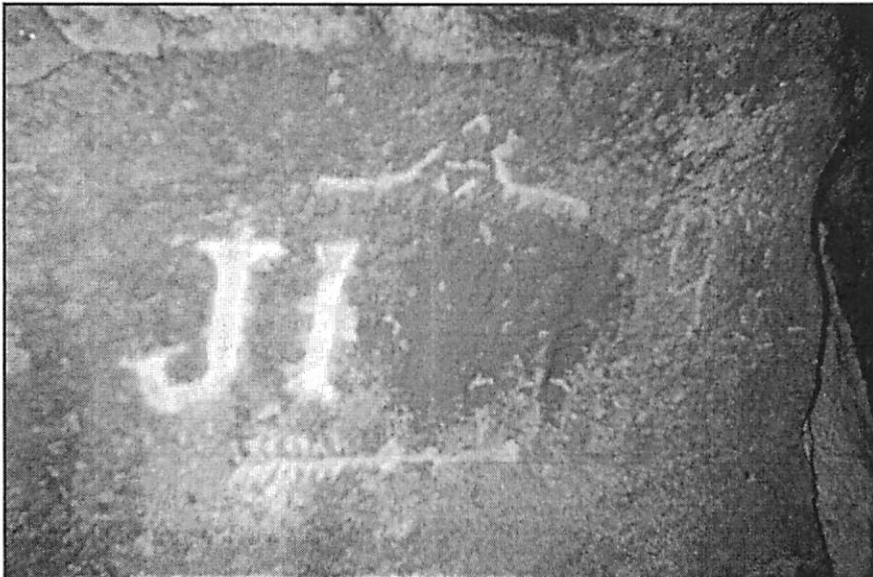


The Open Cave

The Newsletter of the West Virginia Cave Conservancy

Number 15

Spring 2009



WEST VIRGINIA CAVE CONSERVANCY

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

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The West Virginia Cave Conservancy is a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization. All contributions to the Conservancy are tax-deductible. Please send all contributions and dues to: WVCC, Inc., PO Box 243, Frankford, WV 24938. For more information on membership, visit our Web site at www.wvcc.net. Please send all contributions to the newsletter to the newsletter editor. Any internal organization of the NSS has permission to reprint materials in this newsletter with proper recognition given to the author and *The Open Cave*.

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Note to Members: Annual memberships expire on anniversary date of initial membership. Be sure to check your address label for anniversary date.

Web Site
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Cover Art: Before and during clean-up at Haynes Cave.
See article on page 3.
(Photographs by Meredith Hall Weberg)



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The WVCC Calendar

June 27, 2009: WVCC Board of Directors meeting to be held at Crystal Caverns at Hupp's Hill, Strasburg, Virginia. 1:00 p.m. Members are welcome.

July 19-26, 2009. NSS Convention and International Congress of Speleology in Kerrville, Texas.

September 3-7, 2009. Old Timers Reunion in Dailey, West Virginia. Come by and visit us at our booth. Wine and Cheese Member Appreciation party on Friday evening.

September 25-27, 2009: Fall VAR, Location to be determined. BATS and DINGO grottoes are hosting.

November 14, 2009. 12th annual Member Appreciation Banquet. Details to come.

November 15, 2009. WVCC Board of Directors meeting to be held at Lost World Caverns, Lewisburg, West Virginia. 9:30 a.m. Members are welcome.

Mid-March 2010. The Third National Cave and Karst Conservancies Forum. Lewisburg, West Virginia. Details to come.

Editor's Note: I was asked three times by the author NOT to edit this piece. While I disagreed with him, I respected his wishes and I did NOT edit it at all.

President's Message

CAVE BATS and the CAVING MORATORIUMS

I guess the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (US F & W) and the National Speleological Society (NSS) have put sorting hats on all of us. Are you going to abide by their caving moratoriums – or not? Their researchers, who will spend millions of our tax dollars to solve the White Nose Syndrome (WNS) malady that's possibly causing many cave bats to die, have asked people (cavers in particular) to stay out of eastern US caves for an indefinite period. In the New England area as many as 95% of the cave bats are dead. The researchers say they have reason to believe that the WNS fungus is being spread by cavers or other humans going into caves. If people don't go into caves for a year and the malady continues to spread, that will indicate that people (cavers) aren't really responsible for spreading WNS. If people don't cooperate and continue to go caving, the only measurable result will be animosity between those who don't go underground and those who do. Really a shameful result.

