

Northeastern Cave Conservancy News

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Next Board Meeting

Sunday, June 7, 2020 at 10:00 am

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, this will be a virtual meeting. If you would like to attend the meeting and have not already been provided with log-in information, please contact president@necaveconservancy.org to get log-in instructions.

The Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (NCC) is a not-for-profit corporation committed to the conservation, study, management, and acquisition of caves and karst areas having significant geological, hydrological, biological, recreational, historical, or aesthetic features.

To these ends, the NCC combines the resources and expertise of affiliated cave explorers, educators, scientists, landowners, and conservation officials.

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.



THE KNOX CAVE RESCUE - FIFTY YEARS LATER

— Bruce A. Randall —

There are probably few events that have stuck in my mind with more detail than that day in January 1970 when 14-year-old Peter Viens got his knee wedged in the slot at the bottom of the Gun Barrel of Knox Cave (which is located behind the torn-down skating rink on the outskirts of Knox, New York).

We were the Springfield College Outing Club and we were a Family Member of the Explorers Club at the Museum of Natural History in Springfield, MA. We decided to join the Explorers Club because they had good programs and we figured we could learn from their more experienced members. So in early January, shortly after returning from Christmas break, we joined the Explorers Club for a joint trip to Knox Cave. This was not the first trip to Knox for most of us, but it was one of the few that took place in daylight.

I remember that we rode with Doug Deyoe in his really big car, maybe a Chieftain; I think it was an Ex-police car. There were about ten of us, so we had two cars. There was snow on the ground, so we had to park on the main road and hike into the cave. The entrance is down in a snow-filled sinkhole, with the remains of an old wooden stairway. I can't remember if someone, Ron maybe, had to dig it open. I also think that we rigged a rope as a handline down to the entrance. I think that we were the ones who ended up taking charge to get everyone down into the cave.

So, who was on the trip? Ron Carlson, Chickie Baima, Doug Deyoe, Pat Arnold, Shirley "Shaw" Leonard, Bob McGraff, Lynn Crummey, Phil? (sorry, having a senior moment), me (Bru Randall), who else? I'm thinking there were ten of us and maybe about the same number of EC folks.

After we all got in the cave and out of the cold, we spent some time exploring the front part of the cave. Then the Explorers Club leader, Paul Dower (I think that is his name), yelled "who wants to go through the Gun Barrel, let's go." I think that this was the first time for many of the Explorers Club people, whereas most of us had been here before. We let the EC folks go first and then we headed in. Doug didn't go through the Gun Barrel because he knew he wouldn't fit; this will turn out to be a very fortunate situation later. I think that I was the last one through the Gun Barrel. When I came out the other end, there were a couple of youngsters there waiting to go back out. I didn't think much about it although I did notice that there was no adult with them.

Once we regrouped in the larger room some distance past the Gun Barrel, we decided that we should move on to the climb up the Great Divide and then to the Alabaster

Room. Some (the slightly larger folks) climbed up the face of the Great Divide while others (including me) chimneied up behind. I think someone set up a belay. There was no issue and some of us went to the Alabaster Room. It may be that some folks didn't do the Great Divided and headed back. Eventually, the last of us were back at the Great Divide. I remember volunteering to belay some folks down, because then I would be the last one down through the chimney and not need a belay.

I was sitting at the top of the Great Divided belaying someone down when one of the women, Pat or Chickie, came back and said that there was someone stuck in the Gun Barrel. They said that they had gone in and tried to free him, but they didn't have enough strength. This was around 3:00 p.m. I belayed the last person down and then headed to the Gun Barrel. I was most of the way through before I got to the kid who was stuck. This was around 3:30 and he had been stuck since about 1:30. His name was Peter Viens. He was 14 years old and he was on the trip with his aunt, who was out in the main cave.

Peter was sort of on his side and one of his knees had dropped down into the lower slot and rather than backing up and lifting it up, he had tried to pull it forward and force it out; that didn't work. On the other side, the entrance side of the Gun Barrel, was Doug. I don't know how long he had been there. We talked about who we could get to help, we talked about cavers from the RPI (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute) Outing Club that we had heard of, and someone was calling the fire department. The kid was pretty freaked out. I got out my jackknife and cut his jeans, but I couldn't get them to pull around his knee. I think Doug had found an old piece of lumber and tried putting it under Peter's knee to pry it up, but that didn't work.

