 will be the year for the 12th, not-so-annual after all, barn dance. Wow, how time flies and friendships grow.

At some point, our whole family were members of the NSS. I did mention that Clarksville is really the only cave I have been in, minus lava tubes and an elevator. The memberships lapsed. Somewhere along the way, we joined the NCC and then joined as life members. Oddly enough, in the last couple of years, Ellen has really gotten into caving, joining the Helderberg-Hudson grotto and renewing her membership with the NSS. The event that sparked this interest in Ellen was when we took the NCRC (National Cave Rescue Commission) Level 1 class, where we conducted a mock rescue from Knox Cave. Ellen was hooked! Of course, we now live on Cape Cod, the land without caves.

Oddly enough, Ellen and I have never participated in an organized cleanup of Clarksville. Somehow, we always managed to be out of town. That said, what became one of our favorite headlamps—a Petzl with the battery pack that mounted on the back of the helmet that had been a remnant of someone else's caving experience—was found near the cave. Some of our favorite clothes, castoffs of long-forgotten cavers (no, not socks and underwear, yuck), were also found near the cave, washed, and still being worn. Many of these items were washed, folded, and donated to the local church clothing collection box. And gloves, lots of gloves, lots and lots of solitary gloves, long separated from their mates.

So, thank you to the soccer player from Oyster Bay! Ellen has gotten years of wear from the long-sleeved shirt that you left behind at the cave many years ago.

Then, there was the time we discovered miles of toilet paper strewn through the woods. A group of girls from a summer camp had left a trail back to the parking lot! They had also left a different sort of trail that I won't say any more about. This occurred every year for a few years with Ellen talking to the girls, their counselors, their

“guide,” and even writing a letter to the camp. This was all to no avail; they continued until...one year someone stole their toilet paper. Oops!

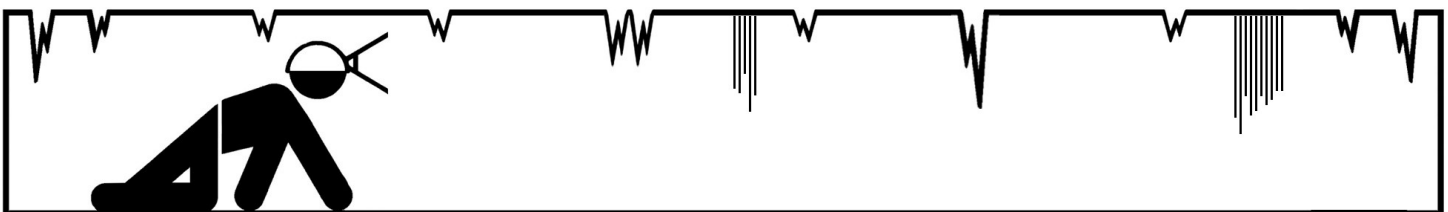
Oh my. So many years, so many fun stories, interesting people and conversations, fond memories, great clothing.

Enter Bill Folsom - “Leslie, have you ever considered being on the Board for the NCC?” Leslie, “Nooooo.” Well, I am now a Trustee, with business cards to prove it and everything. What an amazing organization! A seemingly random, hodgepodge mixture of project cavers (thanks Ramon), geologists, students, professors, earth science teachers, chiropterologists, and cavers extraordinaire, who all have the common goal of using their time, knowledge, and countless energy—and, in many cases, their money—to further the mission of the NCC: to conserve caves and karst in the Northeast.

Neither Ellen nor I remember when we first talked about donating the Thook to the NCC though it was long before we talked to anyone at the NCC about it. Well, it is now a done deal and, with our donation of the Thook, the NCC now owns all three known entrances to the Clarksville Cave. The Thook is securely in the hands and hearts of the NCC. Thanks for the memories.



Our daughters, Sophie and Lauren, exploring Clarksville Cave with their caving buddies, Emily Davis and Mike Warner. Photo by Leslie Hatfield.



