

# Northeastern Cave Conservancy News



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.

### Next Board Meeting

Sunday, March 29th 10AM at the Gallupville House, Gallupville NY

### Note from the Editor

This is the first NCC newsletter since the June 2008 issue (volume 10, no. 2). As always, the content of this newsletter is written by the membership for all to read. Due to the lack of content last year, I chose not to put out a one page issue in September, and next thing I knew the December issue had come and gone with nothing written up to assemble either.

My apologies for not keeping on top of the task of getting more people to write articles, but at the same time, I feel awkward having to continually solicit the handful routine contributors for articles.

A big thanks to all those that contributed to this issue. I'll try my best to maintain the quarterly newsletters this year. Please, please, please send me any NCC related content that you have throughout the year!!

### Notes from the December Board Meeting

- 1) Michael Chu, Vince Kappler, and Bob Simmons re-elected to the NCC board.
- 2) Hay reports that the Onesquethaw changing station is complete. The board thanks Art Rafferty for putting it up.
- 3) Addis reports that the owners of Bentley's Cave have agreed to donate approximately 5 acres of

land as well as a location for a parking lot and access trail.

- 4) Kappler reports that VV totals to date for 2008: 840 hours of work for a total value of \$16857.00.
- 5) Siemion reports that a new trail has been cut at Sellecks preserve that runs from the kiosk along the trees to Levy's Cave, where it rejoins the old trail. The trail is now entirely on NCC property and will require much less mowing.
- 6) Jay Siemion steps down from the NCC board. The board thanks Siemion for his years of service.

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<p>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 addtl. (Family), \$10 (student), \$50 (Benefactor), and \$100 (Institutional). 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;"><a href="http://www.necaveconservancy.org">www.necaveconservancy.org</a></p>		

### Notes from the September 2008 Board Meeting

- 1) Addis notes that the NCC group conservation report won an award at the NSS convention.
- 2) Hay reports that the cleanup at Al and Paul's property went very well, with lots of volunteers helping out.
- 3) Jon Allison announces that he will be stepping down as land trust liason. The board thanks him for his years of work.
- 4) Kappler reports that VV totals to date for 2008: 487 hours of work for a total value of \$9975.00.
- 5) Simmons announces that the management application for Surprise cave is moving forward; Pat Vissering has recived the AANR (adopt a natural resource) application back from her boss without substantial comment and anticipates being able to complete all the minor comments/corrections to it by the end of the year.
- 6) The board has voted to abolish the positon of land trust liason and fold it under the duties of President.
- 7) Addis announces that the NCC will be assisting the DEC in construction of temporary bat gates in 3 mines in NYS in exchange for a donation to the NCC's general fund.
- 8) The board voted that the NCC will not appeal the ALJ decision on the issue of the effect of blasting n the Becker's Cave and Parsonage Spring, and that the NCC withdraw from the case.

### Notes from the June 2008 Board Meeting

- 1) Michael Chu, Vince Kappler, and Bob Simmons re-elected to the NCC board.
- 2) Youngbaer moved that \$250 of the White Nose funds donated by individuals to the NCC via Jonah Spivak for any White Nose-related purpose be used to cosponsor the June 9-11 science strategy.
- 3) The board moved to appoint a representative to attend the Cave Conservation and Management Sessions of the 2008 NSS Convention. The

representative will report on the sessions at the fall NCC meeting and will submit Volunteer Value data (mileage, drive time, time at sessions) to the VV.

- 4) Kappler reports that VV totals to date for 2008: 269 hours of work for a total value of \$6882.00, which is somewhat lagging behind previous years.
- 5) The board is looking for a grant writer for Merlin's Cave fundraising.
- 6) Youngbear reports that bats that are out and about are damaged—including dry and brittle wings, white splotches. They had hoped bats would be healthy but the evidence does not show that.
- 7) Armstrong reports that data loggers were removed from Knox cave, and that during the DEC bat count at Knox only saw one WNS bat past the Gun barrel out of approx. 300 in the entire cave.
- 8) Youngbaer reports:

Fungal find: it survives the cold. Lab tests on this fungus - very large amount of lab work had been completed.

