

Northeastern Cave Conservancy News



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The Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (NCC) is a nonprofit 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. The NCC programs are focused mainly on the preservation of caves and karst. Outreach includes education in schools and local communities, establishment of park spaces on karstlands, and educational messages about the significance of groundwater pollution on this sensitive underground ecosystem. NCC members assist in the exploration, survey, and protection of these natural resources, and manage them so you can explore them yourself.

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Bensons Cave Preserve Luke Mazza bensons@necaveconservancy.org	Jack Packers Preserve Kevin Dumont jack_packers@necaveconservancy.org	Salamander Cave Preserve Cara Gentry & Erik Richards salamander@necaveconservancy.org	Thacher Park Liaison Thom Engel thacher@necaveconservancy.org
Bentleys Cave Preserve Devon Hedges bentleys@necaveconservancy.org	Knox Cave Preserve Mitch Berger knox@necaveconservancy.org	Sellecks Karst Preserve Erik Nieman sellecks@necaveconservancy.org	Special Use Thom Engel specialuse@necaveconservancy.org
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*On the cover: Merlins trailhead, photo courtesy of Leslie Hatfield
Left: Clarksville, photo courtesy of Ashley Meyer*

Introducing the New Officers of the NCC Executive Committee

by Ramon Armen

Over the past year and a half, the NCC Board of Trustees has elected new officers to all four of the positions that make up the Executive Committee. While I would like to take the opportunity to introduce these new officers, I first wanted to discuss why these transitions took place and what it means for the NCC to have new officers.

In 2017, the NCC's Bylaws were modified to extend officer terms from one year to two years, and to limit the number of consecutive terms that officers could serve to three terms (i.e. six consecutive years). There were several reasons for this change, but among the most pressing was to help ensure the longevity and ongoing continuity of the organization as a whole. As a quickly growing volunteer-run organization that we hope will outlast any individual member, it is essential that institutional knowledge not become siloed in individuals; as the workload grows and personnel changes occur, the organization has to continue to function smoothly. Term limits guarantee that there is a regular and healthy turnover in critical roles and that we are regularly testing our transition process, making it smoother and easier to transition any given responsibility to a new individual whenever the future

need should arise. Through regular turnover in positions, term limits also ensure that at any given time there are multiple people who know how to fill any particular role or responsibility, providing redundancy, longevity, and improved continuity to the organization.

The Board first put this theory to practice at the end of 2023, when Bob Simmons and Mitch Berger reached their term limits as President and Secretary respectively. At the end of 2024, Thom Engel and Bill Folsom similarly reached their term limits as Vice President and Treasurer respectively. In all four cases, the outgoing officer graciously accepted a newly established Immediately Previous Officer role with a one year term, to serve in an advisory capacity to the new officer and assist with the transition. While they were not part of the Board with this role (unless separately appointed or elected as a Trustee), this proved immensely beneficial as I and the other new officers started taking on the duties and responsibilities of our new roles, as they were able to help guide us into our new positions.

With all that said, I would like to introduce the new (within the past year and a half) officers of the NCC!

President - Leslie Hatfield



Officially responsible for supervising the activities of the NCC, the role of President is both expansive and multifaceted. As the Chief Executive Officer of the organization, the President is responsible for numerous tasks both outward-facing and inward-facing. They are frequently the point of contact for external parties who are doing business with the NCC, as well as being responsible for directing many of its day-to-day operations. While many tasks are overseen and executed by committees or other officers, the President is ultimately responsible for working with the Board to define the strategic goals of the NCC, and then ensuring that the committees are aligned to and executing against those goals.

Leslie Hatfield was elected as President starting at the beginning of 2024. Leslie's initial foray into caving was somewhat accidental, occurring after she purchased land with a cave entrance and a cave running beneath it. She is a retired earth science teacher who introduced many students, as well as family and friends, to their first caving experience with a visit to the NCC's Clarksville Cave. As a neighboring landowner, Leslie initially became involved with the NCC to assist with its efforts towards the conservation and study of caves and karst areas. As both Trustee and now President, Leslie has spearheaded numerous projects for the NCC, ranging from driving grant applications and organizing a strategic planning session for the Board to helping dig out washed in debris from our cave entrances and improve our trails (to name just a few examples).



Vice President - Kevin Dumont

The role of the Vice President is often seen as the President's right hand; while their official duties are primarily to assume any duties that the President becomes unable to perform for any reason, on a day-to-day basis the VP helps to keep the organization running smoothly so that the President can focus on strategic or longer term goal setting and be the external face to the Organization. This means that many of the NCC Committees report to the VP; the VP helps to ensure that they are aligned to the organizational goals and strategy, and helps them overcome obstacles they are facing.

