

MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR ELLA ARMSTRONG CAVE PRESERVE INTERM, APPROVED 9/12/2004

INTRODUCTION

The Northeastern Cave Conservancy Inc (NCC) proposes to purchase and manage the Ella Armstrong Cave Preserve. The preserve consists of a one (1) acre parcel which borders Knox Cave Road, and roadside parking spaces are planned. A proposed short trail will lead visitors to the cave.

Within a mile, there are five other known caves: Knox Cave, a former commercial cave containing the infamous Gunbarrel; Skull Cave, the second-longest cave in the state (closed); Two-Second Pit (closed); Knox Annex, basically a roofed-over fissure; and Ken's Kave.

PURPOSE OF A MANAGEMENT PLAN

The purpose of a management plan is to describe what is on a property and how it should be managed. A plan is not a static document that once written is placed on the shelf and forgotten. It is a document that is to be used and referenced on a regular basis. The property manager must follow the plan unless there is a compelling and over-riding reason for doing otherwise. Unless there is an immediate need, nothing should be done at a property that is not in the plan. If something new is desired, the plan should be amended only after careful, complete, and thorough analysis of the proposed changes or additions. Then, the amendments must be approved by the NCC board.

HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY

The first known exploration of Ella Armstrong Cave was in 1808. At that time two entrances into the cave were open, one on either side of the road, but one has been filled by highway crews on the shoulder slope decades ago. Records of exploration in the later 1800's are more abundant, including the 1879 inscription of Ella Armstrong at the base of the current entrance drop. When the other entrance was open, one could make it to the base and that was considered the end of the cave. Hence the majority of inscriptions are here.

Even with the extensive visitation of Knox Cave right across the road, Ella Armstrong has always remained relatively obscure. In July of 1960, the Berkshire Hills Grotto made a grade 5 map of the cave. Art Palmer added details to this and created his 1962 map which is the most common record to this day.

The heavily joint controlled cave was recently described by Chuck Porter in the *Northeastern Caver* as follows: "Ella Armstrong has a short, tight, south-trending entrance fissure which slopes down to a 23-foot drop into a large hall up to 10 feet wide and 35 feet high. After 115 feet, a climb up to the west leads to a former entrance blocked by road construction a century ago. Near the base of the 23-foot drop, a complicated series of crawlways extends for 100 feet along a joint dipping at 40 degrees". Most of the cave lies in the Manlius limestone with the exception of the old and current entrance passages being in the Coeymans. Total length of the cave is approximately 350 feet. Of the five caves in the area, Ella Armstrong Cave is slightly higher than Knox Cave, both in elevation and stratigraphically, and may be the oldest cave on the local plateau.

SURFACE MANAGEMENT

A small roadside parking area should be constructed along the property line of the proposed preserve. This will require the placement of a culvert, headwalls, and coordinating with

the local highway crew. A walking trail should be cut from the parking area, looping towards the back of the property, and then providing access to the cave on the gradual slope heading back towards the road and into the sink. A small strainer should be constructed to prevent trash from washing into the cave. A register and/or kiosk should be constructed on the property at the point of the trail farthest from Knox Cave Road, so that it is out of sight. To prevent vehicular access on the neighbor's property, fencing or suitable barricades should be erected.

The property should be posted in accordance with the NYS Penal Law and the NYS Environmental Conservation Law. This will provide the NCC with the ability to better control access to the property. Without posting, individuals could hunt on the property without permission. Based on the proximity to the road, hunting is not allowed on the preserve. With only 150' of depth, the preserve size cannot accommodate it.

Property tax-exempt status should be requested as soon as possible.

The conservation rights to the parcel should be addressed to reduce the potential value of the property by eliminating any development opportunities.

No fires without permission.

No camping on the property.

ACCESS POLICY

The cave on the proposed preserve will not require special permission or a release form for caving trips. Anybody, cavers and non-cavers alike, using the property must complete a trip card and place it in the IN Slot. On leaving the property, they must move the card to an OUT box. (Card design below).

