



A Quarterly Publication of the
Rockcastle Karst Conservancy, Inc.

www.rkci.org

Volume III, Issue I

Winter 2007



2006 Nathan Williams

**IN THIS ISSUE... “FAST RESPONSE CAVE ADVOCACY”,
BAT MONITORING AND CAVE PROTECTION, IDENTIFYING BATS IN
KENTUCKY CAVES, “THE FEATHER IN THE VISOR”, AND MORE!**

The Rockcastle Karst Conservancy is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation and preservation of caves and karst in Rockcastle County, Kentucky.


Inside this issue:

<i>Index</i>	2
<i>Officers, Directors and Committee Chairs</i>	3
<i>From the Editor</i>	4
<i>From the Chairman</i>	4
<i>Fast Response Cave Advocacy</i>	5
<i>Some Notes on Listed Bat Monitoring and Cave Protection in Kentucky</i>	8
<i>A Crude Key to Identifying the Bats Found in KY Caves During the Winter</i>	10
<i>The GSP Committee Update</i>	11
<i>New RKC Members</i>	11
<i>RKC/DBNF Agreement</i>	11
<i>The Feather in the Visor</i>	12
<i>Purchase a Rob Coomer Calendar and Support the RKC</i>	13
<i>RKC Donors</i>	14
<i>Join the RKC!</i>	15
<i>RKC T-Shirts</i>	15

Photo Credits:

Front Cover: Rockcastle County's Pine Hill Cave main entrance. Photo © by Nathan Williams.

Back Cover: Jerry Wallace at the North Entrance to Great Saltpetre Cave. Photo © by Cat Kennedy.



NOTICE!
The combination to the lock on the front gate at the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve will change on January 1, 2007.

Cave Biota

Please peruse our website, comment, and consider adding us as a link to your website.

Thank you!

cavebiota.com

...an evolving cave life webumentary and much more!



Volume III, Issue I January 2007

For more information about the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy, please visit our website at www.rkci.org. Membership is open to anyone interested in protecting the caves and karst of Rockcastle County, Kentucky. See page 15 of this issue for a membership application and the different membership levels and dues.

The *RKC News* is published quarterly for members and other interested parties. The purpose of this publication is to keep members aware of RKC activities. Articles published in the *RKC News* do not necessarily represent the opinions or policies of the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy or its represented members.

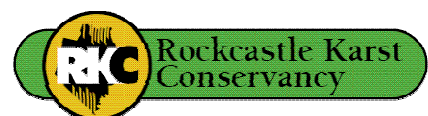
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RKC has educational material for lending. See the website:

<http://rkci.org/library/index.htm>

or contact Tammy Otten: tammyotten@yahoo.com





The RKC News is published during January, April, July and October. Deadline for submissions is the 10th of March, June, September, and December. Send submissions to: mhcaver@aol.com

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RKC Quick News:

- Annual dues are now due! Please send your dues to 1515 Cordell Drive, Dayton, OH 45439. Make checks payable to the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy
- Purchase a Rob Coomer 2007 calendar and support the RKC. See page 13 for details!
- The annual RKC meeting will be held in March 2007. Look for announcements on the RKC website and e-mail.
- The RKC has an e-mail distribution list for members to use to communicate RKC business:

members@rkci.org

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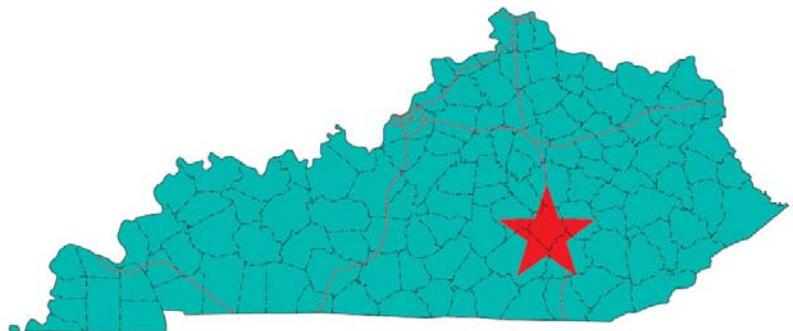
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From the Editor...

