

Northeastern Cave Conservancy News

Volume 16, Number 2

June 2014

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.



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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. Annual membership is \$15 (Regular), \$5 additional (Family), \$10 (student), \$50 (Benefactor), \$100 (Institutional), and \$300 (Lifetime). All checks made payable and sent to:

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www.necaveconservancy.org

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Next Board Meeting
Sunday, June 8, 10:00 am
Mike Chu's Home

Needed: A Group to Help with Graffiti Cleanup in Clarksville Cave

The group would need wire brushes, bristle brushes, and some small buckets to collect glass or trash. We would like to see this done in June to have the cave cleaned up before the start of the very active summer camp season.



NORTHEASTERN CAVE CONSERVANCY, INC.

March Minutes - Summary

March 9, 2014, 10:00 am at HRP Associates, 197 Scott Swamp Road Farmington, CT

Meeting called to order at 10:20 am.

Introduction and greetings – President Bob Addis

Attendance:

Officers: B. Addis, V. Kappler, B. Folsom, C. Hay

Trustees: M. Chu, T. Engel, P. Youngbaer, M. Berger, P. Woodell, M. Ingalls

Absent with Proxy

Hicks – Warner is proxy

Absent without Proxy

Dumont – Board filled with Lee Del Valle

Traino – Board filled with Chuck Porter

President’s Report – Bob Addis (Attachment A)

Bensons could be closing on March 11.

Issue with survey – File with an amended deed description.

Vice President’s Report – Vince Kappler (Attachment B)

Treasurer’s Report – Bill Folsom (Attachment C)

Merlins property is now off the tax rolls.

Secretary’s Report – Christa Hay

Status quo.

Help coordinate bat surveys with DEC.

Science Committee – Larry Davis

We received a research permit application for Clarksville from Dr. Luis Espinaza of Marist College. I have conferred with the Clarksville managers and would like to present my recommendations to you for transmittal to the Board for their consideration.

Publications/Publicity Committee Report – Christa Hay

Will start setting up publicity event for Benson.

Looking to have the preserve managers on a schedule to send reports/articles to the editor so we have a preserve mentioned in each newsletter.

Onesquethaw Cave Preserve – Thom Engel

As is typical for the winter, it has been slow. Only 4 permits have been issued.

Bentleys Preserve Report – Jonah Spivak

I drove by the property yesterday and the site is well snowed in.

Merlins Cave Preserve – Morgan Ingalls

We will be doing a bat count with New York DEC on March 14th.

Bensons Cave Preserve Committee – Luke Mazza (interim)

Bat count was conducted.

Education Committee – Thom Engel

I will be representing the NCC at the annual Shenendehowa/SAGE Science and Health Discovery Night on April 25, 2014 from 6:30 - 9:00 pm.

Membership Committee – Peter Youngbaer (Attachment F)

Special and Group Use Coordinator – Thom

The annual report sent to the EC about two months ago is attached. Since the first of the year, 8 permits have been issued for Clarksville and 3 for Onesquethaw.

Volunteer Value Committee – Vince Kappler

VV totals for 2013: 1916.5 hours of work and 20,522 miles driven to/from projects for a total value of \$70,268.00. These totals represent a significant increase in volunteer hours due to the major projects the NCC has adopted: the Thatcher Park Karst Survey, the Surprise Cave Stewardship, the prep work for the Bensons acquisition, and the storm remediation at Gregorys. The Membership Committee and the ad hoc Risk Management Committee were very active and contributed many more hours in 2013 than in years past and new caver training was a relatively new category for VV with several members documenting time spent introducing new cavers to the sport and our preserves.

The below chart shows that we are reasonably consistent in the hours members contribute to the NCC with the increases in yearly totals typically occurring when we acquire a new preserve or launch a new initiative. Many thanks to all who have supported the NCC Mission over the years and have reported their personal contributions to the preservation of karst in the northeast.

Nominating Committee – Bob Simmons

The nominating committee is soliciting nominations for candidates for the NCC Board for 2014. Three of the nine board seats are up for election. This year Alan Hicks, Morgan Ingalls and Mike Chu's terms are up. I have heard from two candidates that they are running for reelection. If you know of anyone that would make a good candidate, please have them contact Bob Simmons.