Kevin Dumont was elected as Vice President starting at the beginning of 2025. Kevin started caving in 1986 and has served either as a Trustee or Preserve Manager for the NCC since 2010. In addition to Vice President, he also currently serves as Preserve Manager of Jack Packers Preserve and as committee chair for several ad-hoc committees where he has helped define several policies such as our Native American Recognition statement and a new Science Policy. He has two graduate degrees in the geological sciences and enjoys promoting science education, particularly related to karst. He currently works as an Earth Science teacher in Newburgh, NY.



Secretary - Ramon Armen

The official responsibilities of the Secretary are predominantly focused around recordkeeping; the Secretary is responsible for organizing the agenda and minutes of the meetings of the Board or the Executive Committee, as well as maintaining a record of policies and procedures adopted by the Board. They are also responsible for assisting the President with other duties as needed, such as communicating changes to policies to the relevant committees and ensuring alignment with Board actions.

Ramon Armen was elected as Secretary starting at the beginning of 2024. Ramon started caving and digging in the northeast in 2012, and has helped discover, explore, and survey several of the longest caves in New England, as well as in other parts of the country. He enjoys project caving, exploration, cave photography, and introducing new people to the world of caving. He became involved as a Trustee with the NCC in 2018 in order to assist with the NCC's efforts to promote the conservation-minded management and study of our area's cave and karst resources.



Treasurer - Ben Brown

The Treasurer is responsible for maintaining the NCC's financial and accounting systems. This includes ensuring that we abide by all relevant financial reporting and tax laws, maintaining our budget and financial records, safekeeping our monetary funds, and ensuring that all financial transactions are executed properly and in accordance with Board actions. The Treasurer is also responsible for assisting the President with financially-related tasks and oversees several committees relevant to our finances or financial health.

Ben Brown was elected as Treasurer starting at the beginning of 2025. Ben has been caving since his early teens. He has held various leadership roles in the Niagara Frontier Grotto over the last decade and has visited caves across the US. He is an active digger and current chairman of the NSS Digging Section. His digs have resulted in the discovery of several new caves in New York State. He is an electrical engineer with extensive product development experience in both corporate and high-tech startup roles. He currently runs his own small business in western New York and is a volunteer mentor with SCORE on small business topics.

What's Next for the Executive Committee?

A common goal for all four newly elected officers has been to ensure a smooth transition that maintains continuity and minimizes organizational disruption. As part of this, we have been working with preserve managers and other committees that are driving a multitude of meaningful and impactful projects; we hope to highlight much of this committee work in this and future newsletters. However, we also know that the organization is growing and will continue to grow - the NCC will continue to acquire more preserves, take on more projects relevant to our existing preserves, and advocate for effective conservation-minded management of karst resources throughout the region. As our organizational size grows, so does our organizational complexity, and we know that the needs and goals of the organization will continue to evolve and expand as a result.

There are many areas of this evolution that the NCC can choose to focus on, and one of the primary tasks

in front of the Executive Committee is to work with the rest of the Board and NCC membership to identify where the largest priorities and opportunities lie. We know we do not have all of the answers today. Over the next year, we plan to lay the groundwork to start to answer some of the longer term strategic questions facing the NCC and to align on what our long term organizational goals should be and how we plan to get there. The first step of this process is a series of strategic planning sessions with the Board, which we hope to kick off over the course of the coming year. From there, we can start to build and execute against a long term plan for the organization.

This will not happen overnight, but I think I speak for the entire Executive Committee when I say that I am excited about the opportunities in front of the NCC, and look forward to everything that the coming years will bring.

CaveSim is coming to Thacher Park!

The NCC is sponsoring CaveSim, a 26' trailer with a fascinating cave inside. Computer scoring makes the cave extra fun. As visitors crawl and climb through the cave, they get a score based on how careful they are to not touch the stalactites. The cave trailer is one of numerous stations. There will also be an impressive vertical caving tower, a cave rescue stretcher, bat biology lessons, and other hands-on activities.

June 28th & 29th
9AM to 4PM each day
Thacher Park, adjacent to the visitor center



*Photos & info from
<https://www.cavesim.com/>*

Introducing the new NCC Trustees

by Leslie Hatfield

The most recent Trustee election has one continuing Trustee, Mitch Berger, two returning Trustees, Thom Engel and John Dunham, and one Trustee new to the Board, Garrett Gay. Each of these Trustees brings a unique perspective to the Board and it's their varying views and backgrounds that will assist the NCC in growing its influence and presence in Northeast cave conservation.



