

# The Open Cave

The Newsletter of the West Virginia Cave Conservancy



SUMMER, 2001

NUMBER 4

# THE WEST VIRGINIA CAVE CONSERVANCY

**"Preserving the cave and karst resources of West Virginia for future generations"**

**Number 4**

**Summer, 2001**

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West Virginia Cave Conservancy, Inc., P.O. Box 243, Frankford, WV, 24938.

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*This issue's cover is a photo of Blue Ridge Grotto covers at the Lightner Entrance to McClung Cave, Greenbrier County, West Virginia.*

## **LIGHTNER ENTRANCE - NOW... AND THEN**

In February of 2001, WVCC acquired the Lightner Entrance to McClungs Cave. The following two articles give the details of: first, the acquisition; and second, the initial discovery and exploration of the Lightner Entrance.

### **LIGHTNER ENTRANCE**

2000 - 2001

by Cliff Lindsay

The sign on the side of U. S. Route 219 in Greenbrier County, that appeared in late August of 2000, demanded investigation. The sign announced an auction of a 300 acre farm to take place on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2000. The area cavers had been keeping a watch for any sale announcement of the Lightner farm since the earlier death of Tom Lightner Sr. We had heard that his will dictated that the farm had to be sold. A quick turn down Vago Road at Maxwelton confirmed that indeed the auction sign did refer to the Lightner farm.

Further investigation revealed that the farm had been surveyed into 38 parcels ranging in size from 2 1/4 acres to 38 acres. The Lightner Entrance was on parcel #14, which was 9 1/3 acres in size. The lots were laid out on roads as homesites and mini-farms in an area considered to be prime for development. The Maxwelton area is convenient to booming Lewisburg, and is at the north end of a planned 4-lane Lewisburg-Ronceverte bypass (with an interstate interchange).

Charlie Maus and Bob Handley attended the auction as WVCC representatives. They were the high bidders on lot #14 for the first round, but, as is typical of land auctions in the area, subsequent rounds of bidding on combinations of individual lots were called for. Eventually, someone combined lot #14 with other lots to outbid us. However, when the dust settled, Tom Lightner Jr., the executor of the estate, turned down all the bids.

Now it was time for private negotiations. A group of local land developers reached a deal, fairly quickly, to buy all the lots to the south-east of the area we were interested in - about 74 acres total - for about \$4700 per acre. Based in part on this deal, we were able to eventually negotiate a deal to buy 11 2/3 acres of land, including a long access road from Vago Road, for about \$4300 per acre. The size and shape of the parcel was dictated by the location on the back edge of the farm, and the need to not leave any awkward lines and angles in the remaining land that would make it difficult to sell.

Subsequent to our purchase, a block of land about 30 acres in size to the south-west of our parcel sold for \$6000 per acre, and about 28 acres of land to our south, immediately

between our parcel and Vago Road, sold for about \$5056 per acre. Plans are already being developed for both of these last parcels to be further divided and sold as house lots, rumor-has-it at prices between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per acre.

As the Maxwellton area continues to become more populated, this WVCC cave preserve will provide access to the far south-western portion of McClungs Cave, and will provide an interesting through trip between the Lightner Entrance and McClungs Entrance, for those cavers familiar with McClungs Cave.

## **THE DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION OF LIGHTNER PIT**

### **17 MILES THE EASY WAY?**

by Bill Balfour

(This article first appeared in the West Virginia Caver in February, 1986)

The weekend (November 9 and 10<sup>th</sup>, 1985) after the major floods that devastated the eastern sections of West Virginia, Twylia and I decided to go down to Greenbrier County and survey the damage. Twylia's grandparents live at Anthony on the river, but fortunately were high enough to avoid the damage. The bridge over the Greenbrier River was not though, and was washed away.