Fall surveys might not have been good for baseline data. Thinking to wait until they go into hibernation to conduct surveys this fall.

People in other parts of country are very concerned about spreading to other areas.

Possibility of cave closure – mainly hibernaculums.

### **Decision time for the Merlins Cave Preserve**

*by Chuck Porter, Acquisitions Chair*

At the March 29 NCC meeting, the NCC Board will vote on whether to continue with the purchase of Merlins Cave. This beautiful and sporting marble cave in Columbia County, New York (not far from Pittsfield, Mass.) was dug open in the fall of 2006 and pushed -- over several trips -- to waterfalls, canyons, domes, and big rooms, with sculpted walls and abundant formations. Numerous leads remain unchecked because the owners forbade further entry due to insurance and legal reasons. The existing survey of 800 feet horizontal, 116

vertical, is probably less than half of the explored cave.

Pictures and descriptions of Merlins Cave have appeared in the *Northeastern Caver*, on web sites, and on posters displayed at caving events including the 2008 NSS Convention. Nearly \$25,000 has been raised to date, thanks to matching grants from Dick Blenz and Thom Engel, and to generous donations from others in the caving community. The price tag for the proposed preserve is \$85,750 based on an appraisal assuming a conservation easement. In addition, approximately 27% of the cost of a land survey, a stewardship payment of \$3500 to the Columbia Land Conservancy, title search and insurance, \$50 planning board fee, and legal fees, raise the total preserve costs to the low \$90,000s. Should the Board decide to utilize much of the NCC's money market funds (but not including the presently-depressed portfolio held by the National Speleological Foundation), we are roughly halfway there.

The proposed preserve is on a wooded hillside and is an estimated 34.3 acres. Merlins Cave opens on a bench at the fault contact of Stockbridge Marble with insoluble rocks, and extends north towards an impressive line of sinks lying within the proposed preserve. Further south is another karst feature, Dragon Bones Cave, which has been pushed to a stream and might connect with Merlins. Thom Engel conducted a biological survey of the surface and was pleased with the lack of invasive species. Endangered walking fern is present, and the woods are mature and attractive. A deeded 10-foot walking access over a friendly neighbor's property at the top of the hill would lead to a kiosk at the edge of the preserve, and then down to Merlins Cave. From there other trails would lead along the sinks and to Dragon Bones Cave. One curious feature is a circular trough 40 feet in diameter -- perhaps associated with an old milling operation.

Merlins is a significant bat hibernaculum. When the big room at the end was first entered in 2007, up to a thousand bats were estimated present, with many dead. A NYSDEC bat survey in March 2008 tallied 434 little browns, 32 pipistrelles, 21 long-eared and 4 unknown bats. Most were in the big room and WNS was present. Another DEC bat survey is set for March 19, 2009. These have been the only visits into Merlins Cave since 2007.

After Board approval, the next step will be to sign the purchase contract, which we finally have in hand after one and a half years, along with a \$1000 deposit. Following planning board approval, an additional \$7500 is due, with the remaining \$77,250 due by Dec. 31, 2009. A land survey and title search must also be made.

Fund-raising will need to be ramped up. Perhaps no- or low-interest loans can be arranged within the caving community, and as a last resort the owners have indicated they would hold a mortgage on the “final make-up small portion” to complete the deal in 2009. We will also need to contact neighbors and the local fire and rescue squad to gain their support for this preserve. The Columbia Land Conservancy is most enthusiastic about the cave and the surface lands.

The Merlins Cave Preserve contains a beautiful cave in pristine condition, with potential for further passage discoveries and a significant bat population. It is geologically unique. The surface acreage is attractive and this preserve should be an asset for local residents. It will expand the range of the NCC out of Albany and Schoharie counties and towards New England. Let’s make it happen!