Wow! I put out the call for articles and they poured in! In fact, I had more than I could fit in this issue (without making it another 30 page edition). So, I'm going to hold the articles not published this quarter for upcoming editions. I want to thank the contributors for this issue: Roger Brucker, Mary Gratsch, Traci Hemberger, Werner Jud, and Andy Niekamp. Last, but not least, I want to thank the photographers who provided great pics for this edition: Traci Hemberger, Cat Kennedy, Andy Niekamp, and Nathan Williams.

Cave softly,

Mike Hood
RKC News Editor

***From the Chairman:
RKC Is Our KC.***

Greetings RKC Members,

What a year it has been for the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy! We have accomplished a lot in the last twelve months. When 2006 rang in, RKC was still an organization on paper. We had members and we had a bank account. But we didn't have 501(c)3 tax exempt status or a cave property yet.

When our 501(c) 3 tax exempt status was granted by the IRS in late January, we got the ball rolling on acquiring ownership of the Great Saltpetre Cave. Many telephone conference calls were held with the Felburn Foundation, lawyers, the RKC Board and interested cavers to iron out all of the details. An appraisal of the property was performed. Property boundary surveys were supplied. A deed was prepared. The Memo of Understanding was written and re-written until it was acceptable and the GSP management plan was updated. Questions and concerns from the caving community were addressed.

On August 20, 2006, after 33 months of work, our dream became a reality. The RKC Board accepted ownership of the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve from the Felburn Foundation. Many cavers attended the deed ceremony. It was a memorable day. Thank you to everyone who helped make this happen, especially the members of the Greater Cincinnati Grotto.

I would like to give special thanks to Ellie Schiller of the Felburn Foundation for donating the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve to us. I would also like to thank the Greater Cincinnati Grotto for their generous \$7,000 donation to the GSP Committee and their never ending support of the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve.

Also in 2006 we reached an agreement with the Daniel Boone National Forest – London District for stewardship of the Goochland and Waterfall caves. As part of the agreement the caving community will be the key keepers to these two gated caves. We will ensure they are unlocked in the spring for caver visitation and locked again in the autumn to protect the hibernating bats. Earlier in 2006 there was a flurry of email notes going around on various caving lists bashing the Forest Service for closing these caves to cavers. The sentiment was that the government could not be trusted and they did not care about cavers. This all changed after a meeting was arranged with the caving community and representatives of the National Forest Service, KY Fish and Wildlife Service and the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service. One outcome of the meeting was the stewardship agreement of Goochland and Waterfall caves. Look for more good things to come.

Today RKC is stronger than ever! We have 124 members. We own a 305 acre property containing, arguably, the most significant historical cave in Kentucky. We have a network of cavers who support us. We have a lot of work to do, but we have many talented and energetic people who will makes things happen for RKC.

For 2007 I would like our motto to be "R.K.C. Is Our K.C." It is a play on words, but it means that RKC is really **our karst conservancy**. What we accomplish in 2007 will be the result of the support we receive from you, our members, and the caving community. Whatever challenges lie ahead, we can *git er done*. I look forward to an exciting and productive year!

Thank you for your continued support of RKC.

Andy Niekamp
RKC Chairman



Fast Response Cave Advocacy

By Roger Brucker and Hilary Lambert

Karst Environmental Education and Protection, Inc.

Cave rescue organizations have proliferated in the past decade for several reasons. There are more cavers exploring in more caves, and therefore more accidents requiring expert emergency assistance. Second, increasing public awareness of emergencies in general has shifted first responder capabilities from traditional police and fire units to specially trained and equipped rescue squads. Emergency threats of danger, such as injury accidents that need urgent medical care and include formidable environmental challenges, underscore the need for speed and expert removal and transport skills.

At a less urgent, but perhaps equally important level is the need for a fast response “cave saving” task force, embodying expertise in science, politics, legal challenges, and public relations. Recent Kentucky and Tennessee experiences demonstrate the need for a rapid response team. In Tennessee, the threat was to Rumbling Falls Cave, where a municipality proposed building a sewage treatment plant atop the largest cave room in the state. Closer to home, the Kentucky Transpark used complex political moves to claim exemption from EIS preparation in a federalized project on karst near Bowling Green and Mammoth Cave National Park; and state officials have proposed building I-66 across several important karst areas in Kentucky’s Pulaski and Laurel counties, with insufficient environmental and construction expertise.