On Saturday afternoon, we hooked up with Charlie Maus to do some fieldwalking to check out a bunch of potential entrances for any changes after the flood. After about an hour or so of checking swallow holes and blind valleys, it became apparent that not enough rain had fallen in Greenbrier County to cause a major flood in the tributary area of the Greenbrier River. (The river itself had a 100 year flood, but most of the water came from upstream in Pocahontas County.) After reaching this conclusion, we pondered what to do and decided that since it was a warm sunny day we might as well continue what we were doing.

We drove over to Ludington's Cave to see about the old Kidd Entrance to McClungs that had open and shut several years ago. The streambed was still silted shut and the stream was flowing over the old entrance and down the valley into Ludington's.

We then went over to McClungs. After talking to Mrs. Freeman about the flood and many other things, we started fieldwalking south of McClungs. After walking for about an hour and looking at several potential digs, I came upon a large impressive sink. I quickly scrambled down to the bottom and looked at a small insurgence with an old bucket in it. After moving a rock or two, I gave up and started up the other side. When I was almost to the top, I found a small pit at the base of a five foot outcrop. I looked down it and saw a couple of pieces of tin wedged about five feet below. I pulled them out and saw about a ten foot pit that looked climbable. I then yelled to Twylia and Charlie that I had found a cave. They joined me shortly.

Charlie climbed down the ten feet or so and I was surprised when he asked for a light (we all expected this hole to be a FRO dead bottom pit, 10 feet deep). I of course didn't have a real light, but produced my trusty BIC lighter. (I have found out by experience, caver's law, etc., that if you take a light with you when you are fieldwalking you'll never get a chance to use it.) After Charlie moved into a passage at the base of the pit, I climbed down to join him. The passage was opening up and going down. We couldn't see a thing so we retreated to the safety of the outside.

Once out, we decided to go back to the truck and talk to Mrs. Freeman and find out if she or someone else owned the land where the pit was located (we suspected the latter, and were right). She informed us that Mr. Lightner owned that particular property, so we set off to see him. He was very nice and gave us permission to drive through his fields since I had a 4WD. We drove right to the edge of the sink and parked and unpacked a couple of wheat lamps and helmets. Down the pit we went, armed with lights this time. It's a good thing we stopped where we did when we were in earlier, because a couple of more steps and we would have crashed down a deep pit. It looked like it was about 40 to 50 feet deep, 15 feet long, and 5 feet wide, bellowing out below. Not having any vertical gear with us, it was decided to drop the pit the next day.

That night at La Strada, I talked Ed Swepston and Cliff Lindsay into doing the pit with us. (Neither Charlie or I had ascending gear with us this weekend, so we had to find someone who did.) Ed and Cliff couldn't do the pit until Sunday afternoon, and Charlie had to be back to Roanoke by about noon, so he bowed out and told us to tell him how it went.

The next afternoon, we all gathered at the pit and rigged my 100 feet of Bluewater to a nearby tree and into the hole. Ed clipped in and slid over the edge, and was quickly on bottom. He was shouting back at us about what a nice drop it was and that it was all free. Then came the words we didn't want to hear, "But it's a dead bottom pit". Another one for Greenbrier County, there must be at least three or four hundred of them. Then something unexpected happened. Ed yelled up that maybe it wasn't dead after all. He had found a drain at the bottom of the pit with a three inch crack at the top. When he looked down through this crack, he could see more cave. Up came the yell that it "looked like Lost World down here."

Ed then ascended the pit and we discussed what to do. Ed thought that we could chip the crack, or possibly dig the drain out, but whatever we did we would be facing another drop almost immediately. Things were sure getting interesting, and fast. We decided to put off any attempts until the next WVACS weekend when Charlie could join us again. Later, when I plotted the pit location on the topo map, I was surprised to see how close it was to known passage in McClungs - only about 300 feet if the surveys were accurate.

On the weekend of December 7<sup>th</sup>, we were back at the pit in force and were joined by Dave Scott, Steve Carruth, and John Hancock. Gone was the 70 degree weather we had enjoyed on the previous trip. The temperature was in the low 30's, and the pit was taking air. That was a good sign because the McClungs entrance is higher and air flows out it when it is cold outside. The seven of us quickly rappelled into the pit and surveyed the situation. We started digging at the bottom of the drain. After getting through the outer layer, we were soon digging

just plain dirt and cobbles mixed in with bones.

