

The Open Cave

The Newsletter of the West Virginia Cave Conservancy

Number 17

Spring 2010



WEST VIRGINIA CAVE CONSERVANCY

"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*.

WVCC Board of Directors

Frank Abbato (See Right Column)

Pauline Apling (See Right Column)

Carroll Bassett (304.497.4311)
BMS, HC 68 Box 64B, Friars Hill, WV, 24938
www.bmsrescue.com

Fred Grady
2440-D S. Walter Reed Dr., Arlington, VA 22206
grady.fred@nsmh.si.edu

Robert H. Handley
HC 67-Box 508, Renick, WV 24966
leatherwing@frontiernet.net

Cliff Lindsay
Rt. 1, Box 11, Frankford, WV 24938

Ed Saugstad (304.772.4426)
RR2, Box 34, Sinks Grove WV 24976
suunto@yahoo.com

Alex Sproul
5715 Lee-Jackson HWY, Greenville, VA 24440
imocaves@comcast.net

Ed Swepston
Rt. 2, Box 384, Ronceverte, WV 24970

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

Cover Art: Ice in Lobelia Saltpeter Cave photographed by Carroll Bassett with Dave Cowan and Ed Saugstead assisting with lights



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WVCC Officers and Departments

President

Frank Abbato (301.706.4711)
15009 Good Meadow Ct., North Potomac, MD 20878
fabbato@hotmail.com

Vice President

Susi Weston (703.901.9667)
102 Governors Dr. SW, Leesburg, VA 20175
susiweston@gmail.com

Treasurer

Bob Hoke
6304 Kaybro St., Laurel, MD 20707
bob@hoke.net

Secretary

John E. Pearson (304.497.3939)
329 Brownstown Road
Renick WV 24966-9649
jpearson@rcc.com

Web Site
www.wvcc.net

Membership Secretary

Pauline Apling
6304 Kaybro St., Laurel, MD 20707
papling@verizon.net

Newsletter Editor Submissions Welcome!!

Meredith Hall Weberg (703.451.3637)
8061 Kittiwake Ct., Springfield, VA 22153
merecaver@yahoo.com

Web Master

Charlie Williams (703.724.1433)
21118 Deep Furrow Ct., Ashburn, VA 20147
ctw@ashburn-online.com

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The WVCC Calendar

May 21-23, 2010: Spring VAR, Hosted by Bubble Cave. LLC at the WV State Fairgrounds in Fairlea, West Virginia (near Lewisburg) in cave-rich Greenbrier County, site of the 2012 NSS Convention.

June 6, 2010: WVCC Board Meeting, Crystal Caverns, Strasburg, VA, 11:30 a.m. Members welcome!

August 2-7, 2010: NSS Convention, Essex Junction, Vermont.

September 2-6, 2010: Old Timers Reunion, during which WVCC holds its annual Member Appreciation Wine and Cheese Party.

November 13, 2010: WVCC Banquet.

November 14, 2010: WVCC Board Meeting, Lost World Caverns, Lewisburg, WV, 9:30 a.m. Members welcome!

Layout Artist Wanted

Have you ever wanted to do layout for a newsletter? Now is your chance! I am still looking for help with *The Open Cave*. I 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
merecaver@yahoo.com

President's Message

With the new year, we welcome two new Directors, Carroll Bassett and Ed Saugstad. Both have long been members of the West Virginia caving community. Both are on the board of WVACS [West Virginia Association of Cave Studies] and live in West Virginia. Carroll could also be described as an Inventor Extraordinaire, while Ed is a Digger Extraordinaire.

We have a number of other organizational changes within the group. I would like to thank Bob Handley for his service as President of the WVCC. He has made significant strides in the last several years with the organization and productivity of the Conservancy. I am thankful for Bob's ongoing contributions as a Director. I would also like to thank former Directors Jeff Bray and Meredith Hall Weberg for their years of service. John Pearson has replaced me as Secretary, for which I am also thankful.

In some ways, we must carry a heavy mantle for caving and cave access. White Nose Syndrome (WNS) is devastating our bat populations. While the only responsible thing to do in the short term is curb our own caving activity as we work to understand the disease and what can be done, we

also must look to the long term to protect caving access.

I can assure you that any threat of a concerted attack on the legality of cave access will be taken seriously by the WVCC; I believe that making cave access illegal will only do more harm to bats than good. I am concerned that turning caving into an illicit activity will keep responsible cavers from helping to monitor and combat WNS. It will also prevent cavers from studying and protecting geologically and biologically significant caves from permanent damage.

In the short term, we have closed the WVCC's caves in order to work with the scientific community in understanding WNS and its spread. We did not do this lightly. We will review the situation again this spring with the hope that we can reopen some or all of our caves. In the meantime, we ask for the patience and support of our members in taking all reasonable steps to prevent the spread of WNS and help those who have asked with bat monitoring and reporting.