Some opportunities to save caves develop over many years, but some occur suddenly, as when a farm with several notable caves comes to market due to an owner’s death. Developers may seize such opportunities to lock up cave properties before dedicated cave conservation groups can respond with effective protection measures. Clearly, a multi-faceted emergency response to cave threats or cave opportunities is needed. The Rockcastle Karst Conservancy (RKC) is an example of an organization formed to proactively and opportunistically protect caves.

Following is our proposed outline of recommended elements/principles for forming and training cave saving teams, and upgrading caving groups to become expert first responders; with a recent real-world example of how to put these principles into practice on short notice

Outline of Rapid Response Cave Saving and Cave Opportunities Elements

I Discovery (What’s going on?)

A. Definition of the problem

1. Who has the problem?
2. What is the timetable?
3. What segments of the audience have decision-making authority?
4. What are their motives?
5. What are the advocates’ objectives?
6. What obstacles must be overcome?
7. FOIA and Open Records requests

B. Constraints

1. Legal
2. Hydrogeology
3. Physical
4. Topographical
5. Resources (money, fund raising, organizations, volunteers)

(Continued on page 6)

Fast Response Cave Advocacy (Continued from page 5)**II Informing (One-way communication)**

- A. Segmenting and targeting audiences -- Media strategy
 - 1. Opponents
 - 2. Advocates
 - 3. Deciders
 - 4. The public
- B. Differentiating the argument messages
 - 1. Basic white paper -- case description
 - 2. Brochures
 - 3. Web site
 - 4. Advertising messages (print, broadcast, video)
 - 5. Press releases/ press conferences
- C. Positioning the advocates and opponents
 - 1. Where are we? – Where are they?

III. Negotiating (Two-way communication)

- A. Legal action
 - 1. Finding competent counsel
 - 2. Persuasion
 - 3. Education
 - 4. Organization building and incorporating
 - 5. Presentations – preparation for challenges

The above global outline of what must be accomplished is the structure upon which training and planning should be based. A recent example of a cave saving organization's quick, comprehensive response to a cave and karst threat illustrates real-world implementation of this outline's basic principles, and points the way for its future value for cave and karst conservation.

WVCC (West Virginia Cave Conservancy), founded in the 1980s, is an organization of caver volunteers established to protect significant caves in the state. When plans were disclosed to construct a \$20 million sewage treatment plant at Slatyfork, WV on a karst floodplain, WVCC establish the Upper Elk River Task Force to oppose the development on the basis that it threatened a significant wild cave area. The group began to gather factual information about the plans. They discovered that the project had already received an environmental FONSI (Finding of No Significant Impact) from state approval authorities.

It appeared that testimony and evidence from the caving community and also karst experts had been ignored, and there had been total acceptance of the unqualified reports, from the developer's consultants, that the plant posed no environmental risks. At this point the Task Force principal workers saw that legal action might be the only way to stop the project. WVCC's constraints on the Task Force included that no action could be taken without full board approval of the WVCC. The possibility for quick response was limited by policy, and by the reluctance of some board members to engage in an expensive legal fight that might jeopardize the parent group's main conservation emphasis.

KarstEEP (Karst Environmental Education and Protection, Inc.), a Kentucky organization with experience in fighting karst and cave threats, advised the task force to seek independence from its parent organization. The task force was separated and encouraged to go its own way. Thus was born 8 Rivers Safe Development, Inc., a nonprofit West Virginia corporation. Within 30 days the new corporation had accomplished the following:

(Continued on page 7)

Fast Response Cave Advocacy (Continued from page 6)

- Obtained a mailing address in Pocahontas County.
- Sent out urgent white papers to several caving organizations.
- Composed and sent news releases to several caver news magazines.
- Raised \$6500 for legal challenges.
- Opened a bank account in the name of the new corporation.
- Investigated and retained an attorney to challenge the due diligence of officials.
- Written a brochure describing the situation for cavers and the public.
- Made a major presentation for funds and support to the NSS Board of Governors.
- Wrote a comprehensive story for the national *NSS News*.
- Created a comprehensive Web site: <www.8RiversSafeDevelopment.com>
- Conducted a site visit for the attorney and a geology class.
- Compiled photos and prepared a PowerPoint presentation.
- Contacted affinity organizations for financial and other support, such as trout fishermen and river protection groups.
- Filed an official FOIA request for all relevant records in the case from a state agency.
- Established formal and informal agreements with technical consultants.
- Attended an all-day watershed groups capacity-building workshop in Lexington KY.