What the researchers have found out, if anything, isn't being reported because researchers don't usually release findings piecemeal. They wait until they

complete their studies before data is released. We, the general caving public, need to cooperate and give them every chance to do their work as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. It's suspected that it may be a virus that affects the bat immune system and in that weakened condition the fungus WNS moves in. Any creature that dies in a cave (cricket, mouse, bug, etc.) is very quickly covered with a white fungus (but that fungus is not the same as WNS). WNS is a new species of fungus not heretofore identified that moves in on live bats. Where did it come from, where's it been hiding? Did it come over from Hong Kong on a container ship, or out of your basement where you kept your dirty clothes? Or maybe it's come from the subways in some of our major cities? If it's a virus, is it a viral mutation caused by something new that's been introduced into our environment (GMO crops, microwaves)? There are many, many questions, but the demise of our cave bats, which eat millions of insects in warm weather, will certainly affect ALL OF US.

WNS has been found in Pendleton County in West Virginia and in Highland, Bath, and Giles Counties in Virginia. The Monongahla National Forest has closed all their caves as requested by the US F & W. The West Virginia Cave Conservancy (WVCC) has closed their caves, three of them big ones in Greenbrier County, and a number of private land owners have closed their caves as requested by the US F & W and the NSS.

by Bob Handley,
President of WVCC
NSS Member #1002 FE, RL, LB

Haynes Cave Clean-Up Trip March 14, 2009

By Pauline Apling

Since the WVCC was having its meeting on Sunday, March 15th in Lewisburg, West Virginia, I decided to lead a clean-up trip to Haynes Cave that Saturday. I was a little concerned with all the WNS [White Nose Syndrome] uproar, so I checked with the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources about having the trip in Haynes Cave. Craig Stihler told me as long as we used decontaminated gear we should be okay. I had also heard from Ed Saugstad that he had seen only three to five bats in Haynes Cave on previous trips.

Bob Hoke, Meredith Weberg, Susi Weston, Ed Saugstad, Rocky Parsons, and I were on the trip. We met Ed and Rocky at the parking area for Haynes Cave. We all worked on removing the barbed wire from the entrance area of the cave. It was rolled up and left outside the cave for us to move after the cave trip.

It was a rainy, cold day, so it was good to get inside the cave. We headed back and cleaned graffiti along the way. Lots of old and modern graffiti. I saw many orange and red spray paint arrows everywhere in the cave. I had a great crew of cleaners with me. We finally made it to the graffiti room in the back of the cave. You do a hands-and-knees crawl and finally a belly or on-your-side crawl to get to the final room. Once there, you find all kinds of graffiti. We didn't clean much of it. I think some may now be historic, so I'd rather have Fred Grady, owner of the cave, on the trip to tell us what should be cleaned.

We also found a place in the cave with pretty deeply etched graffiti. Meredith ended up making mud in a plastic baggie from the cave dirt and water from her water bottle. She and Susi used the mud to fill in the etched letters. After a couple of tries, they found the right consistency. In fact, when I passed the area later, I didn't even notice the graffiti because she and Susi had done such a great job filling it in.

Haynes is a pleasant cave, with a few wooden walkways and some saltpeter arti-

facts. In fact we saw a part of an old trough in a lower area of the cave.

We still have some graffiti to clean up, so I

may plan another trip either later in 2009 or sometime in 2010. One plan in the future is to keep cows away from the cave by either fencing around the entrance or repairing

the adjoining farmer's fence and installing a way for cavers to cross the fence.

Thanks to everyone who came on the trip.

ELECTION OF WVCC DIRECTORS

You Can Help!

The WVCC Bylaws specify that its affairs will be run by a board of 12 directors. Nine of these directors are elected by a plurality of the votes cast by the WVCC membership at large; the remaining three are appointed by the nine elected board members.

The term of service for elected directors is nine years, beginning on January 1 of the year following election. The terms of these elected directors are staggered such that three terms expire every third year. This arrangement both assures continuity on the board as well as necessitating elections only once every three years.

This is one of those years.

The three retiring directors are Meredith Weberg, Frank Abbato, and Jeff Bray. Of these, only Frank Abbato will seek reelection. Additionally, there is presently a vacant elected director seat, due to the resignation of John Pearson, so this election will seat 4 new directors. The candidate with

the fourth-highest number of votes will fulfill the remainder of Pearson's term.

The board has appointed a Nominating/Elections Committee to solicit candidates and conduct the election. The Committee consists of Pauline Apling (papling@verizon.net), Fred Grady (grady@nrmh.si.edu), and Alex Sproul (imocaves@comcast.net).

The Committee is therefore seeking candidates who have a strong interest in protecting and managing the Conservancy's properties, seeking to acquire management responsibility or ownership of additional cave properties, and conserving the caves of West Virginia through educational outreach. Directors are expected to attend quarterly meetings, held either in Lewisburg or at other locations in the WV/VA area, and to be responsive to e-mail inquiries, discussions, and electronic voting on urgent matters. The only prerequisite for a

candidate is that he/she be a current member of WVCC.