- o Standard caving gear will be required. This includes helmet with a chinstrap; three (3) sources of light, one of which is mounted to the helmet.
- o Minimum group size is 3. In special circumstances, permission will be granted to 2 individuals.
- o The group's leader is responsible that each person should have their own vertical gear and be familiar with its use.
- o All cavers are expected to abide by the normally accepted rules of safe and conservation minded caving as outlined by the National Speleological Society, 2813 Cave Avenue, Huntsville, Alabama 35810-4431.
- o Ella Armstrong Cave must be treated as a unique natural resource, and nothing should be taken out of the cave except trash.
- o All work projects must be clearly defined and authorized beforehand.
- o Each group is expected to clean up any trash in the cave or on the property

Equipment Requirements: Ella Armstrong is a vertical cave. All cavers must have their own equipment for descending and ascending. Rope adequate for rigging the entrance drop will be required. The use of a cable ladder for the drop will be permitted if all cavers are belayed. Two rigging points can be used: the newly installed bolts over the lip, or attaching to the tree outside of the fissure entrance. It is strongly recommended that only experienced vertical cavers use the tree. Beginner vertical cavers can have considerable difficulty negotiating the lip, potentially stranding them on rope.

Ella Armstrong Cave Preserve

Trip Card

Date & time in ___/___/___ _____

Date & time out ___/___/___ _____

Trip leader

Number in Party _____ (Please list the trip members and vehicle plates on the back.)

Purpose of trip: caving, or surface visit

Was there anything unusual or any problem you noted on the property that of which the manager should be aware?

EXPLORATION RULES

Any digging in Ella Armstrong Cave will require special permission from the preserve manager. Persons proposing a dig project shall submit a plan to the manager detailing where they plan to dig, how long they plan to dig, and where they plan to dispose of the spoil. Plans should also include how the diggers plan to remediate the dig should it be abandoned. Any dig that is not worked on for more than six (6) months shall be considered abandoned.

Use of explosives will require approval for each one-time use.

PUBLICITY POLICY

The cave is not to be publicized in publications of general circulation. Caver's publications like The Northeastern Caver and the NSS News may contain information on the latest discoveries. Some grotto publications may also have information, but again these have limited circulation and usually do not give locations.

USE CONFLICTS

At present there does not appear to be any use conflicts. Should a conflict arise between recreational caving and digging, the recreational caving shall take precedence.

If bat counts reveal the presence of any endangered or threatened species, the cave should be closed for the period recommended by the bat specialist of the Endangered Species Unit of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.

RESCUE CONSIDERATIONS

Ella Armstrong Cave poses problems with respect to cave rescue because of limited working room at the top of the drop, while still in the narrow, sloping, entrance fissure. Appropriate placing of recommended bolts should assist in stretcher management, but consideration should be given to holding a mock rescue onsite. The exposed climb in the back of the cave needs further discussions. A rescue would likely result from a fall from either of these drops. Entrapment by inexperienced vertical cavers could also present several additional problems. If the old bolts (over 20 years ago, reported they were old then) aren't removed from the top of the drop, as recommended, a very serious or fatal injury could occur.

FUTURE PLANS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- As soon as practical after closing, the old bolts should be removed over the drop. They should be replaced with at least two new stainless steel bolts and hangers. Position of the first hanger should be high enough over the lip of the drop to assist beginner vertical cavers with getting over the lip. Placement should include consideration for hauling a stretcher up the drop.
- Discussion regarding the value of bolting the 15' exposed climb towards the old blocked entrance should be undertaken. It poses a serious accident risk in its present, tempting state.
- A small roadside parking area should be constructed along the property line of the preserve. This may require the placement of a culvert, and coordinating with the local highway crew.
- Fencing should be placed around the parking lot to prevent access onto the neighbor's property.
- A walking trail should be cut from the parking area, looping towards the back of the property, and then providing access to the cave on the gradual slope heading back towards the road and into the sink.
- A register and/or kiosk should be constructed on the property at the point of the trail furthest from Knox Cave Road, so that it is out of sight.
- A small strainer should be constructed to prevent trash from washing into the cave.
- Property tax-exempt status should be requested as soon as possible.
- The property should be posted in accordance with the NYS Penal Law and the NYS Environmental Conservation Law.
- The conservation rights to the parcel should be addressed to reduce the potential value of the property by eliminating any development opportunities.
- A mock rescue should be conducted to access problems.

Note: In addition to an expansion of history and geological background by Art Palmer, information about surface features could also be added by Thom Engel, Ed.