It is too early to tell whether the 8 Rivers Safe Development fast response cave saving organization will prevail. Its attorney believes the group has a valid claim and that its challenge should be successful. Some public officials have expressed concern that their original “done deal” may have been too hasty. The group is pressing ahead with all of the strategies indicated in the outline – fund raising, network building, coalition building, and public relations. An organizer has received permission to serialize *Living With Karst* in the local weekly newspaper (3,600 circulation).

A key idea behind the strategy was an observation by cave geologist Art Palmer: “Challenges to save caves and karst must be won on economic and political grounds. Appeals to cave conservation values have little effect on the general public.” 8 Rivers Safe Development has positioned itself as a champion of SAFE development on karst and an enemy of unsafe development.

Cave geologist Ralph Ewers has said, “You can build anything on karst, IF money is no object.” One could build a sewage plant on the moon if money were no object. The 8 Rivers group hopes that the plan to build an expensive sewage treatment plan on a karst floodplain will seem just as impractical as building one on the moon.

We recommend consideration by the RKC and other cave and karst conservation organizations of the above-outlined elements and principles for cave and karst conservation in other situations, both for rapid response and longer-term karst and cave protection.

Over the next year, KarstEEP wants to work with RKC and others to strengthen our community’s ability to effectively protect threatened cave and karst resources. We will be developing public education, networking, and training resources; will advocate for better protection for karst waters under the Clean Water Act; and we aim to provide a voice for development of better karst protection ordinances in Kentucky and elsewhere. We are seeking partners and cooperative efforts to further these goals.

www.8RiversSafeDevelopment.com

www.KeepInc.org 

Some Notes on Listed Bat Monitoring and Cave Protection in Kentucky

By Traci A. Hemberger, KY Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Resources, 12/2006

Kentucky harbors 14 native bat species*, 3 of which are endangered: the Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*), the gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*), and the Virginia big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus*). Reasons contributing to their endangered status include, but are not limited to, human disturbance, vandalism, manmade modifications of caves, flooding, and pesticides. Currently, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission (KSNPC), and Mammoth Cave National Park (MCNP) regularly monitor populations of these listed species throughout the state. This data allows population trends to be determined and aids in management decisions. Ultimately, it is used to help assess recovery of each species.

KDFWR has three main objectives for its federally-funded "Listed Bat Monitoring and Cave Protection" project: 1) Monitor listed bat species, 2) Evaluate protection needs of important caves and implement protective measures, and 3) Survey selected sites to document bat species present and to gain information about endangered bats or species of special concern. *[This document will focus only on the first two objectives in relation to Jackson and Rockcastle counties and therefore deals only with winter cave populations.]*

Monitor listed bat species

No specialized equipment is necessary to count bats at their hibernacula. Wheat lamps and dive lights generally are used to illuminate bats and occasionally, binoculars or spotting scopes are used to help count bats on high ceilings. Bats roosting individually or in small clusters (< 50 bats) are counted directly. For bats roosting in large clusters (> 50 bats), the surface area they occupy is measured and the approximate density of bats is determined. Multiplying the surface area occupied by the density of the bats gives an estimate of cluster size. This method expedites data collection in an effort to minimize disturbance to hibernating bats. Censuses at hibernacula include **all species of bats** encountered. Censuses are ideally conducted during mid-January to mid-February.

More than 100 caves in Kentucky serve as Indiana bat hibernacula, the majority of which are found along the Cumberland Plateau. Rockcastle has 12 caves designated as Indiana bat hibernacula. Under the USFWS's current definitions, two of these caves are designated

as Priority 2 Indiana bat hibernacula (Smok & Wate) which means they have (or have had sometime after 1960) populations between 500 and 30,000 bats. In Jackson County, there are at least 18 Indiana bat hibernacula known, only one of which has the Priority 2 designation (WaFo). The most important caves are surveyed every two years. Rockcastle and Jackson caves will be surveyed again in 2008. Below is a table representing Indiana bat counts for the last 10 years in the most important Jackson/Rockcastle Caves, as well as a few of the lesser caves that are surveyed more regularly. Unfortunately, most of the populations in these caves show a downward trend which until recently was the regional trend as well.