In addition to the Board elections each year, the nominating committee is also looking for volunteers for various positions and committees within the NCC such as fundraising chair or assisting with one of the cave preserve management teams.

We anticipate that the same process as was used with such great success for last year's Board elections will be used again this year, without substantial modification.

Thacher Park Committee – Thom Engel

March 22 surface work. No caving but need GPS.
May 3rd. Love My Park Day – Work day on trails.

Surprise Cave Committee – Bob Simmons

Things have been quiet since the December Board meeting. Starting process for AANR renewal which expires (3-year term) in July of this year. I will distribute a draft to the Board for comment of a renewal request to go to DEC by end of April. USGS/DEC Team looking at getting into the cave this month, would like us to check and see if they are iced out of the entrance as they have been in the past, before they mobilize to the cave. I do not have a schedule from them as of this time.

Ad hoc Committee (Tory's Cave) – Bob Simmons

I had a very productive meeting with new staff at Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust on 2/27/2014. They are in the process of completing the requirements for LTA Accreditation which requires that all of their fee-owned and leased properties have a complete management plan in place. I am assisting with the cave-related portions of the plan and am on target to provide a draft by Mid-April. I intend to incorporate a formal management agreement between NCC and WHLT to take over the day to day management of the cave property.

Future discussions will include the possibility that the property ownership might be transferred to NCC at some point

in the future.

On another note, the adjacent property, a former gravel pit, is presently being considered for a zoning change from R-80 Residential to Industrial. WHLT is intervening in this process, based in part on their abutter status. They believe that this zone change will not likely pass, as there is no public water or sewer available and local sentiment is decidedly against it. They note however, that the new owners of the property might then propose a residential subdivision of the parcel which would increase visibility/visitation/trespass of the cave property.

I will be attending the Connecticut Land Conservation Council annual meeting on March 15th. The CLCC is a state-wide umbrella organization for land trusts and other conservation organizations. Looking to learn a few things (it is a full day of seminars and courses on a variety of tracks) and schmooze with some of the representatives of the trusts that have (or may have) cave properties, or could be acquiring such.

Hay moved to accept the minutes of the December 2013 meeting.

Passed

Addis moved to sponsor the North American Symposium for Bat Research at the \$1000.00 level.

Passed

Addis moves that we approve the research in Clarksville as long as they fix the following issues:

They will need to apply for special use since it is a school.

Also please send results to the *Journal of Cave and Karst Studies*, etc.

Passed

Hay moved that Bob Simmons be NCC representative to the CLC Conference.

Passed

Engel moved to authorize the President to appoint representatives at his discretion for LC/LT gatherings in 2014 at personal costs.

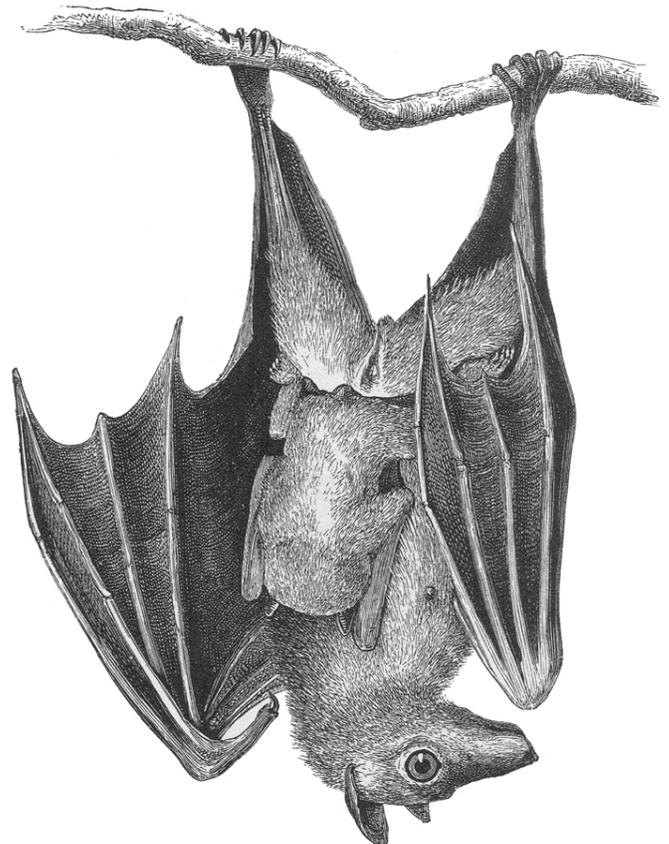
Passed

Meeting adjourned at 12:45 pm.

