Jack Packers Cave Preserve
Management Plan

INTRODUCTION

The Northeastern Cave Conservancy (NCC) leases and manages Jack Packers Cave. Jack Packers is the longest known cave in Greene County, New York, and has a mapped length of 1,432 feet and two entrances.

Jack Packers Cave is formed in the Onondaga Limestone of Middle Devonian age. The NCC leases about 12 acres of the total parcel of 144.5 acres, which includes both entrances to the cave. The leased parcel is bounded on the west by the New York State (NYS) Thruway (northbound side of I-87). Preserve parking has been established as a designated area east of the thruway overpass on the south side of the dirt access road to the property.

PURPOSE OF A MANAGEMENT PLAN

The purpose of a management plan is to describe what is on a property and how it should be managed. A plan is not a static document that once written is placed on the shelf and forgotten. It is a document that is to be used and referenced on a regular basis. The property managers must follow the plan unless there is a compelling and overriding reason for doing otherwise. Unless there is an immediate need, nothing should be done at a property that is not in the plan. If something new is desired, the plan should be amended only after a careful, complete, and thorough analysis of the proposed changes or additions. Then, the amendments must be approved by the NCC board. Think of the management plan as an operating manual for a preserve.

If the management plan is the basis for a lease agreement with a third party, then any changes must also be approved by the third party.

HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY

It is possible that Jack Packers is the cave described in *The New York Times* from June 28, 1885 in an article entitled “Cave Hunting in Catskill”. This article is attributed to “H. G. C.”, who was likely Henry Guy Carlton; Carlton also wrote a description of Howe’s Cave, Luray Caverns, and other southern caves.

Genealogical records show a Packer family that lived on Cauterskill Road in Catskill from the late 19th century until the 1940s, the most recent census data available. A search of the white pages reveals that there are still Packers in the area. It is therefore possible that there was an actual “Jack Packer”.

The cave is not mentioned in any of the 19th-century gazetteers of New York like French’s. George Chadwick in the *Geology of the Catskill and Kaaterskill Quadrangles, Part II* (1916) mentions a cave on the north side of the Kaaterskill a half mile west of the hamlet of Cauterskill. This is significantly shy of the location of Jack Packers but no other caves are known that would match the description. Chadwick places the cave on the Webber Farm and the picture shown in Chadwick of the Webber Farm Spring is the spring found west of the trail leading to the cave.

An 1856 map of Greene County shows D. Weber [sic] living at the farm. It also shows that the current driveway was part of the local road. The current owner confirms that the bridge across the creek was near the house. A deed search might help clarify this question.

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UNDERGROUND RESOURCES

Biological – Multiple species of bats have been observed in the cave. Additionally, it is likely that the following invertebrates would be found in the cave: *Scoliopteryx libatrix*, the cave or herald moth, and *Ceuthophilis maculatus*, a cave cricket. Additionally, the presence of *Stygmobromus allegheniensis*, an aquatic, troglobitic amphipod, should be ascertained, although its presence would seem unlikely. There are likely a number of accidentals washed into the cave via the northern entrance. A more detailed biological inventory should be conducted.

Geological – Jack Packers Cave is formed in the Onondaga Limestone on the strike along the ESE limb of an anticline. The valley adjacent to the cave entrance follows the axis of a syncline. The rock dips to the WNW on the side of this syncline opposite the cave. West of the cave, much of the bedrock has been removed for highway construction, but the Onondaga dips steeply to the WNW. Near vertical beds are visible in the streambed just downstream of the town road bridge over the Kaaterskill.

Based upon passage orientation and passage cross-section, the cave appears to be phreatic in origin. Slickensides are prominently visible in the floor of the cave passage approximately halfway between the entrances. A more thorough analysis of the local structural geology is necessary for a better understanding of the cave's origin and development.

Hydrological – An intermittent stream enters the north entrance, but normally does not appear south of Crawl 13 except as puddles. This water is likely resurging at the spring that Chadwick refers to as Webber Farm Spring. It is about 350 feet SSW of the south entrance to the cave.

Undoubtedly, during periods of high runoff, much of the cave could have flowing water. Water in the entrance passage closest to the south entrance would seem to be very rare; water would likely flow SSW and resurge to the right of the south entrance. There is ample evidence of water exiting the limestone here.

The hydrologic base level is the Kaaterskill, though the nearby spring is perched on the underlying Schoharie Sandstone.

Paleontological – The Onondaga is a reef limestone. No unique paleontological resources are known.

Archaeological – There are no known archaeological resources; passage cross-sections are generally small and would not be attractive even as a temporary campsite for humans.

Historical – No unique historical resources are known.

SURFACE RESOURCES

Biological – There are three distinct habitats on the preserve. There is a small area of riparian habitat along the Kaaterskill.

The slope leading up to the cave has considerable ground cover consisting of wild ginger *(Asarum canadense*), the invasive garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), and the invasive Asiatic bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*). There are a considerable number of ironwoods, a.k.a. American hornbeam *(Carpinus caroliniana*) trees. There are also Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) and mayapples (*Podophyllum peltatum*).

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The area above the slope is open woodland and has little ground cover. What exists are mostly tree seedlings. The trees found are hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), white pine (*Pinus strobus*), red oaks *(Quercus* spp.), and hemlocks (*Tsuga canadensis*).

There is evidence of white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and past evidence for red fox (*Vulpes vulpes)*. Other animals likely to be found are chipmunks (*Tamias striatus*), gray squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*), flying squirrels (*Glaucomys sabrinus*), porcupines (*Erethizon dorsatum*), sharp-shinned hawks (*Accipiter striatus*), pileated woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*), and a variety of woodland birds.

Geological – Down at creek level, the Esopus Shale is visible on the south side of the creek.