**The Kentucky Bat Working Group website (<http://www.biology.eku.edu/bats.htm>) has information regarding their life history, as well as (slightly dated) maps showing county distribution for each. As more occurrences for the Seminole bat are recorded, it may be considered Kentucky's 15th native bat but there is only one incidental record for the 16th bat (Mexican Free-tailed) listed on the website.*

Long term monitoring of cave populations provides information that will allow population trends to be detected. In the case of negative trends, hopefully the cause of the decline can be determined and a course of action to reverse it developed. Also, continued monitoring allows for the inspection of most of the sites on a regular basis. This allows early detection of disturbance and rapid development of corrective measures.

Evaluate protection needs of important caves and implement protective measures

During regular monitoring of bat populations, cave protection needs are assessed. In addition, specific site inspections of caves will be made to evaluate protection needs further. Bat cave protection signs will be placed at many sites harboring endangered species (upon approval by landowner.) Through consultation with the USFWS, USFS, KSNPC, any other public or private organization, and private landowners if necessary, a determination will be made as to which protective measures (if deemed necessary) are most likely to reduce or eliminate disturbance without hindering bat use (i.e., cave gates, fencing, etc.). Protecting bat caves through gates, fences, cooperative agreements, or other means can be an effective method of protection.

(Continued on page 9)

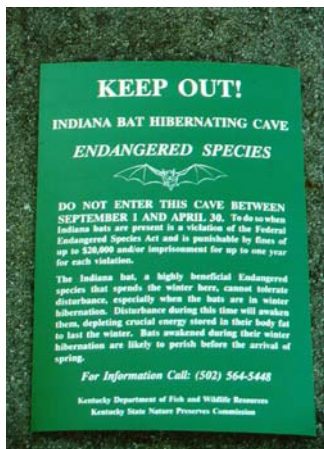
Some Notes on Listed Bat Monitoring and Cave Protection in Kentucky (Continued from page 8)

	Cave	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
J a c k s o n	Win	491	432	407	578	589	660
	BoSa	45	37	26	40	12	
	CePo		132	77	91	36	44
	JoHe		78		95	84	
	Mist	50	102	75	109	83	81
	Stri			54	68	34	72
	WaFo	743	662	571	610	647	540
R o c k c a s t l e	Smok	1417	1419	1198	1314	1089	1023
	Wate	963	723	674	768	528	658
	Gooc	253	356	395	284	272	243
	HuCa	362	264	362	348	305	204
	TwSp		90	37	73	89	36

Indiana bat counts for 12 selected caves in Jackson and Rockcastle counties.

Note: Cave names are abbreviated/shortened at the request of the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Resources to protect the caves and bats. See Andy Niekamp for more info.

Example of bat sign and bat friendly gate:



New signs will have less confrontational wording:

ENTRY PROHIBITED SEPTEMBER THROUGH APRIL

This cave is closed to entry from September to April when endangered bats are present. Entering the cave during this time awakens hibernating bats causing them to use energy needed to live through the winter. These bats may die before the arrival of spring.

Disturbance to these bats is a violation of the Federal Endangered Species Act and is punishable by fines of up to \$50,000 and/or imprisonment for up to one year for each violation.

(Continued on page 10)

Some Notes on Listed Bat Monitoring and Cave Protection in Kentucky (*Continued from page 9*)

All of KY's bats are insectivores such that they need to be able to survive until spring when insects are again available. A few migrate south, the rest hibernate. By entering a state of torpor, bats greatly reduce their metabolic rates and thus energy demands. They will still lose one-fourth to one-half their pre-hibernation weight during hibernation. It is important not to disturb hibernating bats because they use up stored energy reserves (fat) during each arousal, as much as three weeks worth. If a bat is awakened several times during hibernation, it will have a reduced chance of survival. (Biologists usually survey hibernacula once every two years for this reason.)

