



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Thanksgiving brought a wonderful gift to the Kentucky karst region - the re-opening of the Crockett entrance of the Sloans Valley Cave System near Lake Cumberland. This brought back nostalgic memories for so many of us. The RKC Board wishes you and your family joy throughout the Holiday Season!



Winter, 2018 Newsletter

(Edited by Gary Bush)

Janice Gott,
RKC Publicity
6161 Grand Vista Ave.
Cincinnati, OH
45213-1719

Rockcastle Karst
Conservancy
Protecting Kentucky's Interior

*Help Save Our
Vanishing Karstlands !*

*Donate to the RKC
Cave Acquisition Fund !*

SLOANS VALLEY PRESERVE IN OUR SIGHTS AT LAST !!!

After years of working on this project, the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy (RKC) now has an option on five acres of the former Tom Crockett property, including the Garbage Pit and Scowling Tom entrances to the Sloans Valley Cave Complex.

Sloans Valley is a 24-mile-long cave system in Pulaski County, near Somerset, KY and Lake Cumberland. It is the fourth-largest known cave in Kentucky, with many entrances, large and small. The large pit entrance on the Crockett property is one of the best known and holds a fondness in the memories of our cavers, dating back to the 1970s. For many, this entrance was one of their first caving experiences.

Tom and Cathy Crockett, and their children Joshua and Emily, were welcoming to cavers for decades. After Tom's death in 2009, the family had lost control of the property to the bank. RKC had been working with the potential buyers of the property for a couple of years to get an option to purchase the entrances, should their sale go through.

On Wednesday, October 31, 2018, the property was sold and RKC signed an option with the new owners to purchase approximately 5 - 6 acres around the Garbage Pit/ Greenhouse and Scowling Tom Entrances. The new preserve will be named the **Sloans Valley Preserve**. The Garbage Pit/ Greenhouse entrance will be renamed the Crockett Entrance.

Work needed to be done for both safety and aesthetics. The old, rotten air duct had to be removed, a permanent ladder had to be installed in the Pit, a fence must be built around the Pit, an information kiosk must be built, a gravel parking area must be installed, and overgrown brush removed. Besides the cost of the property purchase, some of these projects will require additional funding.

We are so excited to finally become guardians of these iconic cave entrances! We now have the opportunity to keep these entrances open to all cavers and to make it safe for cavers to explore this grand cave system. Please help us to raise the funds needed to cover this purchase and to make this another great RKC caving preserve.

On Saturday, November 24th, fifteen volunteers descended on the new preserve to begin work on these important reclamation projects. See the report of their progress on page two.

Preserve News

2018 has been an amazing year for RKC, as described in this newsletter. We completed a Roadway Flood Mitigation project at GSP to stabilize the gravel road down to the campground. Stabilization of the old Ticket House at GSP is underway. Improvements at the Skylight Preserve continue to be made. Visitations continue at most of our Preserves, continuing our core mission. AND ... RKC has contracted to purchase the two remaining open entrances to the Sloans Valley Cave System in Pulaski County, Kentucky. The new **Sloans Valley Preserve** will be our 5th Preserve. Maintaining caver access to the 4th longest cave in Kentucky is a very significant event and establishes RKC as a major cave conservancy in the United States.

Cornhole Preserve -- by Mary Gratsch

Due to the nasty wet weather, I don't believe Corn Hole has been visited in the past year. All the rain has eroded the dirt road and the fields are overgrown, so access to the cave has been from the Pierces on the Goochland Road.

The entrance sink continues to fall in, making for a steeper descent into the cave. In the future we may need to stabilize part of the entrance slope.

Skylight Preserve -- by Thor Bahrman

Cavers have continued to come to the Skylight and Hurricane Pits of Pine Hill Cave, excited by the renewed access to these challenging drops. A simpler method to access gate keys is being installed. The heavy rains in the area this year have caused some deterioration in the gravel parking area, so restoration work will begin next Spring.

Sloans Valley Preserve ... Crockett Entrance Reclamation Project — Led by Mary Gratsch

Just wanted to let everyone know that we had a successful clean-up at the Crockett Pit Entrance on Saturday, November 24th. We had 15 people in all. There were quite a few new faces ... at least 8.

We were able to completely dismantle the wooden air duct and entrance plywood facade, allowing the cave to breathe freely for the first time in almost 40 years.

Much of the plywood is pressure treated (and it was soaked), so we didn't burn it. There is also a large pile of plastic and other debris that needs either a dumpster or folks with pick-up trucks to haul to the public dump.

An extension ladder has been bolted in the pit.

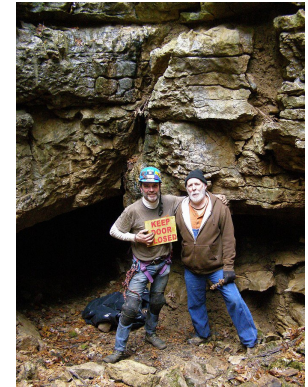
A small group of us took a short trip into the cave and found the blind crawfish population doing well. There is graffiti on the walls, but not very much trash.



Top: Existing Greenhouse, vented with air from the cave.
Bottom: Plywood façade over entrance with the wooden air duct.



Top and Above: Dismanteling the duct and the wooden façade.



Above: The entrance restored to its original look.



Misty Cave Bat Survey

— by Sean Cain, Misty Preserve Chair

On a cold Thursday, January 25, 2018, I met a group of biologists led by Gregg Janos of Copperhead Environmental to perform the bi-annual bat survey. I had previously led a tour with Gregg in February of 2016.