The NSS WNS Rapid Response Fund
 Timely, direct, and much-needed support for WNS research.

Donate today!

www.caves.org/wns



Attachment A – PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Bensons Cave. The acquisition of Benson’s Cave, Schoharie County, NY, seems to be the biggest item over the winter. The United States Cave Conservancy (USCC) bought the cave and approximately 6.5 acres of land in 1993, and more recently has been preparing to donate it to the NCC. Over the past few months, the NCC has done its due diligence in drafting a management plan, completing a new land survey, title search, and arrangements for liability insurance once the closing occurs. The NCC, at the December 2013 meeting, authorized the President to sign the papers although the actual closing and NCC ownership commences with the signing by the USCC’s President first. I sign later and some paperwork is recorded in the Schoharie County Courthouse.

So where is this process right now? Our attorney has gotten the proper forms for recording to their attorney. We believe that at this time, the new deed has been written by their attorney. The dangling phrase we hear now is that their attorney has experienced delays due to “illness and travel” on the part of the USCC President. Rest assured that the NCC Board and in particular the Executive Committee is directly on top of this situation and will announce the signing-closing the moment it happens.

The Benson’s Cave Preserve will need a thorough clean up as soon as the NCC takes ownership; watch for details, if you can help. In addition, the Spring NRO will be held at nearby Hideaway Campgrounds in Central Bridge and, hopefully, Bensons will play a part in that weekend.

End-of-the-Year Donations. We had a modest response to our request for donations in December with one major exception. A member we don’t see often if ever mailed us \$3,000 with a note that it was for “all the good work that you people are doing”. He had caved there several years ago and had a number of questions about passage connections in Clarksville, particularly the Ward-Gregory link. Along with a thank you letter and my answers to his questions, I include a full-sized Clarksville poster. This is the one used at the kiosk with cave map and several photographs showing areas of the cave. Nice, on both parts!

I have agreed to author a motion for a \$1,000 sponsorship of the North American Symposium for Bat Research to be held later in 2014. Personally I am in favor of strengthening our partnerships with the scientific community as a demonstration of the NCC Mission Statement although, as President, I generally do not vote.

Attachment B – VICE PRESIDENT’S REPORT

NCC Manual. Twelve pages of the manual were updated after the December meeting and posted to the web site a few days later.

Liability. I received assurance from our liability carrier that the Bensons Preserve would be added to our policy as soon as we closed on the property. The additional premium was estimated at \$160 annually plus tax and would be prorated to coincide with our current policy term.

The question of dropping liability waivers and any impact on our liability policy is an ongoing email conversation with our insurance broker. Because I’m working through a broker, the conversation is slow because the she has to confer with the legal department of our policy carrier, Seneca Specialty. I’m trying to shift the discussion to a direct dialogue between us and Seneca because Seneca, although a New York based company, may not be fully aware of the protections afforded landowners by the NY sportsmen’s law.

EC Conference Call (2/14). The February conference call was probably the shortest I’ve participated in. The primary topic was progress on Bensons and how we, the NCC, anxiously await word that the USCC has signed the paperwork transferring the title to us.

Miscellaneous. I assisted the President by personalizing and mailing his end-of-the-year letter to all Life Members.

Attachment F – MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT

As of information reported to me by Feb. 28, 2014, our current membership stands as follows, compared to the base-line of April 22, 2012:

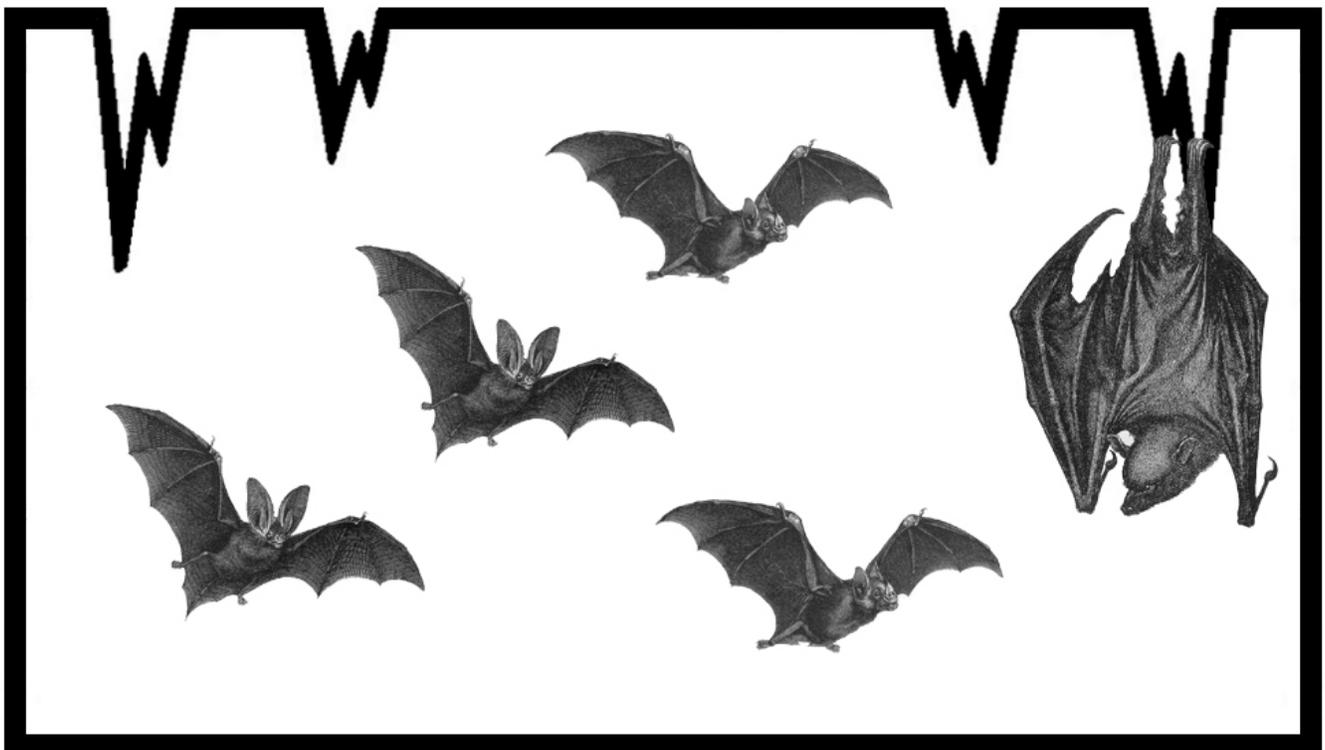
February 28, 2014	April 22, 2012
Life: 30	Life: 18
Family Life: 0	Family Life: 0
Benefactor: 15	Benefactor: 10
Regular: 100	Regular: 88
Family: 17	Family: 16
Student: 3	Student: 0
Institutional: 7	Institutional: 3
TOTAL: 172*	TOTAL: 135

*Versus 162 in December

In terms of additional outreach, I posted a notice on the NCC Facebook page (thanks, Bill, for the idea). We suspect there are many people who see that page and are not NCC members. The notice begins with a question: Have you ever visited Clarksville Cave? Onesquethaw, etc., and points out this is thanks to the all-volunteer NCC. Other membership benefits are then touted, and the dues information is presented. Let's hope this nets some new members.

Further, one of the best ways to grow membership is to not let people get away. Any non-profit development director will tell you that maintaining current members is far easier than getting new ones. To that end, here is a list of the people whose NCC memberships have lapsed in the past year. I ask all Board members who know any of these people to reach out to them and ask them to renew. If their membership is more than 6 months old, we'll re-set their renewal date and give them a full year's membership – such a deal! So please, Board Members, we need your help:

Finally, here's a list of our current Institutional members. If your grotto or outing club isn't here, please put in a plug. If you know a camp or other group that we should solicit, please do so, or let me know. With your help, we can grow this list, and likely recruit more individual members, as well.



GUIDE TRAINING IN MERLINS CAVE

— Lee C. Del Valle —

On a hot and steamy day in June 2013, the Northeastern Cave Conservancy (NCC) held a cave-guide training session. The purpose of this workshop was to familiarize individuals with leading trips into Merlins Cave. Merlins is the newest cave acquired by the NCC and sits under a 34-acre parcel of land in Columbia County, NY (see http://www.necaveconservancy.org/merlins_info.php).