Those interested in serving are strongly encouraged to contact one of the Committee members above and toss their helmet into the ring. The Committee will also be proactively seeking candidates from among our membership and inviting them to run. The goal is to have twice the number of candidates as seats to be filled, so that the new directors will feel properly elected, rather than just volunteered, and to have the candidate slate finalized by the June 27th Board Meeting.

The election will take place by mailed ballot and must be completed prior to the annual banquet scheduled for November 14th, at which time the results will be announced.

Now is the time for all good members to come to the aid of their Conservancy! Your help and leadership are urgently needed!

Layout Artist Wanted

Have you ever wanted to do layout for a newsletter? Now is your chance! I am looking for help with *The Open Cave*. I still want to edit the articles, but I just don't have the time it takes to do the layout. And, you have to admit, the newsletter could use some snazzing up. Send me an e-mail if you are interested. Include any experience in layout and a sample if you like.

Thanks,
Meredith Hall Weberg
The Open Cave Editor
mercaver@yahoo.com

The Fuller Entrance to the Culverson Creek System Greenbrier County, West Virginia

By Lois and Cliff Lindsay

In an earlier issue of *The Open Cave*, Bob Handley listed caves in West Virginia that were owned by cavers. On his list were several cave entrances on the "Old Fuller Place," including the Fuller Entrance to the Culverson Creek System. In 1995, the authors were fortunate enough to acquire this classic, old, run-down, mountain farm with its cave entrances. We have continued to keep the caves on the property open for cavers since that time. Most of the caves on the property are small. However, the Fuller Entrance is one of the main entrances to the 21-mile-long Culverson Creek System.

The only other entrances that are regularly used by cavers to access the Culverson Creek System are the SSS Entrance and the Wildcat Entrance.

The Fuller Entrance was originally "Fuller Cave," documented by William E. Davies in his first edition thriller: *Caverns of West Virginia*, published in 1949 by the West Virginia Geological Survey. In this original edition, Davies describes Fuller Cave in terms that make it sound like a Doug Medville FRO [For Record Only]. Well, maybe a little better than that. A later edition docu-

ments the exploration of Fuller Cave downstream for over 5,000 feet and the eventual linking of SSS Cave with Fuller Cave.

The Old Fuller Place is located about three miles west of Frankford, West Virginia, on the Williamsburg Road. The Fuller Entrance is located about one-half mile south of the Williamsburg Road in a deep sink on the west side of a linear valley, marked on the USGS topographic map as "Thorny Hollow." The entrance sink is not only deep, but steep as well, making access a little tricky. Actually, getting into the entrance is easy enough; after all, "gravity is your friend" for that part of the trip. Getting back out of the sink is possible because we currently have a handline in place.

In the summertime or early fall, a trip into the Fuller Entrance and down the canyon to the waterfalls can be a nice way to spend a half day or more. The trip involves only a little route-finding around a few obstacles. Basically, one simply follows the Fuller stream from the entrance for about a mile to the first waterfall. The first half of the length of the canyon is somewhat narrower with a smaller stream than the second half, because the SSS stream joins the Fuller stream at the halfway point. The second half of the trip is in a beautiful, sculpted canyon.

At this point, maybe we should mention the plunge-pools. We think it's a minor detail, but the reason we recommended this as a nice trip for summertime and early fall is that there are some "right sporting" pools of water in the second half of the canyon. Some of these pools are easily "yodeling" depth. It's a great way to cool off during warm weather! Trust us! There's plenty of cave below the waterfall, but we're limiting our discussion to the nice trips.

Another very nice trip to while away a few hours before hitting the Irish Pub is a classic through-trip between the Fuller Entrance and the SSS Entrance. Not only do you get to see the Fuller stream passage, but you can enjoy the classic, upper level, phreatic Peterbilt Passage in the SSS part of the system. The SSS Entrance is located just across a fence-line on the farm of our



Dave Cowan and Ed Swepston at the downstream entrance of one of the natural tunnels. They are looking out into the karst window toward the downstream tunnel that leads into the Fuller Entrance sink. You can follow the water into Fuller, but almost nobody goes that way—using the handline to drop right into the Fuller entrance sink, as Bill did in the other photograph, is the way to go.

(Photograph by Cliff Lindsay)

neighbor to the east. Fortunately, our neighbor is caver-friendly, and no particular permission is required to use the entrance.

This through-trip does have one problem: the connection passage is not obvious from either side, and cannot realistically be described. You have to either persistently explore every small lead in the Peterbilt Passage (hint: the connection is in a small lead), or bring along a guide (preferably one who is familiar with this connection passage). We can give you one more hint. We fondly refer to the start of the connection passage on the SSS side as "The Chasm of Death." We might concede that the name is a slight exaggeration, but "Chasm of Broken Bones" just doesn't have the same ring.