The trail from the parking area encounters large talus blocks of Onondaga Limestone about halfway up the slope. The Schoharie Sandstone is visible west of the trail at Webber Farm Spring. Continuing up the slope, the trail reaches the top right at the axis of a syncline; this syncline is generally filled with unconsolidated sediments.

At the south entrance of the cave, the rocks are on the east limb of a steeply descending anticline. The bedding across the syncline is not as steep and suggests that the folding is asymmetrical or that there is faulting. A more thorough geological assessment is needed.

Hydrological – Besides the intermittent stream entering the north entrance, there is a spring that Chadwick refers to as Webber Farm Spring. The discharge from this joins another stream coming from under the nearby highway. This passes under the owner's driveway and joins the Kaaterskill south of the preserve.

Paleontological – No unique paleontological resources are known on the preserve.

Archaeological – No unique archeological resources are known on the preserve.

Historical – No unique historical resources are known on the preserve.

ASSUMPTION OF RISK STATEMENT

Cave exploration and hiking on karst terrain may involve risk of injury or death from various hazards, both obvious and obscure, including, but not limited to, slippery and uneven ground, open pits, injury by acts of other people, falling, being struck by falling objects, becoming lost, the presence or sudden appearance of water, and hypothermia. All cave visitors will abide by the normally accepted rules of safe and conservation minded caving as outlined by the National Speleological Society, 6001 Pulaski Pike, Huntsville, Alabama 35810-1122.

ACCESS POLICY

Jack Packers Cave will be managed for park-and-go caving.

Groups where any money has or will change hands, including but not limited to cave-for-pay, camps, schools, colleges, and outdoor education programs, as well as churches and scouts, must contact the Special Use Coordinator for information on access to the cave at specialuse@necaveconservancy.org.

Other access requirements are:

- Visitors must be properly equipped. Each individual must have a helmet and at least three (3) independent sources of light. Knee pads are recommended.
- Minimum group size is 3. No groups of more than 6 individuals shall be allowed in the cave except by special written permission of the preserve manager. This is smaller than the NCC's normal maximum group size, but the smaller cave cross-sections dictate this.
- The cave and property shall be closed during rescues or at the discretion of the manager or landowner.
- All visitors entering the cave must have a change of clothes and commit to post-caving WNS decontamination. See: http://whitenosesyndrome.org/topics/decontamination
- Visitors may **not** park on the owner's access road or block it in any way. No vehicular or pedestrian traffic is allowed past the first farm gate located east of the thruway overpass. Cars should park head-in or tail-in and be completely off the roadway.
- Access to the cave is free of charge to all.

USE CONFLICTS

At this time, the only potential use conflict is the closure of the cave during the winter due to the presence of bats (from October 1 to April 30). However, the owner has indicated an intention to fully comply with the closure. Outside of this, the owner may wish to for passive recreation, firewood collection, or maple sugaring.

RESEARCH RULES

All research carried out on the NCC preserve must meet the following criteria:

1) Researchers must initially contact both the NCC science coordinator and the preserve manager(s).
2) The goals and objectives of the research must be clearly defined.
3) Except for long-term monitoring studies, there must be a clear beginning and end to each project.
4) The work should not cause permanent damage to any caves, natural features, native biota, or historical resources nor interfere with natural hydrologic or chemical processes. Any damage must be mitigated.
5) The research plan must ensure the maximum safety of all concerned.
6) The work must not interfere with the "experience" of other property visitors.
7) Unless specifically authorized by the NCC Board, researchers must operate within the confines of the established management plans for each property.

EXPLORATION RULES

The cave is bounded on the west by an interstate thruway and on the east by a valley. The potential for exploration seems limited. One possibility is following the stream in the cave.

Any digging projects must be approved by the preserve manager(s). Persons proposing a dig project shall submit a plan to the manager(s) detailing where they plan to dig, how long they plan to dig, and where they plan to dispose of the spoils. Plans should also include how the diggers plan to remediate the dig should it be abandoned. Projects that include potential passage modification require specific approval from the preserve manager(s) and property owner. Any dig that is not worked on for more than one year, excluding cave closures for bat hibernation, shall be considered abandoned and any subsequent work in the same area will require the manager(s)' approval.

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Results of exploration trips will be conveyed to the preserve manager(s). All new exploration should be map-as-you-go.

PUBLICITY POLICY

Regarding publicity about the cave itself, except as noted below, the cave is not to be publicized in magazines or newspapers of general circulation nor on radio or television. Cavers' publications like *The Northeastern Caver* and the *NSS News* may contain information on the latest discoveries. Some grotto publications may also have information, but again these have limited circulation and usually do not give locations. It is requested that posts on social media not mention the cave's location. It is further requested that images have their metadata that locates the picture removed.

The landowner may mention the cave and the preserve in any advertising related to his business.

SURFACE MANAGEMENT

From the parking area, a trail has been established that leads to the south entrance of the cave. In addition to the maintenance of this trail, a second trail is planned that will connect the two entrances of the cave.

RESCUE CONSIDERATIONS

There are a number of sharp turns in the cave that would make evacuating a patient in a stretcher challenging, and require the use of alternate measures such as a half-SKED in many places. Such spots include the bypass at Three Bridges, The Slide, and the crawl near the northern entrance.

FUTURE PLANS

- It is recommended that a surface survey between the two entrances be completed.
- A thorough analysis of the preserve's geology is needed.
- Creation of a trail between the two entrances.
- Post signage along the northern and eastern limits and western limits of the preserve to prevent preserve visitors from wandering onto the remainder of the property of the owner or the thruway ROW, respectively.
- Identify and contact local rescue/EMS resources to inform them of the cave and the preserve.

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