Access to Merlins cave differs from that of other caves managed by the NCC. Unlike Clarksville Cave, for example, which has an open-access policy, access to Merlins Cave is only permitted when accompanied by a guide who is familiar with safe traveling through the cave. Anyone wishing to visit the cave can contact the NCC (see merlins@necaveconservancy.org) for referral to a trained Merlins Cave guide.

On June 29, 2013, the preserve manger Morgan Ingalls and Vermont Cavers Association (VCA) member John Dunham hosted a team of eight prospective guides. Beside myself, these included David Mahoney (Metropolitan/Met Grotto), NCC board member Mitch Berger (MIT Caving Club and Boston Grotto), NCRC instructor Greg Moore (RPI), Harold Hahn (SCAG), Dan Garigen (NFG), Erica Light (UMass), and Mathew O'Donnell (no Grotto affiliation).

The training took approximately six hours, not including the uphill “both way” walk into mosquito country. Merlins Cave is best entered lying on ones back and sliding into the cave so that you “drop down” onto your feet. An additional zigzag effort near the entrance requires some tricky maneuvering. This is followed by a low, stream crawl for about 40 feet. Some additional crawling is required, with one person at a time moving towards a constriction in the cave known as the Bear Trap. At the Bear Trap, the first of two waterfall drops in the cave is reached. This down climb must be cautiously negotiated, with attention paid to carefully placed footing. The natural reaction is to want to go down facing the drop. However, the best way to negotiate the climb is to turn into the wall and face the waterfall, making use of the many hand and foot holds present on several carved rock ledges. Apart from the increased overall stability gained by facing the rock, the primary advantage of this approach is the extra distance achieved by being able to extend one’s ankle to allow a toe to reach the next hold, rather than having to flex one’s ankle to find the next hold with the heel. Visitors to the cave who hadn’t been deterred by the entrance crawl or the Bear Trap may still easily turn back at



Lee Del Valle takes advantage of a Kodak moment as Walt Zeankowski of the Met Grotto emerges from the entrance squeeze of Merlins Cave. Photo by Jose Martinez.

this point, if they wish. A cave guide may help cavers from below by providing verbal directions for finding useful footholds. After passing Domes 2 and 3, as well as a complex, multi-level passageway, another waterfall is reached. Negotiating this waterfall requires descending a somewhat difficult, 18-foot down climb called the Nemesis Drop. This climb, which leads to the beautiful marble formations associated with Dome 4, can be partially traversed and chimneyed. A standing rope found at this location is reflective of the ongoing exploration of leads near the top of this dome (other portions of the cave are also still being actively explored).

Farther along, one comes to Dome 3 and additional multi-level passages, including the Third Waterfall climb into the Fortress Canyon, which, in turn, leads to the Ironclad Room. The waterfall climbs tend to get cavers wet and cold; this is compounded by continued slow progress through the cave. As such, it is a good idea for cavers to carry some extra layers of dry clothing (especially something that will wick away moisture) as well as a vapor barrier, such as trash bag or poncho. Other areas one might visit in the cave include the Bat Room, which had no bats at the time, and the Slime Climb. The latter is a muddy slope that one could easily climb down, but perhaps not so easily get back up without making use of a fixed rope or webbing for assistance. This is a site of ongoing digging activity within the cave (Note: Merlins Cave is the larger and more significant of the two caves located on this particular property. Its deepest point to date is at a depth of 141.5 feet, and it is richly decorated with many beautiful geological features, numerous waterfalls, and a complex multi-layered configuration.

With regard to Merlins Cave, CCG member Jacob Kirk said, “Merlins is not a cave for people who do not like to

climb.” Preserve manager Morgan Ingall’s stated that she has seen people “talk smack until they get to the first down climb, at which point they may balk when they realize just what they are in for.” Met Grotto member David Mahoney said, “This cave is too awesome.” These comments all point to the relative difficulty in traveling through some portions of the cave. Moreover, Merlins Cave is not a through trip and return to the surface necessitates traveling back along the same path.