It was apparent to the others that the dig would soon have us through, so they rigged the leftover rope and padded it into the next drop (we had a 150 foot length of rope this time). Everything was soon completed and Ed clipped on and backed into the dug-out drain, and after three feet was over the edge. The next drop was about a 30 foot rappel against the wall into a room with lots of formations. One by one we rappelled into the room. We broke out some snacks and Charlie Maus began a dissertation on how nice it was to rappel on a rack and that this was the first time he had ever used one. Charlie then admitted this was the first time he had been on a rope since 1964. No wonder he had never used a rack!

Only two good leads left this room. One was at ceiling level 35 feet above us. The other one went about 100 feet and ended in a mud plug. After hearing that the passage ended, I was dismayed. I had hoped that when we dropped the second pitch, we would be in McClungs and now we weren't. With an apparent no-go, I started contemplating where the air was going, it had to be going into McClungs. It was really blowing through the drain at the base of the first drop. Soon Dave Scott came back and said I at least should to out that passage and see the skeleton. Skeleton!?!? I walked out to within about 10 feet of the end of the passage and on a flowstone shelf, found myself gazing at a complete skeleton of some kind of critter. Not being a palenontologist, I didn't have any idea what it was except that it was obviously very old because the bones were crystalized inside and out with calcite. The skeleton was spread out over about 4 square feet in the middle of the passage.

Just beyond the skeleton was a big breakdown slab. As I crawled over it I noticed a small hold in the flowstone between the breakdown and the wall in a slot about four feet deep. I lit a Newport to check out the air and stuck it down into the slot. The smoke quickly rushed into the hole—this is where the air was going. About that time Steve Carruth and John Hancock joined me. I quickly order them to pick me up and lower me head first into the slot. Looking through the hole I could see a stream passage at least 3 by 3 feet. McClungs, here we come!

While this was going on, the others had started out. Only Cliff was still on the level with us, the rest were at that bottom of the first drop. We requested a small sledge hammer and crowbar from the vehicles. Soon gear was arriving from the outside. Dave stationed himself at the top of, and Ed stayed at the bottom of, the first drop to pass gear, etc.

The four of us then attacked the hole with a vengeance. After about a hour, Cliff decided to relieve Ed so Ed could relieve Dave who was getting very chilled at the top. Another half hour of work and finally a large chuck broke off and we were in. I slid through the hole and into the stream crawl - the air was very strong. After crawling around the corner, I was able to stand and look out into a breakdown chamber. I called for the others to come through. In the mean time, I looked for footprints in the mud that coated the breakdown, noting that it was still virgin (one of the few times I wished I wasn't in virgin cave). We carefully scrambled over the breakdown and found nothing. The only way to proceed was to go down between the breakdown blocks, but it was about 15 feet down. So close yet so far - we would need another rope to go further. That was it for this weekend.

The next WVACS weekend was January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1986. This time we had a real crew - I had done an excellent job of sucking in people. However, Ed opted for a trip into the Bowen Canyon in Organ, Charlie and Dave decided on surface work, and John (the best digger I've seen) was in Germany. However, they were replaced by Terry Hall, Bill Dorsey, Al Stubbe, Alice Cruse, Randy Rumer, John Fredricks, John Robinson, and Tom Hay. When we got to the pit, I had Randy set a bolt at the top of the first drop to rig the rope away from an unstable breakdown choke at the edge of the drop. He also set another bolt at the bottom of the first drop to facilitate an easier rig of the second drop. We all dropped the pits while Tom Hay took pictures.

We then quickly moved to the dig and on into the breakdown room. There we rigged another rope and climbed down into the walking passage below - it was virgin. We explored several hundred feet of passage in different directions - nothing. Where was the air? Time to get out another Newport. At the end of a passage that terminated in breakdown the smoke shot up and around blocks like a big fan was sucking it up. A big rock was blocking the crawl into the breakdown.