Looking forward to the rest of 2010, we will continue to pay off our debt from the purchase of Maxwellton, which is more

than 70 percent complete at this time. We will be actively working to improve the organization and structure of the Conservancy to better protect our caves from liability. The ~~changes~~ changes underway with the Web site last year will continue.

Although we are not close to buying any caves right now, investigating properties and continuing fundraising activities should put us in a position to acquire new caves should the opportunity arise. Don't think that because the economy is slow, we will pass up a chance to acquire a significant new cave. In the past, we have been fortunate that cavers from around the country have contributed the dollars and support needed for cave acquisitions and we hope that you will continue to support us in the future.

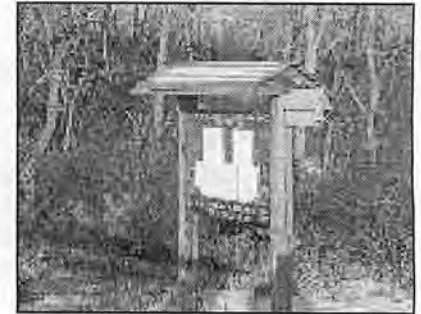
As the new President of the WVCC, I want to hear your concerns and requests. Please feel free to reach out and let me know what the WVCC can do better. I also look forward to meeting as many of you as I can around the campfire.

Regards,
Frank Abbato

Lightners Management Committee Report January 2010

On January 3, 2010, Ellie Florance and I traveled to the Lightner property for a routine property visit and checkup. The 1/3-mile-long driveway was engulfed in snowdrifts too deep for the average car, so we diverted our travels and took the plowed road to Julian and Joy Arbuckle's house for a shorter hike through the snow drifts to the property. Before going to the property, we visited the Arbuckles to wish them a Happy New Year. The Arbuckles have been watching the property for the Conservancy now for over a year to report anything out of the ordinary as a favor to me. Fortunately, the Arbuckles have never had to give me a call. We finally got to meet Julian and introduce ourselves. We then hiked through the drifting snow of Greenbrier County to install a birdhouse on the kiosk as an enhancement to the cave preserve. Hopefully, we will have some bluebirds next spring.

Tom Lightner Jr. had reported to Ed Sweptston that a cherry tree had fallen on the fence line sometime in November. However, the snowdrifts and the high winds were too daunting to walk the entire prop-



Birdhouses at Lightners and Persingers Cave Preserves (Photos by John E. Pearson)

erty line to determine if any further action was needed. Ed stated that, knowing Tom as he did, the fence was probably already cleared of the tree and there would be no further action needed on my part. I did try to call Tom to introduce myself and thank him, but as yet haven't gotten in touch with him.

Afterwards, we took a trip to the Persinger property and installed two more birdhouses. One was installed on the kiosk and one on the changing area. The pine trees are approaching 8–10 feet in height. The spruces are slowly growing up and showed through the snow, which actually kept some four-

wheelers from driving across the property. Not all the spruces have survived, but enough are making a go of it to bring a smile to us.

I would like to schedule another rose bush clearing similar to last June's project weekend, so if you know of a scout troop looking for a good conservation project, contact me at jpearson@rcc.com with the detail so we can make arrangements.

By John E. Pearson
Lightners Cave Preserve
Committee Chair

Maxwelton Sink Cave Preserve Update

The most recent acquisition by the WVCC was the Scott Entrance to Maxwelton Sink Cave back in October 2008. As many WVCC members know, we've had a relationship with this cave for several years, dating back to about 1998. The wonderful relationship we had with the owners who sold us the cave helped us concentrate efforts on regaining a permanent entrance to the cave outside of the floodplain in which the original entrance was located. This had been the main roadblock to continuous access for many years. Thanks to some great survey work (in the '70s and during the recent dig); good science; and a ton of volunteer time, effort, and blood, we were able to gain access to the cave once again, and immediately started to resurvey the cave and make some conservation-minded trails in the cave.

We raised a lot of money and we made a lot of promises, and I'm happy to say that we've kept them all or are in the process of fulfilling them. In February, April, and

September of 2009, the Maxwelton Sink Management Committee and WVCC volunteers continued work toward fulfilling these promises. Over the weekend of September 19–20, 2009, we held a major work weekend at the cave property to complete a large portion of the final phase of the entrance and cave stabilization project. Some of the improvements that were made at September work weekend included: the installation of the promised ladder, the clearing away of loose shale near the entrance and on the cliff, filling in holes with rock at the cliff base, constructing a rock stairway to make getting on and off rope at the top of the entrance pipe easier, and placing the secure lid on the pipe. We also placed plaques on the lid at the entrance to acknowledge not only the ladder/hatch fundraiser donors as promised



(Photograph by Jeff Bray)

(whose help we could not have been without), but to acknowledge those who gave up so many weekends, weekdays, and the aforementioned blood, sweat, and tears to get access to this cave re-established. We definitely would not even be talking about this cave if it were not for those individuals that put nearly all other caving activities aside for anywhere from six months to four-plus years, depending on when the person became involved. It was really an amazing site to see so many folks gathering on a regular basis for such an unselfish activity like this, which became known as the "world's largest cave dig."