Merlins Cave is not recommended for individuals who do not care for some degree of exposed climbing, or for those who may have health issues preventing them from engaging in strenuous activity. Safely traveling through Merlins requires that cavers recognize their limitations and remain comfortably within them. A rescue a rescue would be quite time consuming and likely require some modification to the cave.

Areas of the cave marked with caution and flagging tapes should be avoided, due to the presence of either potentially dangerous loose rock and debris or delicate and easily damaged formations. Common sense and good judgment are the mainstays of safety when traveling through these areas. Even though Merlins is not technically con-

sidered to be a “vertical cave” per se, a muddy traverse that must be crossed requires the use of a seat harness and cow’s tail for safe passage (allowing a caver to “clip in” while crossing), reinforcing the reason that the NCC requires visitors to the cave to be in the company of an experienced guide.

To be sure, I am very happy to have taken part in this training. In particular, it has given me the opportunity to explore the cave, something I’ve wanted to do since the NCC started its fundraising project (in 2010) for purchasing the cave. It is also a rewarding feeling to be an NCC representative who can now help to lead trips to this cave for the Central Connecticut, Met, and Northern New Jersey Grottos. Area cavers interested in visiting Merlins Cave can contact me through the CCG website at info@ctcavers.org.



Lee Del Valle tying into the safety line before crossing the High Room traverse in Merlins Cave. Photo by John Dunham.