Mitch Berger continues his tenure on the Board having been re-elected to another term. Mitch is a life member of the NCC and currently serves as the Manager of our Knox Cave Preserve as well as chair of the Risk Management Committee. Having previously served as Secretary and Trustee, Mitch brings a lot of institutional knowledge to the Board as well as information gleaned from his active participation in several other cave conservancies and as a member of several grottos. Mitch would like to see the NCC "...continue as a national leader in cave conservation and acquire more preserves, particularly ones not subject to winter closures and ones outside of New York, so as to offer more opportunities for members from other states to participate."



Thom Engel returns to the Board as a Trustee having previously served as a Trustee, and most recently having served as the Vice President. Thom wears a variety of hats for the NCC, currently serving as the chairman of the Education Committee, chair of the Special Use Committee, and as the NCC liaison with Thacher Park. In addition to wearing all of those hats, Thom is currently the co-manager for both Onesquethaw Preserve and Clarksville Preserve. Thom would like to see the NCC "...acquire more caves in other states in the Northeast..." as well as "...targeting caves that are currently closed or that can provide a broad variety of caving experiences."



John Dunham has previously served the NCC as a Trustee, though most would more readily connect their name to the caving publication, the *Northeastern Caver*, where John is the current editor. John is an active project caver where they get to put their amazing cartography skills to work. John recognizes the importance of the NCC preserves in ease of access and getting people underground and feels that "...maintaining the NCC is as critical to Northeastern caving as the work of finding new caves and mentoring new cavers." John has a very inclusive view on accessibility and they believe "...greatly in making caving equitable and welcoming – that relies partly on people looking past differences to bring new cavers of all sorts into the experience, and partly on having places for those new cavers to go where they can have safe and exciting experiences."



Garrett Gay is a newcomer to the NCC Board, coming to us with a background in the sciences, specifically the geosciences and geochemistry. Garrett is an active participant in digging expeditions and new cave mapping. He is also very interested in cave-based scientific inquiry which aligns nicely with the NCC's commitment to cave and karst conservation and study. Garrett feels that his science background has given him "...a unique perspective on the approach to balance the very necessary geological, hydrological, and biological conservation of our caves and to ensure safe and responsible recreational opportunities for all those interested."



Merlins Expansion

From the Acquisitions Chair – Bob Simmons

Pulling through the gate into the Merlins Cave Preserve parking area, I am struck by the quiet, undisturbed nature of the place. Our kiosk/changing area, though man-made, blends well into the surrounding woods. A well-built trail lures you up the hill about a thousand feet, perhaps a little too steep at times, but eventually levels out on a plateau of open woods, bedrock outcrops, and cliffs. If you know the way, you can traverse either left or right at this point on the trail to reach two small caves, Tunnel Hill and Volcano, respectively (and potential for who knows?). Continuing on the trail another 1,400 or so feet past outcrops and cliffs brings you to the edge of the 35.69-acre Merlins Preserve proper, with Dragon Bones Cave just to the left and the Merlins Cave entrance another 700 or so feet further along the marble outcrop plateau. Many visitors are

surprised to realize that all of the land they have hiked through to this point is not actually a part of the preserve, and that the parking area and trail are a deeded access easement across another's property.

We now have the opportunity to secure our parking and trail access and protect the scenic and conservation values of all the land between Tunnel Hill Road and the main portion of the Merlins Cave Preserve. At present, the owner of the land which our access trail crosses could sell or develop the property into residential or other uses, or log, mine, or otherwise destroy the natural beauty of the property. Having walked the entirety of our proposed 35.32-acre property, in addition to what you see from our access trail, there is already an existing pathway that could be improved with a little

effort to add an additional mile of interesting hiking trail to the combined 71-acre preserve. This could start from the existing loop trail on our current Merlins parcel and run along below the hills and cliffs to the west, returning back to the parking area, and passing a set of springs and cliff faces along the way.

Mike Belknap and Martha Burke-Hennessy, the current owners, have offered us this property at less than appraised value in the hopes that we can preserve this beautiful piece of land and protect the rest of the karst areas on the hillside. We have offers of funding and matching grants being lined up and will be looking to you, our members and friends, to help us make the jewel that is Merlins, shine even brighter.

“...thank you for the decision of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy to expand Merlins Cave property.... the preservation of this property for public use and education provides an inexpressible happiness.”