Al and Steve Carruth crawled up and tied a sling on it and it was pulled out of the way. Al then crawled another body length beyond, rolled on his back, "It's nothing but breakdown". He could see holes between the blocks but nothing was big enough to get through. Cliff got very quiet and slumped against the wall. I was beginning to get a bad feeling too.

Al crawled back and Alice went in, she confirmed his report. "Dynamite", she said when she got out, "That's what we need". Cliff was near comatose, only grunting when spoken to, disappointment was on everyone's face.

"Let me go up and look at it", I heard myself say. I crawled up, got on my back, and sat up in a little chamber. I lit another Newport. There went the smoke into an L shaped crack between the blocks. "Toss me that damn bolt driver." (The only equipment we had this time.) I started beating on the crack. The rock on one side was rotten, more like very hard mud. It flew away in small chips and chunks. I worked for about a half hour making progress, but the position was awkward and I needed a rest.

Bill Dorsey volunteered to whack awhile. We traded places; 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes, the hammer kept beating. Then Bill said, "I am going to try it". A minute later we heard a yell "I'm through!"

"What do you see?", I yelled.

"It opens up! It goes!", he replied.

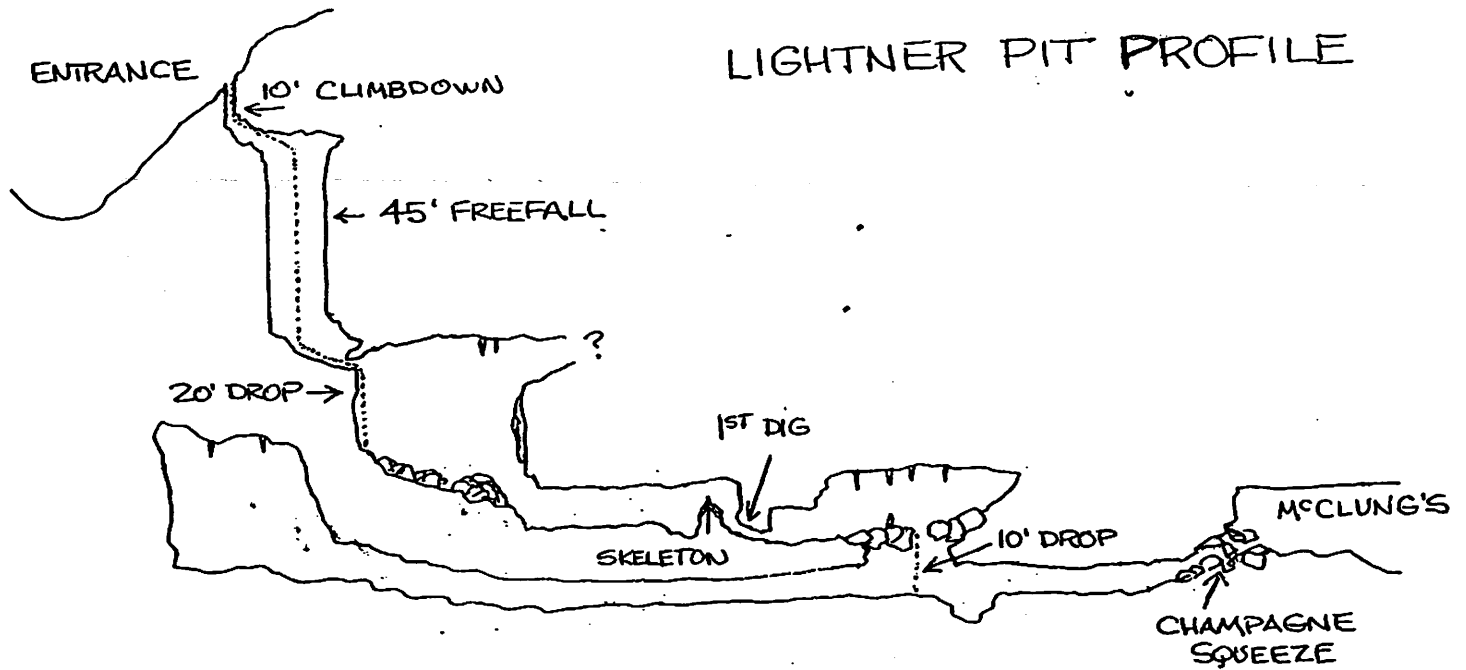
"Do you see footprints? Are there any footprints?"