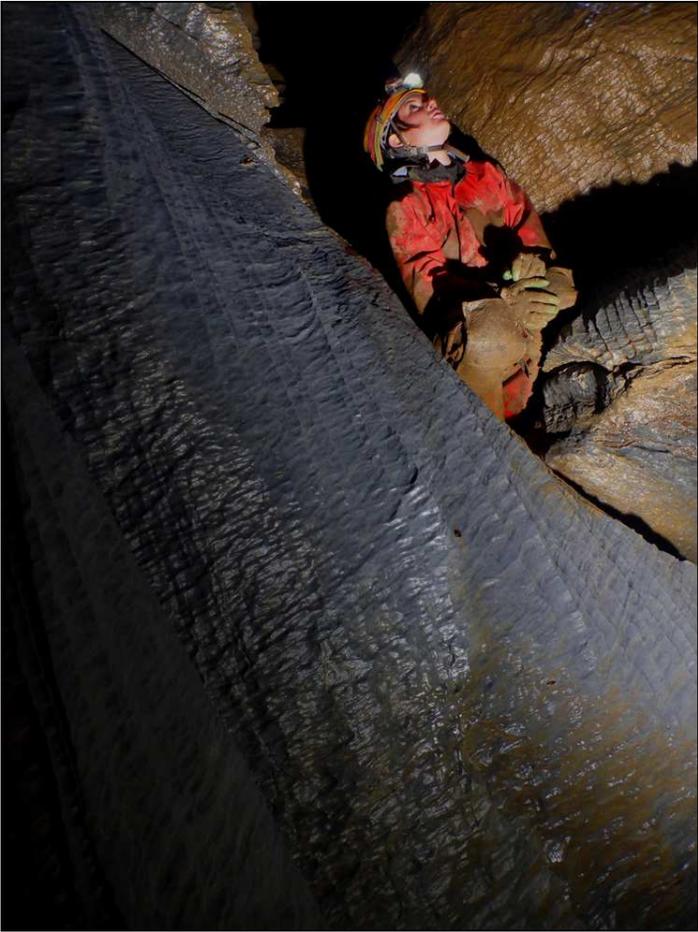
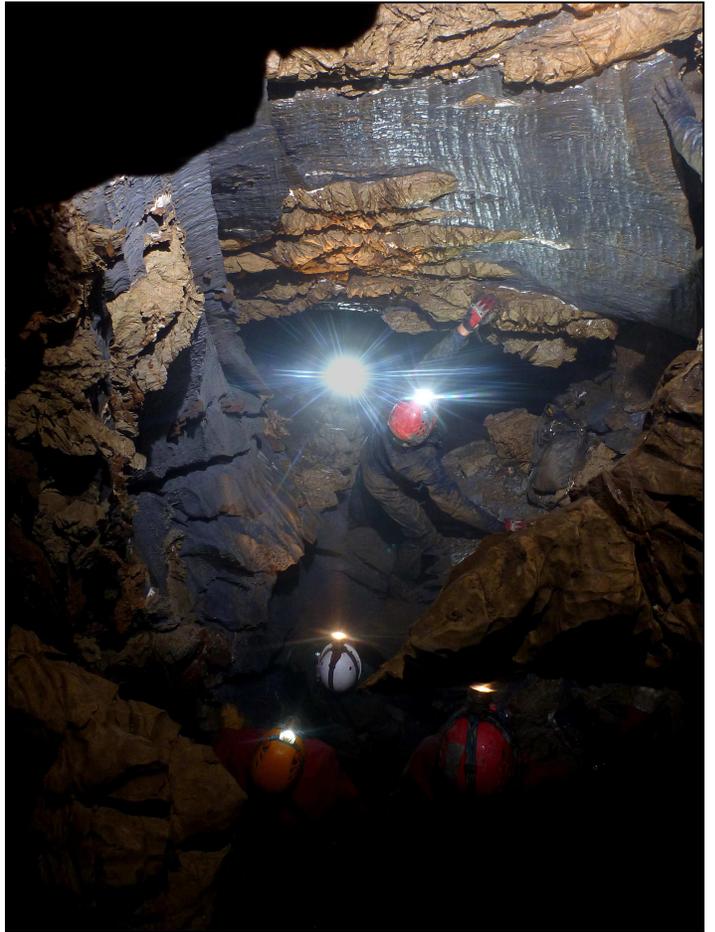
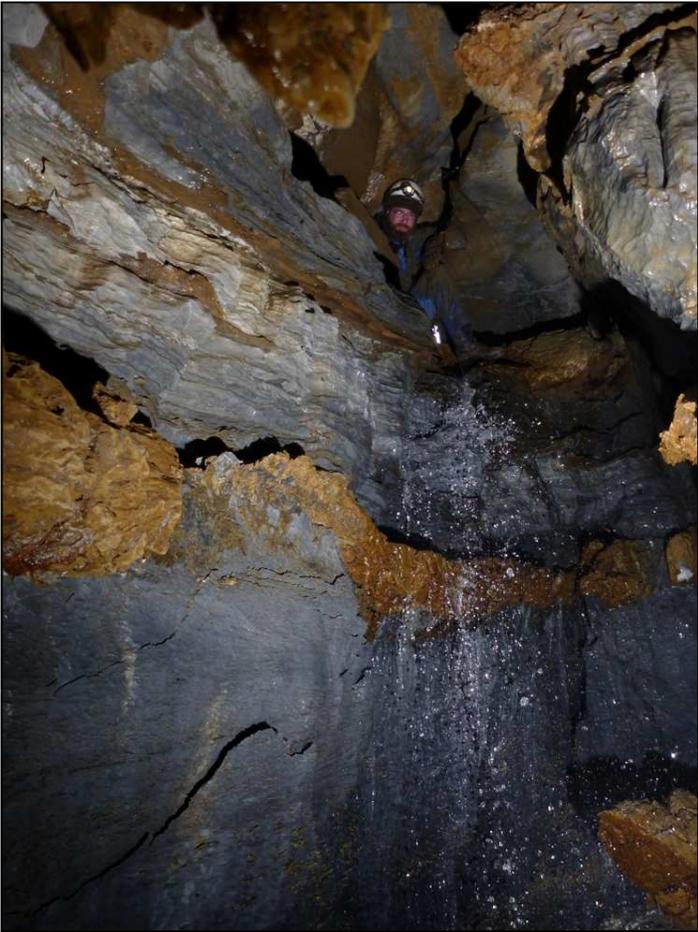


Moving through the Lower Loop passageway. Photo by John Dunham.



Iron carbonate and quartz fins in the Ironclad Room. Photo by John Dunham.

All photographs on the following page are by John Dunham.