- Martha Burke-Hennessy and Mike Belknap

MERLINS

T. GLIA

From the President

Dear Friends and Supporters,

I am thrilled to share an exciting opportunity with you – the future expansion of our picturesque Merlins Cave Preserve! Currently, our preserve spans 36 acres, featuring Dragon Bones Cave and the awe-inspiring Merlins Cave. We now have the chance to acquire an additional 35 acres, which includes Volcano Cave and Tunnel Hill Cave, bringing our total to an impressive 71 acres with four known caves.

This expansion is not just about increasing our land; it's about preserving the natural beauty and geological wonders for future generations. Imagine the adventures and discoveries that await in these new caves! Let's not forget about the surface, though! This acquisition will allow for pleasant walks through a forested hillside, not only on the existing loop access trail, but plans are also in place to expand the surface trails as well.

To make this dream a reality, we need your support. We have a generous donor who is offering a 50% match for the first \$40,000 in donations, effectively turning \$40,000 into \$60,000! This means your contribution will have an even greater impact:

-  A \$10 donation becomes \$15
-  A \$50 donation becomes \$75
-  A \$100 donation becomes \$150
-  A \$1,000 donation becomes \$1,500

Every dollar counts and brings us closer to our goal of raising \$110,000 to expand Merlins Cave Preserve. Your donation will help us protect these natural treasures and ensure they remain accessible for exploration and education.

Join us in this exciting journey and make a lasting difference. Together, we can preserve the wonders of Merlins Cave Preserve for generations to come.

For information on donating to this acquisition, please refer to the following page, Merlins Cave Preserve, where you will find directions to donate by check or pay via PayPal/credit/debit card.

Thank you for your support!

-Leslie Hatfield, President
l.hatfield@necaveconservancy.org





Merlins Cave Preserve

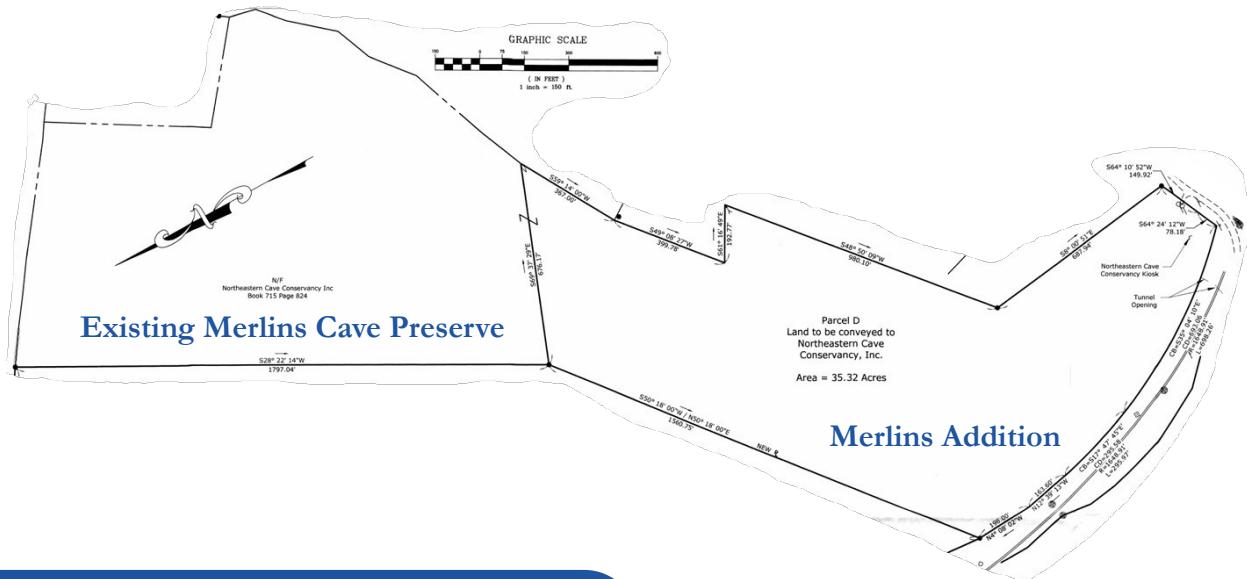


Current - 35.69 acres

Aquiring additional - 35.32 acres

Total after acquisition - 71+ acres

Merlins Cave Preserve is EXPANDING!



Help protect this land by donating today!

To make a donation by check:

Checks payable to:

Northeastern Cave Conservancy (Memo: Merlins)
Mail to: NCC, PO Box 254, Schoharie, NY 12157

Thank you!

To make a donation

via

PayPal, credit card, or debit card:

Thank you!



Protecting and conserving this land and its beautiful caves and karst will take a community effort!