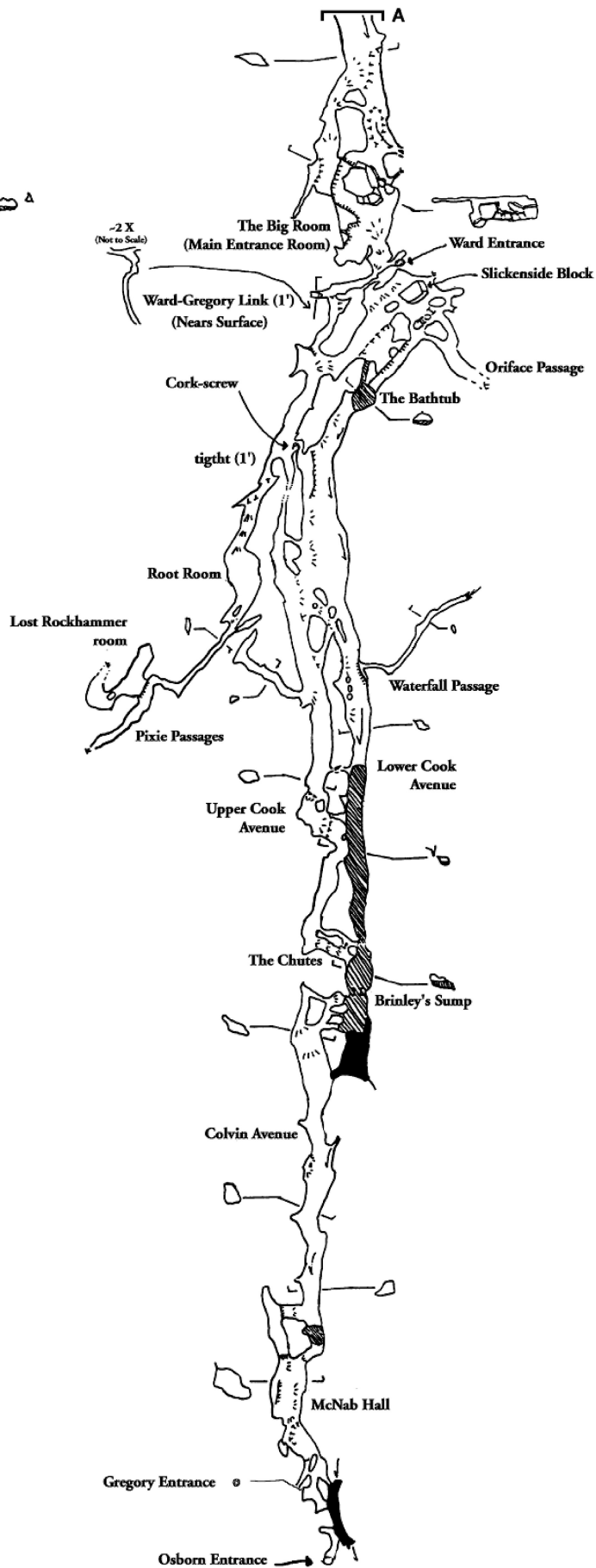
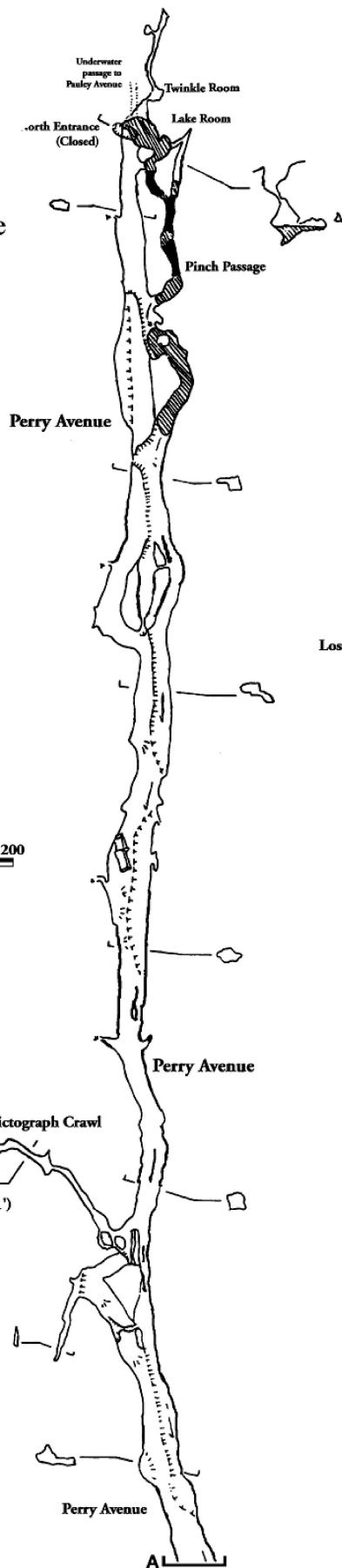