Bats were found throughout the cave, but two clusters were found in the main passage at the first intersection. These clusters were located in the same spot in 2016.

The following results were recorded from the surveys. The first number being the 2016 survey and the second the 2018 survey. 2016/2018

- Big Brown - 1/5
- Little Brown - 40/4
- Indiana - 11/25
- Tri-Colored - 13/18
- Small-Footed - 0/1
- Virginia Big-Eared - 0/4
- **Total - 65/57**

In 2016, no White Nose Syndrome (WNS) was discovered in the cave. During the 2018 survey, WNS was discovered on three bats and swab samples were taken from all to be tested.



As a reminder, **Misty Cave is closed to all access from November 1st to May 1st**, while the Indiana Bats are in hibernation. There will be "NO" entry allowed during the closed period without written permission from the Misty Cave Preserve Committee.

Thanks again to all those who support and help with this wonderful preserve.



GSP Road Repair Project Report -- The Rest of the Story

— by Neena Jud

You may remember reading in past newsletters that Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve was awarded a grant to repair the gravel road leading down to the Shelter. The grant was awarded by FEMA through Kentucky Emergency Management. Neena Jud submitted the application and managed the project in collaboration with Werner Jud.

Construction began in March 2018, just as the snows came through. Workmen and equipment from Clifford Collins dug the ditches, installed the culverts and regraded the roads, applying fresh compacted gravel. Volunteers connected a drain from the Shelter roof, applied seed & straw across the project area, and placed the rocks at the culvert outlets.

Work was completed in time for Open House in May. The brief downpour Friday evening, before the visitors arrived, gave us a chance to see how the repairs would hold up. Although the culverts deposited a lot of water in the field where cars park, the ditches worked to collect the rain water, sent it through



the pipes, and allowed the gravel on the road to stay in place.

As the summer of 2018 ended, many vehicles have driven over the road, from Karst-O-Rama to Scout troops to cavers meeting up for cave trips. The grass has grown and now it is hard to tell where the ground was torn up.

Just like any other profession, Mitigation Managers in Kentucky hold an annual conference. In September of this year, out of all the projects across the Commonwealth that were designed to reduce damages and improve resilience to floods and storms, our little roadway project at GSP was awarded Project of the Year. The award was accepted on our behalf by Esther White, our grant manager with Kentucky Emergency Management.



The GSP Management Committee continues to maintain the Cave and grounds of the Preserve, so that cavers and visitors can enjoy this natural and historical retreat for years to come.

"Orientation to Cave Rescue" Held at GSP

— by Bob Roth

On April 21&22 members of the 4 managing grottoes of GSP, Darryl Marsh GCG, Tama Cassidy DUG, Brian Devine COG, and Jonathan Carman BGG/GCG, hosted an *Orientation to Cave Rescue* course at the preserve. 26 students participated in the event, instructed by the National Cave Rescue Commission Central Region. Students gathered under the shelter house for a 2-part session on the 21st.



In the morning they learn about the NCRC and what they do. Subject matter included Leadership/Fellowship, Documentation, Equipment, Logistics, Hypothermia, Medical & Physiological Considerations, Media Interactions & Communications. The afternoon session focused on Water Problems, Evacuation Considerations, Self Rescue, Litters & Handling of & Patient

Packaging. The day concluded with an obstacle courses for hands-on experience of techniques learned.

On Day 2, students were dispatched to Rockcastle County cave # 120-0001 to participate in a mock rescue.



Instructors placed 3 people at separate locations in different conditions throughout the cave to be assisted out. Over the next 3 1/2 hours students used their skills to complete the assignment.

More information about Cave Rescue can be found

at <http://central.ncrc.info> or by contacting Regional Coordinator Jessica Deli at 812-345-5012 -or- 812-278-9577.

Remember: GSP Open House to be held on May 18th & 19th, 2019

(Note: The Open House is always the weekend after Mother's Day)

Great Saltpetre Cave was a significant source of saltpeter for gunpowder during the War of 1812. The property has been an important part of the Rockcastle County community. Come and enjoy it. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend. Bring the whole family for a great day of interesting fun. The free cave tours last 45 to 60 minutes. The cave has electric lights. The cave floor is generally flat. Dress for the cave environment - comfortable shoes and a sweat shirt. The cave is 57 degrees year-round. Bring a flashlight, if you wish. Bring a picnic lunch or patronize the Livingston Fire Department's concession stand. We'll do our best to make sure you have a good time.



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6161 Grand Vista Ave.
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RKC's Gary O'Dell to talk on Sloans Valley Cave at the Winter Adventure Weekend
To be held at Carter Caves State Park on the last weekend in January, 2019.

Board Member Gary O'Dell presents "Willard Rouse Jillson and the Crystal Cave of Sloans Valley, Kentucky." With nearly 25 miles of passages, Sloans Valley Cave in the southeastern part of the state is the 4th longest cave in Kentucky and ranks 23rd longest in the United States.

The karst window known as *Great Rock Sink* has historically been the most popular access point and the area within, known as *Crystal Cave*, was operated as a show cave, until submerged in early 1951 by the impoundment of Lake Cumberland. This presentation traces the exploration history of the Sloans Valley system, focusing primarily upon the Crystal Cave section. Highlighted are the explorations and surveys carried out in 1950 by Dr. Willard Rouse Jillson, the Kentucky State Geologist at that time, and his students from Transylvania University (Lexington).

The presentation also covers exploration and surveys made during the 1960s and 1970s, by the combined efforts of the Greater Cincinnati, Central Ohio, and Bluegrass Grottos of the National Speleological Society.