A Crude Key to Identifying the Bats Found in KY Caves During the Winter By Traci A. Hemberger, KY Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Resources

[modified from MacGregor 1985; JRCC = Jackson and Rockcastle County Caves]

- (A) ears very long (to about 1-1/2 inches) and usually arched back against body (in hibernation) or extended (when awake); found hanging singly or in groups or clusters...
- (1) upperparts grayish brown; underparts white - **Rafinesque's Big-eared Bat** (JRCC – singles mostly though some clusters)
- (2) upperparts pale to dark brown; underparts light brown – **Virginia Big-eared Bat** (Fairly rare in JRCC; usually singles)
- (AA) ears “normal” . . . go to (B)
- (B) hanging singly . . . go to 3-6
- (3) fur silver-tipped on back; fur elsewhere on body very dark except bases of ears which are reddish; often found wedged deeply into crevices in cold zones near cave entrances – **Silver-haired Bat** (Found in JRCC; uncommon bat in winter; hard to find in wedged in crevices.)
- (4) fur light brown, reddish brown, or “blonde” (or bat may be covered with fine water droplets and appear white all over); forearm reddish; usually found in the open in the warmer portions of caves – **Eastern Pipistrelle** (Common throughout state)
- (5) brown or reddish-brown, large, muzzle naked; often hiding partly in crevices in cold areas near entrances; tending to pen mouth wide, exposing a large set of sharp teeth (used to eat beetles), and to screech loudly when blown upon or touched – **Big Brown Bat** (Commonly found throughout state though not plentiful.)
- (6) smaller; dark brown; longer and more pointed tragus (projection from ear) than other species; tending to hide singly in the back of a cranny or crevice and to chatter noisily when disturbed – **Northern Bat**
- (BB) hanging in groups, rows, or clusters . . . go to (C)
- (C) in loose clusters or rows, sparse enough that at least some of cave wall or ceiling can be seen easily from below when you look into the group; these bats have dark noses . . . go to 7 & 8
- (7) in loose clusters or rows in very humid, warm or moderately-warm caves, usually hanging straight down, with wings parallel to the body, from ceilings, domes, or from wall crevices – **Little Brown Bat**
- (8) in loose groups in cool or cold sections of caves, usually sprawled against the walls or ceilings with wings angled away from the body – **Gray Bat** (Does not hibernate or summer in JRCC)
- (CC) in very tight clusters, so tight (150-450 per square foot) that each bat is touching its neighbors and the cave ceiling cannot be seen from below when you look into the cluster; these bats have pink or pinkish-gray noses and grayish upper bodies; occur only in cool or cold sections of caves . . . go to 9 & 10
- (9) found statewide, but mainly east and north of Mammoth Cave National Park (MCNP); belly color grayish or tannish (but not white!) – **Indiana Bat**
- (10) found from MCNP westward; belly color distinctly white – **Southeastern Bat** (therefore not found in Jackson & Rockcastle Caves)
- [Note, the eastern small-footed myotis is not covered in this key. It is rare in winter.]



GREAT SALTPETRE CAVE PRESERVE COMMITTEE UPDATE

Chairman - Mary Gratsch
 Treasurer - Werner Jud
 GCG Representative - Jerry Brandenburg
 GCG Representative - Matt Keller
 BGG Representative - Jerry Dixon
 BGG Representative - Pat Hutson
 DUG Representative - Bob Yuellig
 DUG Representative - Tim Hale
 Caretaker - Bill Carr

UPDATES: The gate combination is set to change on January 1, 2007. The new combo will be given out with membership renewals for GCG and DUG members.

Approved upcoming projects include:

Bill Carr – repairs on spillway to reduce internal leakage
 Pat Hutson – addition of rip rap along banks above spillway to reduce erosion
 Werner Jud/Deb Bledsoe and others - new outhouse

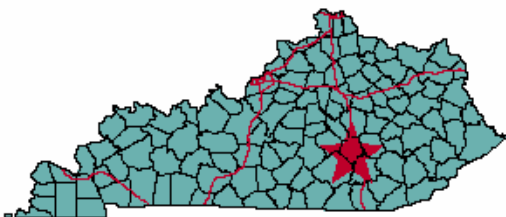
Pending projects include:

Richard Duncan – cleaning/renovation? of ticket house
 Bob Yuellig – build bridge over small creek from back field to CCIC trail
 ??? - painting ticket house