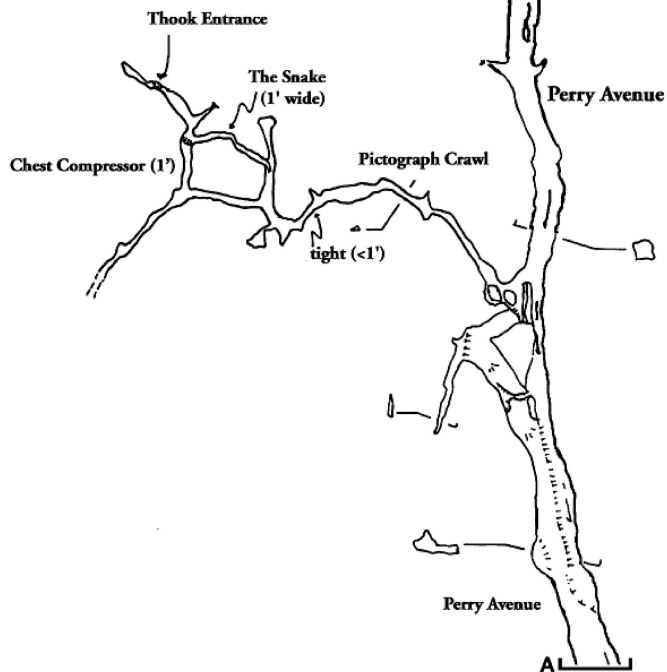
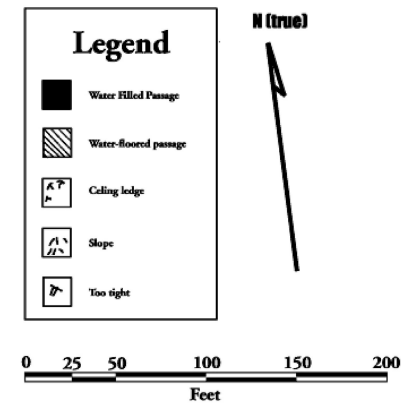
# Clarksville Cave (Ward-Gregory Cave)