Thank you for helping the Northeastern Cave Conservancy—together we can forever protect this land.

DEC Bat Counts

by Emily Davis

For many years, the NCC has partnered with the NY State Department of Conservation on doing research and protecting New York bats. Most bat counts have happened every two years in any individual cave to lessen disturbance of the bats. Ashley Meyer, after coming on board in 2023 as lead bat wildlife biologist in our region for NY DEC, has been coordinating bat counts with NSS and NCC cave managers. The attention to cave safety and environmental concerns have been in the forefront in the planning, preparation, and conduct of these counts.

This year, I was excited to be involved in helping with the counts at both NSS and NCC caves. Clarksville manager Mike Chu assisted with the count and bat location



mapping in that cave. These surveys were conducted over the winter, during the hibernation season for bats. NCC caves surveyed included Clarksville, Jack Packers, and Bentleys.

At least 20 tricolored bats were found in Clarksville this year, which is up from only one or two in the past. This was a significant find as overall populations of these bats are very low, having reduced 98% or more in the northeast since White Nose Syndrome. These bats are proposed for listing as an endangered species. There were also a dozen tricolors in Jack Packers as well as one lonely little brown bat.

Also of interest in our collaboration with NY DEC is a recent vertical training for representatives from four DEC regions led by Erik Nieman. In addition, Ashley Meyer will be presenting a paper at the upcoming NSS Convention in Cobleskill, NY titled, "The Importance of Collaboration Between State Agencies and the Caving Community to Support Bat Conservation."



I have worked with NY DEC on bat counts since the mid-80s and feel the caving community is fortunate to have had a long relationship with the State. Today, the NCC and regional cavers are successfully working wth NY DEC staff in mutually respectful, beneficial, and cooperative ways towards our common goals.



Bats in Jack Pakers. Photo by Ashley Meyer.



Preserve Updates

Bensons Preserve Volunteer Work Day

By Luke Mazza

On Sunday, May 18th NCC members Janet Bowman and Rico Neumann joined me for a small but productive work session at the Bensons property.

The morning started off with myself and Janet clipping back the brush along the edges of the approximately 300' long right of way while Rico followed close behind to grab the downed brush and drag it off into the woods. In this way, we made quick work of pushing back the edges to the fence line on the right side and very close to the "original" brush line on the left. Doing this eliminates the overhanging brush that makes it more difficult to walk back to the preserve, and also ensures that for whatever reason (maintenance, a cave rescue, etc.) it's possible to bring a vehicle back there. After that was done, we moved to an area where a large multi-trunked tree had fallen across the trail. This tree is too large and hung up on other trees at the moment to deal with without professional help and a large effort. As a short term solution we rerouted the path around the tree so that the way onward would be obvious. Next, we moved to the northern property line where we broke down and removed an abandoned tent-style hunting blind that had blown onto the property. Despite our small crew, we accomplished all goals for the day.

Thanks to Janet and Rico for making it out despite the questionable weather! Next up to get Bensons primed and ready for the 2025 Convention-goers will be to do the usual mowing of the right of way and install some beautiful new kiosk posters.



Onesquethaw Preserve Clean-up

by Thom Engel

April 19, 2025 was a workday at Onesquethaw Cave Preserve. Wind-blown litter was picked up out in the field before the plants could grow up and hide it. Also, there was a lot of broken glass in the sinkhole that was picked up. Onesquethaw being a sinking stream can bring down a lot of trash from upstream.

The changing area had some routine and not so routine work done. The bench seat was replaced as was some of the siding. Openings in the changing area were sealed to make it a little more private.

Many thanks go to Elena Berman, Iris Danielson, Emily Davis, Lydia Hohelkamp, Tom O'Donnell, Johnny Pitt, and Jake Salzman.



Jack Packers

By Kevin Dumont

A bat count took place on March 27, 2025 at Jack Packers Cave with personnel from the New York DEC and the NCC. A total of 13 bats were observed, with the majority being tricolored (*Perimyotis subflavus*). Given the status of this species, Jack Packers represents a notable hibernaculum for tricolored bats in this part of the state.



Onesquethaw clean-up
Photos by John Pitt

A Fresh New Look at our Preserves

By Erik Nieman

There is currently a lot of activity here in Upstate New York as we prepare for the NSS Convention coming in late June. As volunteers work to help clean up our preserves and finish various projects, one project has been ongoing during the winter months. The Publications Committee has been working on giving a much needed facelift to our preserve kiosks in the way of newly designed, and updated kiosk posters.