There are other caves and karst features on the farm. There are a few small caves that you could poke in, such as Tricycle Pit. The Oh No, No Truck Entrance to the Culverson Creek System is a small entrance with a long story. Just up the valley from the Fuller Entrance are a couple of pretty karst features well worth seeing—a karst window and a natural tunnel. Feel free to explore and enjoy!

The Fuller Entrance, and indeed all of the Culverson Creek System, is best visited in the dryer time of the year. An unbelievably large part of the lower levels of the system can totally flood during heavy rain and/or snow-melt events in late winter or early spring. During thunderstorm season, heavy rainfall can cause a few low spots down Fuller stream to flood; and heavy rainfall can cause the SSS Entrance to become impassible. Some other words of caution. We don't recommend dallying just inside the Fuller Entrance. A quick glance up should send you scurrying on. In SSS, there are places where you might find yourself on a ledge above a very deep canyon. There's something for everyone in this system!

We will be observing the announced moratorium due to White Nose Syndrome. Hopefully, this situation will be cleared up reasonably soon. Normally, we don't require any special notification to visit the Fuller Entrance or the farm, but you are certainly welcome to contact us to tell us your plans or ask any questions. The best way to contact us is by e-mail at cliffindsay@hotmail.com.

Happy caving!



Bill Balfour entering the Fuller Entrance of Culverson Creek Cave.

(Photograph by Cliff Lindsay)

Some Interesting Facts About West Virginia Cave Conservancy Caves

By Bob Handley

Editor's Note: This article was written before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service caving moratorium went into effect; WVCC is abiding by the moratorium so keep this in mind when reading about access.

The following caves are owned or leased by West Virginia Cave Conservancy (WVCC). They are listed in the order of acquisition with some dimensions and their Cave Managers:

Rapps Cave (a part of Buckeye Creek Cave)
Greenbrier County, West Virginia
Originally leased in May of 1999
Manager: Bob Handley
(leatherwing@frontiernet.net)
1 mile of passage

WVCC leases Rapps with a 5-year (renewable) lease. The cave is significant because of archeology and paleontology. The entrance is fenced and gated to protect the archeology. It has been connected to Buckeye Creek Cave (BCC) by a very close voice connection (10 feet and we could see lights). A handshake connection and then a survey through that needs to be done and is acceptable to the landowner. (A body-sized opening is not acceptable to the owner.)

There are two other available digs into virgin cave. One is off of the passage that

leaves the left side of the Entrance Room. The opening is 5+ feet wide but may be only 5 inches high. The passage very quickly gets higher and then in 6 to 8 feet, it drops down over a flowstone ledge into a little room. You can't see whether it goes or not—very likely it doesn't go (no air noted). The other virgin passage is at the very end of the main passage. It is a 5 1/2 inch wide slot maybe 8 feet long with no bottom—lots of air blowing up into Rapps. It will be a lower level. It may go into BCC but from the maps we have it appears to be a little north of BCC. My curiosity is eating away at me—WHAT'S DOWN THERE? We have the owner's permission to open this up.

Rapps isn't open to tourist trips at present, but cavers who are interested in project work or scientific studies are welcome. Finishing WVACS's map of Rapps, scientific studies, and the three dig projects are available to be worked.

Island Ford Cave
Alleghany County, Virginia
Donated to WVCC in 2000
Manager: Alex Sproul
(imocaves@comcast.net)
2,200 feet of multi-level passage (0.417 mi.)
5+ acres of surface along U. S. Route 60 east of Covington

Lightners Entrance (to McClungs Cave)
Greenbrier County, West Virginia
Purchased January 16, 2001
Manager: John Pearson
(jpearson@rcc.com)
16.4 miles of passages
11.628 acres of surface was purchased with the cave entrance
(The McClung Entrance is closed. You can't go in or come out of that entrance.)

Lightners is a vertical entrance with a 10-foot climb-down, a 45-foot free drop, a 20-foot drop, and a 10-foot drop. There are two hot spots. One is near the Lightners Entrance (Freeman Avenue area) where a sizeable breakdown has been penetrated at the end of the "S" Survey. The low passage continues over a digable dirt and gravel floor with a breeze. The other hot spot is to survey a connection between McClungs and Ludingtons Cave. Several years ago Mark (Streek) Botkin and Lee Workman went through the tight Carrion Crawl in Ludingtons into what was presumably the old Kidd Entrance section of McClungs. They found two 5-gallon plastic buckets there that would not have fit through Carrion Crawl. The Kidd Entrance has been physically closed for a number of years. Connecting these two caves would make at least a 27-mile system.

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