Scheduled events for 2007 include:

12/31/06-1/1/07 New Years Eve gathering
 4/14/07 London Girl Scouts tour GSC/sponsored by Deb Bledsoe
 5/19-20 Annual Open House/sponsored by GSP
 6/22-24 Karst-O-Rama/sponsored by GCG
 10/27-28 Halloween gathering

Learn more about the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve at <http://www.caves.org/conservancy/gsp/>



NEW RKC MEMBERS

As of this Publication
 (RKC Membership Number in Parenthesis)

John Taylor (21), upgrade to Life Member
 Ernie Payne, Jr. (130), Evansville, IN (Individual)
 Richard Duncan (131), Cincinnati, OH (Individual)
 Keith Turner (132), Faison, NC (Life Member)
 Lea Turner (133), Faison, NC (Life Member)

The RKC now has
 127 Individual Members
 And
 6 Organization Members

Welcome!

RKC/DBNF VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

The Rockcastle Karst Conservancy and the London District of the Daniel Boone National Forest have signed a volunteer agreement for the key keeper duties for Goochland Cave and Waterfall Cave.

Both caves are on Forest Service property in Rockcastle County, KY and are gated to protect hibernating bats. As part of the agreement RKC volunteers will be responsible for unlocking the cave gates in the spring and locking them in fall. Both caves are open for visiting during May, June, July and August.

The volunteers are:

Goochland Cave: Gregg Robben and Carl Swannigan
 Waterfall Cave: Jim Perkins and Elise St. John

I would like to thank everyone that volunteered. Unfortunately more people volunteered than were spots available.

Everyone can help! When you visit Goochland and Waterfall Caves please check the caves and gates for vandalism and any problems. Please report any problems immediately. If you visit either cave and find everything in good order please fill in the form on this web page:

<http://www.rkci.org/dbnf.htm>

We will periodically report to the Forest Service the total number of times cavers visit these caves and check on them. This information should help build a stronger and better relationship between the caving community and the Forest Service.

Thank you for your support!

Andy Niekamp
 RKC Chairman

The Feather in the Visor

By Andy Niekamp, RKC Chairman



August 30, 2006

The history of the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy began on Tuesday, November 11, 2003. And a feather found that day played a role in the history of RKC.

On that day Ellie Schiller, the Executive Director of the Felburn Foundation and owner of the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve, visited the Great Saltpetre Cave after not having been there in many years. She brought along her friends Mark Moore, Les Moore and Sherry Reid. A number of cavers were also there that day to meet Ellie and tour the Preserve. Our tour included a visit to the Cave and a walking tour of the campground. During the walking tour of the campground Sherry found a turkey feather in the back field. She picked it up and carried with her all day long.

Later that day after a meal at the Rockcastle Steak House, Werner Jud and I drove Ellie, Mark, Les and Sherry back to their hotel. All of the other cavers had gone home. Ellie invited Werner and me into the lobby of the hotel for a chat. It was there that Ellie revealed her proposal to us. If we, the cavers who had maintained the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve since 1989, would form an independent, tax exempt, non-profit corporation she would give GSP to us. Werner and I were caught completely off guard. We didn't expect to hear this from Ellie.

I don't recall what our initial response to Ellie was. But it was something about this being a dream come true and the realization that we had a lot of work to do make this happen. Mark, Les and Sherry knew ahead of time about Ellie's proposal so they were not as surprised as Werner and me. Sherry was still holding the feather she found earlier in the day. At that moment Sherry handed me the feather and said "Here take this feather and use it to sign the deed to GSP when the day comes." I reached out and accepted the feather and said "Yes – We can do that!"