We designed this entrance to be something we expect will last for hundreds of years. Our philosophy was that if you build something to last, and do it right and not rush into it, then you will save money and effort in the future. We feel we have done this. But it will also be up to those who visit the cave to keep it in great lasting condition. As you would in any other cave, please respect the unique and delicate formations as you come across them. Please stay on marked trails, and if you encounter something that you feel should be marked to help keep people from harming it (or themselves), please mark it temporarily and then communicate this to any member of the management committee (contact info can be found on the WVCC Web site for the Maxwellton Sink Cave Project).

Current WNS government recommendations and issues aside, we expect this cave to be open to vertically competent cavers. The entrance ladder will be a bit of an illusion—the cave is still a vertical cave! Even with the ladder, there will still be a cable ladder drop within a couple hundred feet of the entrance, and if you plan to continue deeper in the cave than a couple thousand feet, you will have to negotiate another traverse and drop. Plus, WVCC asks that you be on belay when using the ladder. Beyond that, there are miles of cave to explore! And it's a gem! I hope that everyone who has an interest will take time to enjoy and appreciate this cave once it is re-opened.

The reason this cave had diggers with such devotion to the project was because this cave was special to many folks back when it was open in the 1970s. The owners who sold us the cave respected this property to a high level, and one of them is a caver who had been in the cave in the 1970s. He



Nearly 25 WVCC members and friends showed up for the Dedication Ceremony on November 14, 2009. Note the caver at the top left corner of the photo.

(Photograph by Jeff Bray)

recognized the uniqueness of this cave and felt that it was important to regain access, if for no other reason than to study it and enjoy it. Now, thanks to his help in so many ways, and to those mentioned above, the entire caving community should be able to appreciate this resource for generations to come!

Please keep in mind that once caving resumes in the Virginias, this cave does have a lock, so you need to plan your trips to Maxwellton Sink Cave. Please see the Web site for any contact numbers, and please plan ahead! One cannot simply expect to reach anyone on the contact list the day of or just before a trip! We're cavers too, ya know! So plan ahead, and in the meantime, while we are asked to stay above ground to help our bats, consider taking part in a con-

servation project with the WVCC, VAR, or your local grotto. This is a great opportunity to give something back to your community through some volunteerism!

By Jeff Bray
Maxwelton Sink Cave Preserve
Committee Chair



Dedication Ceremony on November 14, 2009

(Photographs by Meredith Hall Weberg)

The Open Cave

c/o WVCC
PO Box 243
Frankford, WV 24938

2009 WVCC Elections

Three new members of the WVCC Board of Directors were elected in November. The Board welcomes:

Frank Abbato
Carroll Bassett
Ed Saugstad

The new directors were announced and welcomed at the annual WVCC Banquet on November 14. They attended the November 15th Board meeting as observers, and were seated on January 1, 2010. Their first board meeting will be on March 20.

There was a larger than usual field of candidates (a good thing!) for this election: Frank Abbato (incumbent), Carroll Bassett, Jerry Bowen, Rich Geisler, Mike Oatney, George Phillips, Ed Saugstad, Bob Thren, and John Tudek. Everyone's willingness to serve is very much appreciated! The efforts of the Nominating Committee (Pauline Apling, Fred Grady, and Alex Sproul)

in soliciting candidates and conducting the election are also appreciated.

Two other incumbent directors opted not to run for another term: Jeff Bray and Meredith Weberg. We thank them for their many years of faithful service, and appreciate their continuing involvement in other ways..

The WVCC is governed by a Board of Directors, nine of whom are elected by the membership, and three of whom may be appointed by the sitting directors. Elected directors serve nine-year terms, and for continuity, terms are staggered, with one-third elected every three years. The next director election will be in 2012, though other appointed directors may be seated in the interim.

Additionally, at its meeting on November 15, the Board elected Frank Abbato as the new President of the Conservancy. The

service of former President Bob Handley is very much appreciated. The current WVCC officers are now:

Frank Abbato, President
Susi Weston, Vice President
John Pearson, Secretary
Bob Hoke, Treasurer

Pauline Apling also serves as Membership Secretary, Meredith Weberg continues as editor of *The Open Cave*, and Charlie Williams continues as Webmaster.

We mailed 194 ballots Regular and Family members (none went to Institutional members). Of these, 127 ballots were returned, which is a very good return rate of 65 percent. Everyone who returned a ballot in this election should pat themselves on the back for participating in democracy in action! Thanks for your support of WVCC and its officers and Board!