Things get a little fuzzy about now. I remember that Pat came into the Gun Barrel once or several times to bring me things that I needed. Sometime along the way, my carbide light went out. I think I might have had a battery-powered flashlight on the side of my helmet that I used. Not really sure. One thing that was really important, and I can't stress this enough, was that Doug was doing everything he could to keep Peter calm. As I remember, Doug, who was a grad student, was majoring in special ed or a related subject and was used to dealing with people in crisis. So, he was very successful in keeping Peter calmed down. I believe that when I got to Peter that Doug told me that there were a couple of State Troopers there. At some point, as we are trying to manipulate Peter's knee, there is this very bright light shining on us and I hear a movie camera whirring. Well I let out every expletive that the Marine Corps had taught me. The Trooper is telling me to watch my language since the kid's aunt was out there. I

told him that if she didn't like my language, she could leave. The UPI or AP photographer shut off his camera and the Trooper didn't give me any more grief.

At some point after this, the firemen came in. The first thing they started doing was telling us that they were going to blast the cave shut. They tried using a collapsible pike pole to pry up the kid's knee, but he started screaming that a rattlesnake was biting him. The prying didn't work, so they stopped. Then they tried putting a rope around under his arms. They said he is fat, and they could just pull him out. I tried explaining that is was knee that was wedged. It took them a really long time to understand that. Finally, they passed me a thermos with soapy water to pour on Peter's knee and then they passed me another rope that I tied around Peter's ankle. So, when they pulled on the ankle rope, it pulled his foot toward the back of his head and his knee popped out. The fireman were all excited so they kept pulling; I had to yell at them to slow down since I was trying to wriggle along with my hand under

Peter's knee to keep from dropping back into the slot and getting trapped again. Finally he was out, but there were still about 18 more people back beyond the Gun Barrel. The Trooper wanted me to leave but I refused. The Troopers looked so funny in their trench coats and white Stetsons.

It was about 8:30 p.m. when Viens was unstuck and probably another hour or two before everyone was out. When we finally got out there was a smoldering fire. The fire department and the ladies' auxiliary with food and something hot to drink were long gone. We were on our own. The one good thing was that the dirt road had been plowed back to the old skating rink, so it was easier to walk out.

Fortunately, the cars started. On the drive back to Springfield, I remember hearing on the radio that we were still stuck in the cave. I'm guessing we stopped for food on the Mass. Turnpike.



Images from the Gun Barrel (Knox Cave). Photos by Thomas Holder (above) and Brian Mayfield (right). Note the narrow slot running along the floor of this 50-foot-long tubular passageway.





Committed to the conservation, study, management, and acquisition of caves and karst areas having significant geological, hydrological, biological, recreational, historical, or aesthetic features.

Members and Friends of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy,

Daily (sometimes hourly) it seems, we are being bombarded with information, rules and guidance on how we should be reacting to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to federal, state and local directives, the National Speleological Society (NSS) has called for a moratorium on caving and visiting the NSS Preserves (caves.org). Caving events are being cancelled or postponed. Many of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy's (NCC) caves would typically reopen following the bat hibernation season on or after May 1, 2020. Given the latest federal, state and local guidelines and restrictions with respect to such issues as hygiene, social distancing, and limitations on unnecessary travel, caving becomes essentially impossible in the near term. The NCC preserves are all located in New York State, the state hit hardest by COVID-19 thus far. In light of this dynamic situation, the NCC is providing the following interim guidance regarding our preserves:

- First and foremost we must consider the safety of our members, friends, families and our NCC preserve managers; please follow all federal, state and local directives as well as the preserve management plans (necaveconservancy.org). If you can't abide by each and every one of these requirements, then you should not come to the Preserve. You, much as I may be in need of a good walk over some beautiful karst terrain. Again, follow all of the guidance and rules indicated above or go somewhere else. Permit and permission rules for each preserve still apply. When in doubt, please contact the preserve manager in advance and if the parking is occupied, perhaps consider going somewhere else.
- As the requirements and guidelines are changing on a daily basis, we have not referenced them here, as anything we'd include would be soon outdated. Ignorance of the latest guidance in the time of the internet is no excuse.
- Please, please, please, do not act in such a way as to increase the likelihood that you will place any additional burden on local EMS and Medical infrastructure. This is particularly so the rural communities in which our preserves are located. A cave rescue could expose dozens of medical staff, your fellow cavers (and their families) to unnecessary potential risks. In short, be safe and be smart.
- All NCC projects, workdays, Member's Day, ceremonies and events which require more than one person to be present are on indefinite hold. We will provide updates when things are more clear and definite; thanks for your patience. Everything will be waiting for us when COVID-19 is in the rear view mirror. The infrastructure at the new Alan Traino Preserve was also planned for completion this spring. In the interim, please contact the Preserve manager at: traino_preserve@necaveconservancy.org for information on the preserve interim visitation guidelines.

These restrictions will remain in effect while the current emergency lasts. If in doubt, please contact the specific preserve manager or the NCC directly.

So what can you do to help in the interim? First, take care of yourselves, your families and friends and we hope to see you underground as soon as all this passes. The NCC is still actively fundraising on a number of fronts. COVID-19 has caused the cancellation of the Spring NRO, where we had hoped to raise funding for recent and ongoing acquisitions (Traino Preserve, Clarksville addition, Salamander Preserve, etc.). A number of our benefactors are presently out of work or are on limited incomes due to COVID-19. We appreciate everyone's generosity to date and promise to continue the NCC mission of protecting caves and karst in the northeast. Anything you can do to help us weather these troublesome times is always appreciated.

Bob Simmons
President, Northeastern Cave Conservancy



2020 NSS VIRTUAL CONVENTION

July 27-31, 2020

VIRTUAL EVENTS FOR THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY 2020 CONVENTION NSS HEADQUARTERS, HUNTSVILLE, AL

May 1, 2020

Dear NSS Friends,

As you know, due to circumstances beyond our control, this year's NSS Convention in Elkins, West Virginia, was postponed to 2023. As a sort of consolation and distraction from being quarantined, we are offering some elements of Convention as virtual events.

These include the Cartographic Salon, Cave Ballad Salon, Graphic Arts Salon, Photography Salon, Symbolic Emblems Salon, T-Shirt Salon, and Video Salon; as well as the Communications and Electronics Section and Vertical Section meetings.

We will also offer a number of presentations from West Virginia Exploration and United States Exploration. Also for your viewing pleasure will be the Cave Conservancy Roundtable and the State Survey Roundtable.

The Fine Arts Salon folks are planning a special offering that is sure to please.

Most importantly, we will offer the Thursday night Awards Salon and Friday Awards show on those days during the last week of July. It will almost be like you're in Elkins.

If you had been planning to give a presentation in Elkins, know that it is not too late. Contact the person in charge of that section or sessions and work things out. Many presentations can be done in the virtual realm.

But do not think that this is the wave of the future. This is a one-time only offering during the last week in July. If you've never gone to an NSS Convention, now is your chance to see one aspect of the many benefits they offer. Who knows, maybe you'll be inspired to attend or to make a presentation of your own at a future Convention!

We hope you will enjoy the non-Convention this summer. At least it will give you something to do that is cave related, in case we are still not caving by then.

Thanks,

Rich Geisler and Meredith Hall Weberg
2020/23 NSS Convention Co-Chairs

P.S. If you had registered for Convention, we are still working on the process to offer you a full refund; the chance to move your money towards next year's Convention in Weed, California; or to donate your money to the NSS. AND if you reserved hotel rooms in Elkins, PLEASE don't forget to cancel those reservations! The hotels are being notified that we postponed Convention, but you need to cancel anyhow.



Overlooked beauty on the surface of the Clarksville Preserve in early May. Turkey tail fungus on a fallen tree trunk and Osborne Cave overflow under high water conditions. Photos by Paul Rubin.