### Sellecks Karst Preserve visitation statistics

*by Jay Siemion, Preserve Manager*

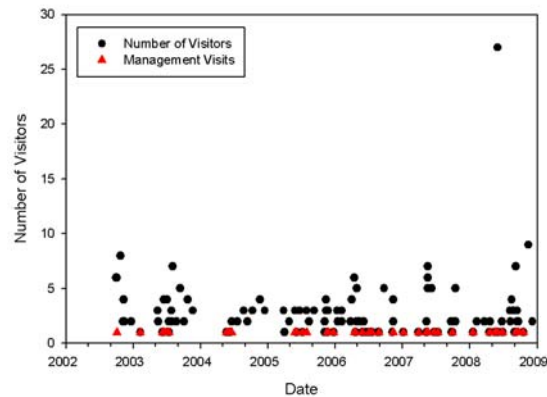
In past years reports on visitation to properties owned by the NCC have not been compiled as part of the management strategy. While visitation reports show numbers that may be of interest to the board and membership, they are also useful tools to be used when applying for grants. The ability to identify the number and frequency of visitors to each property can strongly illustrate the value these preserves bring to the community. As the NCC grows, visitation reports can also be used to allocate resources to the properties which have been determined to have the highest visibility and use by the public. Below is a brief summary of visitation to the Sellecks Preserve from summer 2002 to the end of 2008. The numbers presented are minimum estimates as visitation to the preserve is monitored by a self registration process.

Between the summer of 2002 and the end of 2008 324 individuals visited the property in 78 recorded visits. The annual number of group visits and the

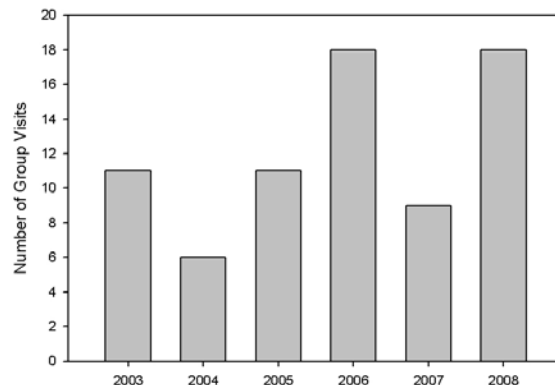
number of individuals in those groups over time are shown in the accompanying figures. During those visits Levy’s Cave was visited 50% of the time; Selleck’s Cave 50% of the time; Cave 575 35% of the time; and all three caves were entered during the same visit 30% of the time. Thirty-eight percent of the total visits to the preserve were surface walks. Most visits were between April and November with little to no visitation during the winter months. Minimum caving group size was 2 with a maximum of 9, while surface groups varied between 1 and 27 people. The year 2004 saw the fewest visits (6) while 2006 and 2008 saw the most (18). Many of the caving groups were lead by people familiar to the preserve manager with many repeat visits by the same groups. Local people were also noted to have visited for surface walks on a somewhat regular basis. There were 40 management visits during the last 7 years, with most during the early summer months to mow the parking area.

It would be a worthwhile goal to have an annual report on usage from each property to document the visitation for both institutional knowledge and to assist in future grant proposals.

Sellecks Preserve Visitation 2002-2008



Number of Groups Visiting the Sellecks Preserve Annually



## Bentley's Cave News

by Chuck Porter

The owners of Bentley's Cavern have offered to donate it to the NCC. Bentley's Cavern is a popular horizontal cave in Berlin, Rensselaer County, NY, not far from the Massachusetts border. The cave is developed in marble and contains a variety of attractive passage features. It has a long history: being a bandit and gamblers' hideout in the 19th century, a possible stop on the underground railroad, photography (with Clay Perry) in the 1930s, the site of a 1956 NRO work project, and the recent Grade 5 map drafted by Ken Davis and Peter Haberland. Cavers and locals have visited Bentley's for many decades.