"Yes!!", came the reply. Everyone broke into yells and screams at this point. Cliff had come up like a bolt of lightning hit him. I crawled up to the hole and with much difficulty, finally squeezed through. It was very tight for some of the others. Alice came next, then we went to work enlarging the squeeze. Soon everyone was through and Cliff proceeded to open up

a large pack he had been carrying and pulled out a bottle of champagne, much to the delight of everyone else. While toasting our good fortune, it was decided that after going through the "Champagne Squeeze", it was only fitting to go out the McClungs entrance.

After packing up, we headed down the passage. In a couple of hundred feet we were at a junction with T-21 on the wall - the Tufa Trail. It was exactly where I thought we would come in. Down the Tufa Trail and into Freeman Avenue we went; three hours later we walked out into the cold clear winter night at the entrance. By planning ahead we should have left a vehicle at the McClungs entrance since we now had to walk overland to our cars. But its like carrying a light fieldwalking, if we had done it, we wouldn't have made the connection.

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# **RAPPS CAVE**

## **Completion of the Initial Investigation Field Work**

by Bob Handley

The WV Dept. of Culture and History Excavation Permit was finally received in December of 2000 and plans were made to work in the Cave in May of 2001. The crew of about 14 men and women moved into the WVACS Field Station on May 13<sup>th</sup> and started work in the cave on Monday May 14<sup>th</sup> - a beautiful sunny day. Drs. Kim McBride, Sarah Sherwood, and Nickolas Hermann were the primary archaeologists.

The entrance slope was carefully inventoried, all significant features (bones, pot chard's, charcoal, etc.) Were flagged and two trench sites were marked off. All these things were located on a map that had been made by Dr. Hermann in May of 2000. A one meter square excavation was also started on the surface about five meters in front of the cave entrance. All of the dirt removed from the excavations was pass through 1/4 inch screens. Overall many cubic meters of earth were passed through the screens.

The initial excavations turned up very little of interest, so additional excavation sites were selected and the search was expanded to the limits of the entrance room and other parts of the cave. Some charcoal was collected from various sites for C-14 dating. Nothing of significance was found below a few inches of the surface. There were a few isolated human bones found in the entrance room. These were buried with a brief ceremony in the bottom of one of the excavation sites.

A human burial was found on the surface (the same one that was detected by shovel test when we were getting ready to put up the fence). Enough of these bones were uncovered to determine that it was a burial and then the remains were recovered.

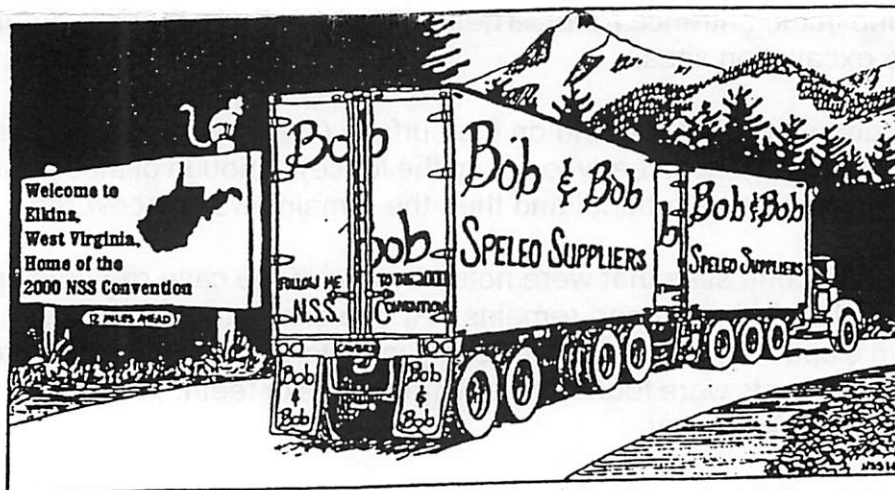
Several bone sites that were noted by one of the cave re-survey parties were located and identified as being human remains. At one site many bones were strewn down over a breakdown slope. They were meticulously inventoried. It was considered strange that only long bone fragments were found - no skull fragments or teeth. A skull cap fragment was found several hundred feet away.