While some of the information on the kiosks is now standardized across all preserves, the content for the remainder of the kiosk panel is up to the individual preserve managers. One of the items that is a new addition to our kiosks, and that we have standardized across all the preserves, is a Native American Land Acknowledgment. Many thanks to Kevin Dumont for researching this, and writing the individual acknowledgments, as well as the accompanying article found below.

Native American Land Acknowledgment

By Kevin Dumont

After several years of consideration, research, and consultation with experts, the NCC has settled on the inclusion of language pertaining to Native American land acknowledgement on the signs or kiosks at all of our preserves. The nations represented across our preserves include the Muhhekunneuw (Mohican), Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), Pishgachtigok (Schaghticoke), Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), and Monsiyok (Munsee Lenape/Delaware); the parenthetical terms are the common names used by people outside of these indigenous communities.

As an example, here is the statement to be displayed at the Clarksville Cave Preserve:

The Northeastern Cave Conservancy acknowledges that this preserve is located on the ancestral lands of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), Muhhekunneuw (Mohican), and Pishgachtigok (Schaghticoke) people. We honor and respect the enduring relationship that Indigenous communities have with these lands, recognizing their role as the original stewards and protectors of these natural spaces.

The NCC views these statements of acknowledgment as an important first step in partnering with Indigenous communities as mutual stewards of the lands and resources we continue to preserve and cherish.

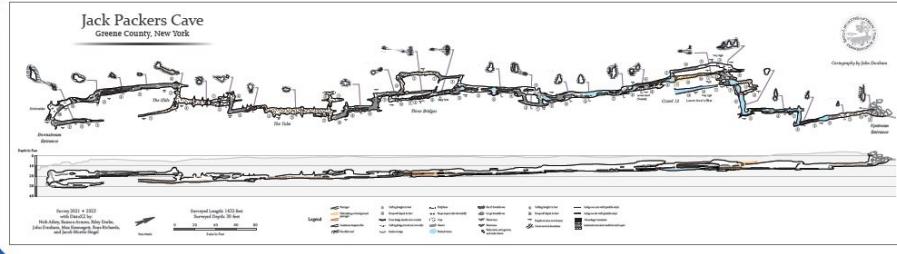


Preserving caves & karst in the Northeast since 1978

Contact the Preserve Manager
jack_packers@necaveconservancy.org
www.necaveconservancy.org

Welcome to Jack Packers Cave Preserve

Jack Packers Cave is the longest known cave in Greene County, New York with a mapped length of over 1,400 feet and two entrances. The cave is formed along the axis of an anticline in the Onondaga limestone of Middle Devonian age. The Northeastern Cave Conservancy leases about 12 acres of land that includes both entrances to the cave.



Land Acknowledgment

The Northeastern Cave Conservancy acknowledges that this preserve is located on the ancestral lands of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), Muhhekunneuw (Mohican), and Pishgachtigok (Schaghticoke) people. We honor and respect the enduring relationship that Indigenous communities have with these lands, recognizing their role as the original stewards and protectors of these natural spaces.



The Alan Traino Karst Preserve: Past & Present

by Devon Hedges

On the last Sunday in April 2025, the Helderberg-Hudson Grotto brought out four members, including the manager of the Alan Traino Karst Preserve, to do some seasonal cleanup at the site. In addition to clearing the mostly natural debris brought into the sinkhole by melting snow, spring rains and gravity, there was also some well-intentioned infrastructure to put away for good. All efforts were both a regular part of getting the preserve tidied up for spring and also to get ready for the 2025 National Speleological Society Convention in June.

Preserve namesake Alan Traino (deceased, NSS #52270RE), Bill Folsom (NSS #36313), Chuck Porter (NSS #5330), and Thom Engel (NSS #13832) all played a part in stoking interest during the 2010s in the caves and karst southeast of Clarksville Cave, particularly in the caves of the Chatter-Stone-Hole system found in northwestern Coeymans, NY. Always looking for virgin cave, Alan & Bill had down-days from some dig projects in the area, days when it was too wet & rainy to work safely around the wide rim of a sinkhole holding a very

promising and deep shaft. A large crew was needed to work that dig, so when the hardy few were too few to staff the dig-face, high-line and 2-to-1 haul, spoils pile, and all-important gas grill, discovery & adventure was sought farther afield. The Chatter-Stone-Hole system hadn't been visited much since mapping & digging projects tapered off in the late 1960s. Traino & Co. spent weekend workdays clearing a raft of debris to forge ahead into the enticing entrance buried below. Eventually, the team reopened the way forward to about 1,450 feet of previously mapped passage in the largest known cave of the system.