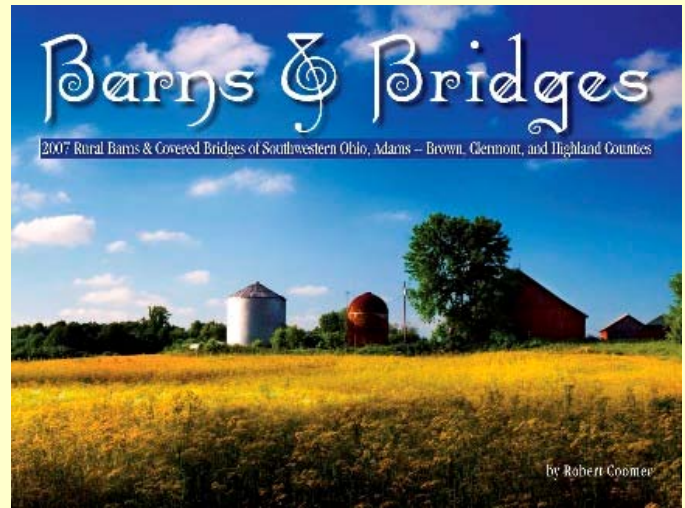
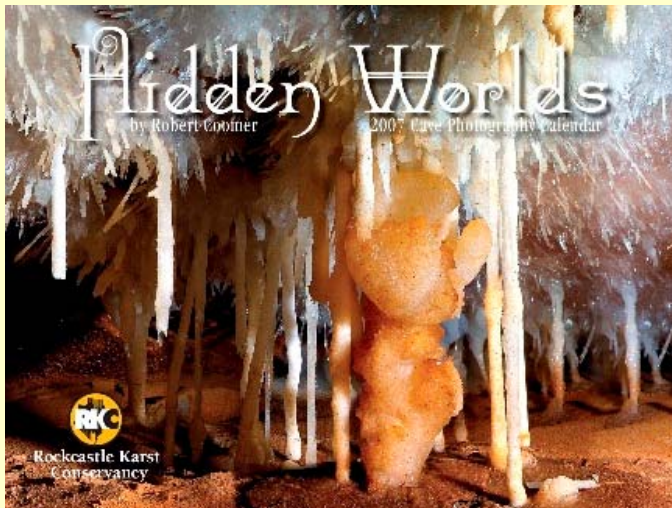
On the drive home back to Dayton that night while pondering the events of the day I took the feather and placed it on top of the visor of the passenger seat of my Chevy Tahoe. That seemed to be a good place for it. At least it would not get lost or damaged there. That feather had significance for me.

I kept the feather in visor for safe keeping. That feather stayed in the visor for 1,014 days waiting to be used. It was never taken down or moved from its position. Whenever I would drive my Tahoe I would look at the feather and remember Sherry's words about using it to sign the GSP deed. The feather was in the visor for every RKC meeting that I drove to even those early meetings when we didn't even have a name for RKC. As time passed I became a board member of RKC and later its first chairman.

It stayed there for the meetings where we worked on the Articles of Incorporation for RKC. The meeting we had to create bylaws for RKC. It was there during RKC's first annual meeting in March of 2005. It was there when I drove to the 2005 NSS Convention and gave a presentation about GSP to the Karst Conservancy Roundtable. It was there when I drove to Karst-O-Rama in 2005 and carried materials for the first ever RKC booth. It was there when I drove to RKC's first cave clean up in October 2005. The feather was there when I drove home from work in January 2006 and received the letter from the IRS that said RKC had been approved for 501(c)3 status. The feather was in my visor for the many trips I made to the bank to deposit membership fees and donations. The feather was in my visor for three Christmas

(Continued on page 13)

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The Feather in the Visor *(Continued from page 12)*

seasons, three Easters, three summer seasons, and for four caver funerals.

On Sunday, August 20, 2006, Ellie Schiller visited the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve again. This time she was there to transfer ownership of the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve to RKC. I did not forget about the feather. Shortly before the deed signing ceremony began I took the feather down from my visor. It was a great moment. It was a moment I had been waiting for. I taped the feather to an ink pen. It was that pen that both Ellie and I used to sign the deed to the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve on behalf of the Felburn Foundation and RKC members.

The feather is no longer in my visor. Since it was taken down on the day the GSP deed was signed it was never returned. It now sits in a coffee cup on

my desk at home, along with other pens and pencils. For the ten days it has been gone from my visor I look up while driving my Tahoe and notice that something is missing. Something seems out of place. But the fact that the feather is no longer there means the Great Saltpetre Cave is now owned by the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy. The pen and feather wait to be called back into duty to sign another deed for RKC. I hope it does not wait long.

Update: On September 3, 2006, Sherry Reid, the person who found the feather, was killed in a motorcycle accident.

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