WVCC provided an electric generator for work lights in the cave. This was a first for Dr. Sherwood who had used only head lamps and hand lanterns previously. The 120 volt lights greatly facilitated the work and she says that a generator will be required on all of her future cave projects.

Friday, May 18<sup>th</sup> finished the week of hard work in which much more excavation was done than was originally planned. Most of the excavation sites ended on solid (or at least very large) rock. I believe two sites - one in the cave and one outside - went down well over a meter. The one outside turned up two rifle slugs that were undoubtedly meant for ground

hogs, but they missed. No ground hog remains were found. The very last thing Friday, Dr. Hermann ran a laser theodolite survey from the Rapps Entrance to the Buckeye Creek Cave entrance. This highly accurate survey will give us a much better relationship between the two caves.

A report on the initial investigation is due in the near future (September or October of 2001). Prior to seeing the report, the cave seems to have been used by early Indians, maybe on a sporadic basis, but it was not an ancient habitation site. WVCC has yet to finish the Rapps re-survey and map, to make the human connection between Rapps and Buckeye Creek, and to locate a possible pit that could have been used to drop the human bones into the cave (the ones found on the breakdown slope). Our Rapps lease still has three years to run (before it is terminated or renewed). A new management plan will be developed for this period. What will be the caver access? What will happen to the fence? The new plan will be presented at our November 10<sup>th</sup> Banquet.



## CONTRIBUTORS TO THE LIGHTNER ENTRANCE

All covers owe a great thanks to the following individuals and groups that have made direct contributions toward the purchase of the Lightner Entrance:

Pam Tegelman	Battlefield Area Troglodyte Society
Walter Pirie	Mark Folsom
Kenneth Huffines	Michael Manke
John Pearson	C. W. Maus
Tri-State Grotto	Pauline Apling
Mark Stover	R. Keith Dunlap
Brant & Kammy Johnson	Delbert & June Dawson
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J. Kirk Holzapfel	Monongahela Grotto
Dogwood City Grotto	Dave & Mary Sue Socky
West Virginia Association for Cave Studies	Albert Stewart
Chris, Treah & Doug Boyer	Anonymous #1
Michigan Interlakes Grotto	Don Anderson
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Koichiro Takamizawa  
Steve & A.M. Conner  
Elliot Darchicourt  
Ed Day  
John Deighan &  
Paige Baldassaro  
Kirk Digby  
Mark Eisenbees

## **DOUBLE YOUR MONEY !!**

If you would like to make a contribution to help with the purchase of the Lightner Entrance, now is a great time to send in your check! The Cave Conservancy of the Virginias has recently awarded a Challenge Grant to WVCC to help with the purchase. For every dollar donated to WVCC for the Lightner Entrance purchase, CCV will donate a dollar, up to \$10,000. To date, slightly over \$5,000 has already been donated toward this matching grant. Please note on your check that it's for the CCV - Lightner grant.