In the later 2010s, a bright-eyed, optimistic, and enthusiastic newer generation of cavers joined the more experienced diggers in cleaning up and exploring Slingerlands Hellhole. In the last third of the previously mapped underground stream, a tubular, phreatic passage leads up beyond the terminal sump at the lowest part of the cave. Through lots of small, upward crawlways, the cave begins to resemble the initial downward planes of the entrance series. Floating debris starts to reappear, lodged in the ceiling

cracks. Some unfortunate surface critters (frogs, mostly) are seen as well, waiting out the sunless days with decreasing provisions and chances for survival. All signs point to an elusive connection between the back of two caves and a new path to the surface.

No new leads were found, but interest was high enough to bring in skilled cave cartographers from further out of the area. John Dunham (NSS #55186), Ramon Armen (NSS #64498), Larry Bernier (NSS #70393), Devon Hedges (NSS #66151), Folsom, and Porter spent a few days gathering data and ultimately improving on the maps from the last century. Some of the same crew were also keen on further discovery and spent time remapping & working the back end of neighboring Georges Surprise Cave, once noted to have a point where voices from the back of Slingerlands Hellhole could be heard. Digging and modifying the smaller and shorter Georges Surprise Cave have yet to bear out the presumed connection between the two caves, but adventure and exploration continue.

With an insurgent, sinking stream entrance, the pit surrounding the entrance to Slingerlands Hellhole collects a lot of once-floating debris. Small to large sticks and branches are typically found jammed together at various nooks and crags of the stone-scape and entrance gaps in the person-sized limestone canyon. There's been years with enough volunteers and gusto to clear debris down to the stone in most areas. Other years, getting the entrance passable is the bare minimum needed to qualify for a successful work day. In the recent past, some modest construction was accomplished and some trash was picked from the surface surroundings. In 2025, a re-purposed roof that lasted about five winters needed to be broken down, removed and discarded. A simple kiosk featuring the historical narrative, current map, and a log book for visitors remains in good shape. Scouting locations and site conditions for a formal, private changing area was also accomplished recently.

In getting ready for the 2025 NSS Convention in nearby Cobleskill, NY, the approach has been a lot like other clean-ups in that we do what we can with the resources available and have a good time doing it! The early spring gathering of Nancy Ying (NSS# 71175), Janet Bowman (NSS #74323), and Bonnie Schultz (NSS #74417) joined Preserve Manager Devon Hedges in moving buckets filled with light debris, dirt, and stone or armloads of sticks and large branches out of the slot in the bedrock. There's also a main point of occlusion where a large tree trunk that's been wedged in place traps smaller bits and creates a tangled clot not worth crawling

through. The trunk has been immovable since before Traino & Company's visits to Slingerlands Hellhole got going in 2016. The volunteers cleared this entrance, making the crawl more hospitable and fashioned a safety rail at the edge of the 10- to 12-foot-high canyon to better allow helping hands in forming a chain to move the fill out. Dammed debris was dragged out and fill from underneath was dug and dredged so the stream path could divert away from the main passage at the entrance crawl. Although there's no staying dry when exploring Slingerlands Hellhole, we can try putting off the inevitable for a moment for wary 1st-timers! Devon has also made a few trips to the dump to discard the humbled remains of the kiosk roof and more. He and Leslie Hatfield (NSS #54214), President of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy which owns the preserve, have done some work planning further improvements.



As the caves of this system regularly feature once-floating debris lodged in the ceilings, the caves are thought to flood significantly. After recent years of observation, this seems most likely to occur with melt-off of significant snow pack and considerable spring rains, but less likely to be a regular occurrence over the rest of a typical year. However, the conditions suggest that mammals are unlikely to survive through a winter inside, so there has been no requirement to close the caves for seasonal hibernation of endangered species. This makes the Alan Traino Karst Preserve one of the few year-round caves to visit in the area. For the hearty and hardy explorer, there's no need to wait to get underground!



*Photo credits: Devon Hedges
Previous: Slingerlands Entrance Crawl
Left: Alan Traino Karst Preserve kiosk
Above: Devon Hedges & Shirley Madewell at Slingerlands Hellhole*



What's in New York, 72 Steps Tall, and Recently Underwent a Renovation?

by Mitch Berger,
Knox Cave Preserve Manager

Nope, it's not the Statue of Liberty (that's 377 stairs); it's the Knox Access Trail! Have you been to Knox Cave in the past several

years and noticed that the part of the trail going down the sinkhole seemed to be deteriorating and getting harder and harder to navigate? No need to worry that you were getting more out of shape – the trail that had been in place since it was constructed in preparation for the 1979 NSS Convention really was eroding away. Over the course of 15 main work days (plus several visits to prepare and then to tie up some loose ends), our brand new 72-step trail based on timber box steps (yet incorporating historical elements of the original trail) was built entirely with volunteer labor, and finally reached the top of the 45 foot deep sinkhole at 4:34pm EST on Saturday, November 16, 2024. Stay tuned for a full-length article all about the project in our next issue!