The property has been in the Bentley family since 1769 and present owners Bob and Eleanor Bentley, along with their daughter Randi Bentley, are eager to have the cave remain accessible with the land in a wild state. Discussions are still ongoing but we hope to have a parking area a discreet distance off Rt. 22 with a 2800-foot trail along logging roads leading to the cave property. Although longer than the usual access from another owner's property, this route is much less steep. The tentative parcel size would be about six acres and includes both Bentley's and Dry Valley caverns.

NCC member and professional surveyor Mike Bourgeois has kindly agreed to survey the property gratis in spring 2009 and will be looking for assistance at that time. Consequently, total costs should be minimal -- perhaps just a few hundred dollars to cover legal fees, kiosk materials, and gravel for the parking area. Mike Chu has hiked over the property several times to get GPS data on boundaries and features. Mike Bourgeois, Bob Addis, and I have also visited the property and/or the owners.

Members of the caving community have been in contact with the Bentley's for some years, but after Randi visited Knox Cave and saw the kiosk and the condition of the preserve there, she was impressed and contacted the NCC about a donation. It has been a pleasure to work with the Bentley's and we look forward to a continuing good relationship with new neighbors in Berlin.

## Bat Counts

by Christa Hay

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) once again asked the NCC for help with bat counts this year. It was decided at the December board meeting that I would help to coordinate these bat count trips. Al Hicks sent out an informational email with the list of caves, survey form and a very good link to a Power Point to help with bat identification which was forwarded on to the caving community. If you would like to know all about identifying bats download the PowerPoint from here <ftp://ftp.dec.state.ny.us/dfwmr/wildlife/bats>. This is a really interesting and informational document and I would recommend everyone to download this file.

The caves visited or set up to be visited (at the time of this writing) are the following:

- Knox – Ed Lucas, Mike Bourgeois, Craig Cantello, David Newman (DEC)
- Gage – Mike Chu, Mark Whittemore, Ryan Vonlinden (DEC)
- Schoharie – Bill Nettleton, Sue Warzek, Kate Langwig (DEC)
- Barytes Mine – Joe Armstrong, Al Hicks (DEC)
- Howe Cave Mine – Joe Armstrong, Al Hicks (DEC)
- McFails – Joe Armstrong
- Merlins – John Dunham, Bob Dion, Michael Chu, Corey Hackley, Dennis Wischman (DEC)
- Surprise – Bill Folsom, Mark Folsom, Alan Traino, David Newman (DEC) – unfortunately the cave was iced shut when they got there but they happened to find Tom and Brian Barton at the parking lot across from Rhodes Cave (also iced shut) and then went to the Bull Mine.
- Bull Mine – Tom Barton, Brian Barton, Alan Traino, David Newman (DEC)

Many of the cave community across the state offered their help as well as the above people in this endeavor. Unfortunately not all caves were accessible. As always I am impressed with the positive help that comes from cavers! The DEC was going strong on their end of the bat counts as well and the caver community helped to lessen their workload. When the final counts are completed hopefully we can report on the overall bat situation. Thanks to all that helped!

## Upcoming Events

**May 15-17, 2009:** Spring NRO held at the Country Village Campground in Leicester, VT  
([http://www.caves.org/region/nro/meetings\\_nro.html](http://www.caves.org/region/nro/meetings_nro.html))

**June 13-20, 2009:** 2009 NCRC Weeklong, in Bedford, Indiana.

**July 19-26, 2009:** 2009 NSS Convention, in Kerrville, Texas

**August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009:** NJ Tri-state Speleological Society presents [www.benefit4thecaves.com](http://www.benefit4thecaves.com)



Fahnestock Mine bat gate construction w/DEC



New changing area at Onesquethaw Cave. Big thanks to Art Rafferty!