All cavers should give an additional "thank you" to the following individuals and groups who have made other donations during 2001 that have helped with the Lightner Entrance purchase, and with other expenses:

Bassett Foundation  
Tri-State Grotto (Cave Bucks)  
David Taylor  
William Murray  
Tri-State Grotto (Cave Bucks)  
Frederick Grotto (Cave Bucks)  
Frederick Grotto (Cave Bucks)  
Commander Cody Caving Club (Cave Bucks)  
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Tri-State Grotto (Cave Bucks)  
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## **ISLAND FORD CAVE IS DONATED TO WVCC**

By Cliff Lindsay

Island Ford Cave, located in Alleghany County, Virginia (a few miles east of Covington), was donated to the West Virginia Cave Conservancy (WVCC). The entrance and 5.22 acres of surrounding property was donated on May 23, 2001, after a Lewisburg attorney, who happened to know President Ed Swepston and his connection with WVCC, approached Ed and inquired whether WVCC might be interested in accepting the donation from an estate. Island Ford Cave is over 2,200 feet long and has been popular with locals and cavers for many years. The cave has an entrance that is located directly adjacent to historic old U.S. Route 60.

The cave will be maintained in an "open" condition, and will be freely available to all experienced cavers, regardless of affiliation. WVCC's first step is to build a parking area and access trail. An informational kiosk will be installed to provide visitors with important facts about the cave and surrounding area. Access to Island Ford Cave is open as no permits or reservations are required. No overnight camping or open fires are permitted.

Island Ford Cave is the latest property owned, leased, or managed by WVCC. Other properties include Haynes Cave, Lobelia Saltpeter Cave, Rapps Cave, the Historic Entrance to McClungs Cave and The Lightners Entrance to McClungs Cave.

## **WVCC's THIRD ANNUAL BANQUET**

WVCC's third annual banquet will take place over the weekend of November 10, 2001 at The Brier Inn at Lewisburg, WV. The banquet is a great opportunity for everyone to get together and discuss past and future activities. In addition, funds raised from the banquet fee help to support WVCC projects. Please mark your calendars, and plan to attend by filling out and returning the reservation form in the back of this newsletter. If you would like to participate in any trips to any of WVCC's preserves Saturday morning, contact Ed Swepston by phone or by the e-mail address listed on the form.

## NEW MEMBERS AND MEMBERSHIP UPGRADES

All members please welcome and give a big "thank you" to all the people and organizations listed below who have recently joined or upgraded their membership status! Such support is critical to accomplishing our shared mission of acquiring, managing, and protecting caves. Thank you!

### BENEFACTOR:

Judy Fisher

### INSTITUTIONS:

Battlefield Area Troglodyte Society  
Commander Cody Caving Club  
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Roxanne Shively

**FAMILY MEMBERS:**

Christopher Boyer  
Trea Boyer  
June Dawson  
Delbert Dawson  
Michael Dore  
Pat Dore  
Miles Drake  
Keith Dunlap  
Tina Hall  
Kenneth Huffines  
David Irving  
Brant Johnson  
Kammy Johnson  
Michael Manke  
Victoria Manke  
Nancy Maus  
Thomas & Kimberly Metzgar  
William Murray  
Walter Pirie  
Kevin Psarianos  
Joshua Rubinstein  
Joanne Smith  
Andrew Turner  
Greg Turner  
Jeannie Turner  
Megan Turner  
Bruce Ventura  
David Warren  
Carolyn Zangara



**WHAT:** THE THIRD ANNUAL WVCC BANQUET

**WHEN:** NOVEMBER 10, 2001  
6:00 - 7:30 PM SOCIAL HOUR  
7:30 - 8:30 PM DINNER  
8:30 - 9:00 PM PRESENTATIONS

**WHERE:** THE BRIER INN AT THE 1-64/US219 INTERCHANGE,  
LEWISBURG, WV

**COST:** \$25.00 PER PERSON

**DRESS:** CASUAL

**QUESTIONS?:** CONTACT ED SWEPSTON AT:  
304-645-5300 (DAYTIME)  
304-645-6984 (EVENINGS)  
eswepston@hotmail.com

IF YOU CAN ATTEND, PLEASE REPLY BY NOVEMBER 3, 2001

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ENCLOSED IS MY CHECK FOR \$ \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$25.00/PERSON  
TO RESERVE PLACES FOR THE WVCC BANQUET FOR (PLEASE  
PRINT NAMES):

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