## Lake Room to Osborn Cave

Albany Co., NY

T. Cook, T. Engel, W. Foote, A. Fleishmann, E. Kastning, G. Saunders, J. Schweyen, R. Smith, & many others

1. This map is based on the Kastning map of 3/7/75. New passages added are the Pinch Passage, the Thook Section, the Orifice Passage, and part of the Bathub Fisside.
2. Stream flow is perennial, but varies from a low of 2 gpm to in excess of 80,000 gpm.
3. The Gregory Entrance, Brinley's Sump, and the stream access immediately west of McNab Hall are subject to flooding. During periods of extreme flood, the bathtub and the downstream end of Perry Avenue also sump shut.
4. From the Lake Room south, the entire cave is Grade 5 except the Pinch Passage (grade unknown), the Orifice Passage (grade 2), and the underwater sections (Grade 3).



**GIVE & GEAR-UP RAFFLE - 2021**  
**— Leslie Hatfield —**

Fundraising success story 2021! \$5K++!

These past twenty-one months have been filled with so many Covid-generated let downs, it is great to be able to write about something positive. As many of you know, much of the NCC’s fundraising efforts rely on in-person events.

- NRO - Rescheduled
- 12th Annual Barn Dance - Cancelled
- NRO - Cancelled
- 12th Annual Barn Dance - Cancelled again

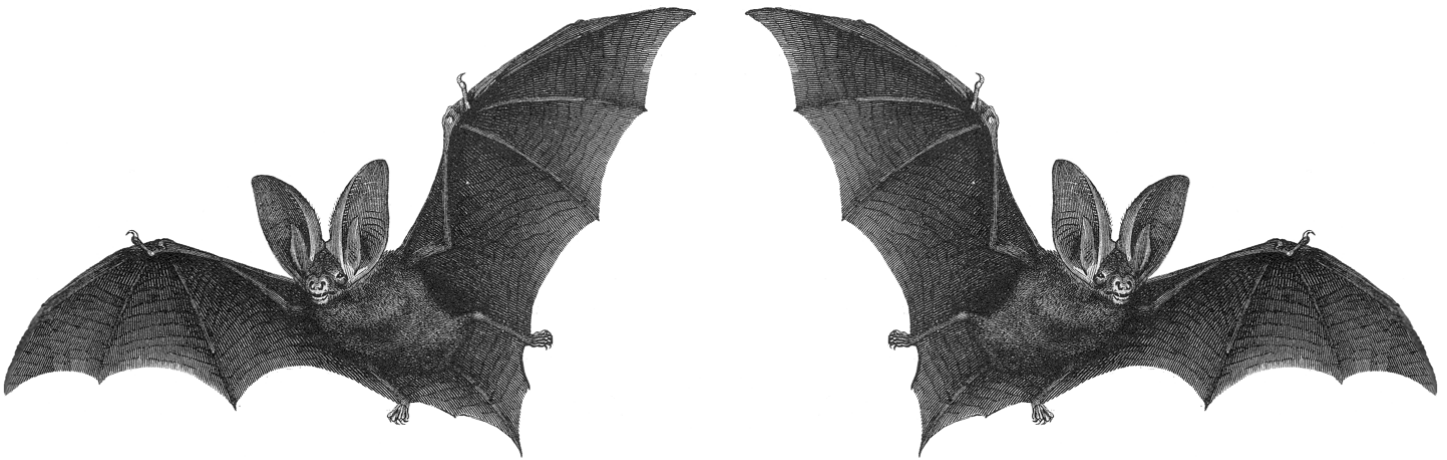
As much of the world has been forced to shift to doing everything online, from ordering toilet paper to conducting business meetings, this shift provided the NCC with an opportunity to move some fundraising efforts online, as well. The Give & Gear-Up 2021 Raffle was created to assist in filling our Covid-generated fundraising void.

Businesses generously donated a variety of items: belay gloves, a Prussik double pulley, climbing ropes, outdoor com-  
mode, and more. The Give & Gear-Up 2021 raffle generated over five thousand dollars (\$5742) from sixty (60) donors! The online format allowed participation from donors in the Northeast, as well as some from as far away as New Mexico and British Columbia.

Thank you, thank you to all our volunteers and donors. And a special thank you to the following businesses for making this a great success:

- Pigeon Mountain Industries
- Elevated Climbing
- Carroll Bassett/BMS Rescue Equipment
- Final Frontier Sports
- Untapped Nutrition

- BlueWater Ropes
- Restop
- Field Notes
- Black Dome Press
- Cabot Family Farms



**NEW YORK STATE EMPLOYEES FEDERATED APPEAL**

Do you work for the State of New York? If so, you can now donate to the Northeastern Cave Conservancy via paycheck deductions. Go to [www.sefanys.org](http://www.sefanys.org), then use the pull-down menu on the right where it says “Select Charity Name.” Then click on “Search” to see the code(s) for the three regions of New York State where the NCC has a pre-serve. You can then use one of these codes to set up your payroll deduction.

Please consider this to give automatically to your favorite charity!

Bill Folsom