We hope you can join us at the Knox Cave Preserve for the
Northeastern Cave Conservancy's

Member Appreciation Day & Knox Access Trail Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Saturday, August 16th
11:00 – 3:00
Food at Noon



Ribbon Cutting and Awards Starting at 1:00

Certificate of Merit & Good Neighbor Award Presentations

Lunch will be provided. Bring a lawn chair. Transportation from the parking area to the top of the sinkhole will be provided for those in need.

Questions? Reach out to Leslie: l.hatfield@necaveconservancy.org





Volunteer Value

By Vince Kappler

** The 1,977 Volunteer Value hours reported for 2024 is the greatest number of hours for any year since VV started in 2006. Many thanks to all who reported the data that pushed our total VV supporting the NCC Mission to over \$900,000.00 since we started this project. The previous hour record was set in 2013 at 1,916 hours. **

The VV value reported to date for 2025 is: 142 hours on task, 854 miles traveled, for a total value of \$5,510.00.

INDEPENDENT SECTOR (IS) tracks the value of volunteer time. For the latest year available, IS determined that the national rate is \$33.49 and our regional rate is 36.09. I will calculate NCC's VV at \$34.00 per hour for 2025 just to be on the conservative side.

The IRS has increased the business mileage rate to \$.70 for 2025. Note that this is not the rate that can be deducted from your personal taxes. The NCC adopted the use of the prevailing IRS business rate when it modeled its VV program after the original NSS-USFS VV agreement which permitted the use of the business rate instead of the charitable donation rate.

The VV reporting form on the website has been glitchy the past few reporting cycles and has been discontinued. In its place is a reminder to send an email with your data to me at volunteervalue@necaveconservancy.org or my personal email vkappler@ptd.net. All submissions received will be acknowledged by return email.

NOTE: While 2024 VV reporting set a record, I only received reports from a few preserve managers.

ACTUAL VALUES for RECENT YEARS

Year	Hours	Miles	Dollar Value
2021	825	2,097	\$25,941.00
2022	1,213	3,370	\$33,125.00
2023	1,025	11,556	\$41,533.00
2024	**1,977**	20,332	\$75,484.00

OVERALL TOTAL VV
2006-2024

\$901,646.00

Northeast cavers have a 50+ year history of working to understand and preserve karst features in the region. More recently, the NCC has taken the lead in the protection, exploration, scientific investigation, conservation, and preservation of cave and karst resources in our area. Besides owning several properties, the NCC manages property for other agencies, has made presentations to local governments concerning land use, contributed to environmental impact studies, and advised local property owners on living with their karst properties. All of this work has and continues to be done by volunteers. By assigning dollar values to our volunteer work and adding up the sums, we can create the documentation that can be used for cave management proposals and karst protection battles. This documentation will also add support for any applications the NCC may make for federal, state, or private grants. The documentation may also be of value when used to calculate charitable contributions for income tax purposes.



How to Help

Join the
NCC!

Annual membership levels:

Regular \$20
Regular + 1 Family \$25
Regular + 2 Family \$30
Regular + 3 Family \$35
Benefactor \$50
Institutional \$100
Life Membership \$400
Family Life Membership \$125

All checks made payable and sent to:

Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc.
P.O. Box 254
Schoharie, N.Y. 12157
www.necaveconservancy.org

Giving to the NCC at Work

Many employers offer the opportunity to have donations deducted directly from your paycheck. Some even offer a corporate match of employee donations.

The NCC can be found on multiple corporate giving platforms. For businesses in the private sector, Benevity is commonly used. For New York State employees, donations can be directed to the NCC through the United Way campaign. Check to see if your employer offers directed donations and especially if they offer matching. It's a great way to support the NCC!

If you find your employer offers a directed donation option where the NCC doesn't appear, please reach out to treasurer@necaveconservancy.org to see if we can get us added.

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. The Newsletter editor accepts submissions via editor@necaveconservancy.org.

*Top: Inside Onesquethaw
Bottom: Outside Jack Packers*

*On the back: Crawling in Jack Packers
All photos courtesy of Ashley Meyer*