Merlin's Cave

Columbia Co., NY

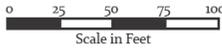
Surveyed Length: 2008.4ft
 Surveyed Depth: 141.5ft

Discovered Fall 2007 by
 Larry Botto, Bob Dion, John Dunham, Clint Matter, and Mike Telladira

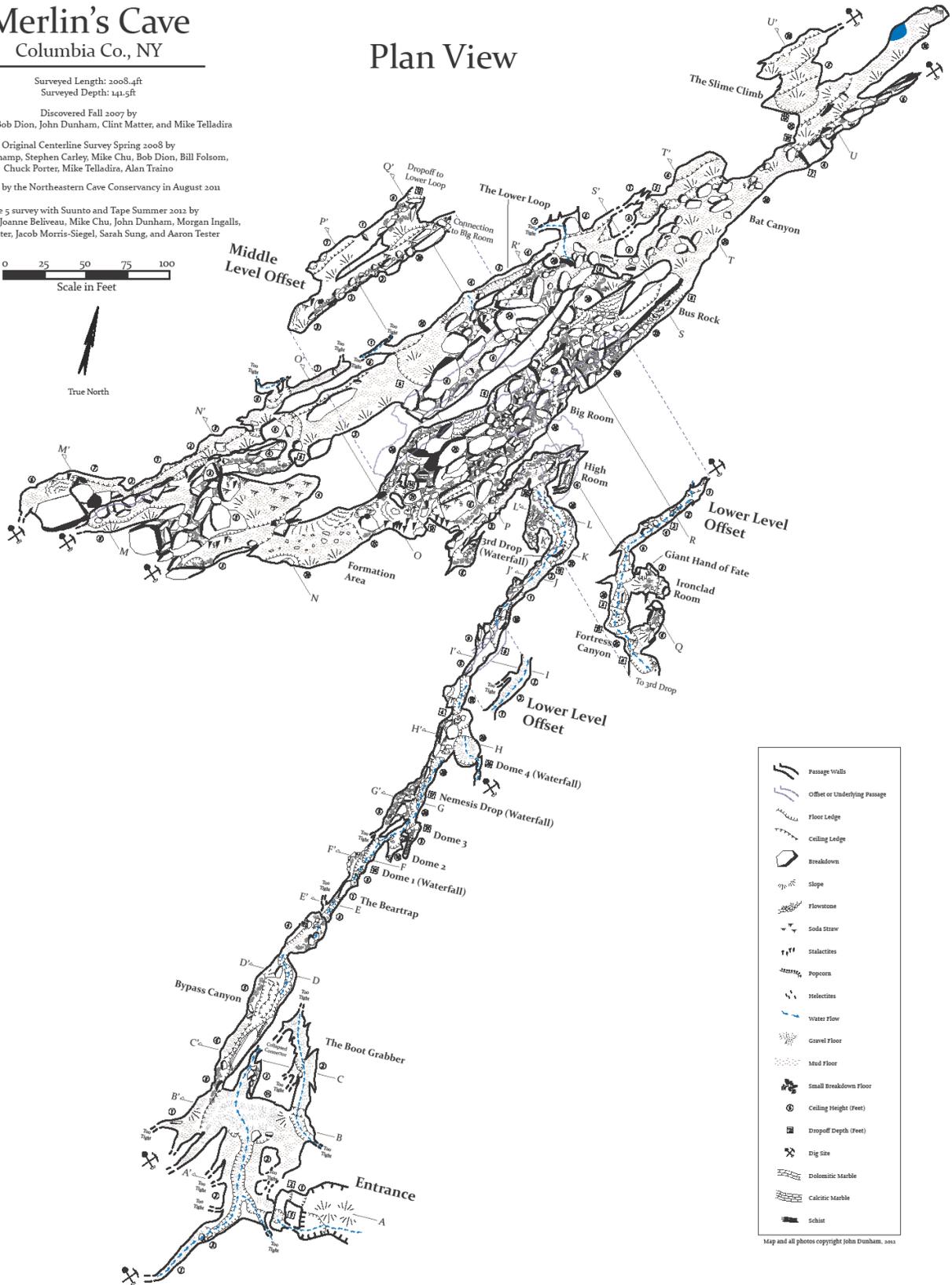
Original Centerline Survey Spring 2008 by
 Chris Beauchamp, Stephen Cazel, Mike Chu, Bob Dion, Bill Folsom,
 Chuck Porter, Mike Telladira, Alan Traino

Purchased by the Northeastern Cave Conservancy in August 2011

Grade 5 survey with Suunto and Tape Summer 2012 by
 Joe Armstrong, Joanne Beliveau, Mike Chu, John Dunham, Morgan Ingalls,
 Chuck Porter, Jacob Morris-Siegel, Sarah Sung, and Aaron Tester



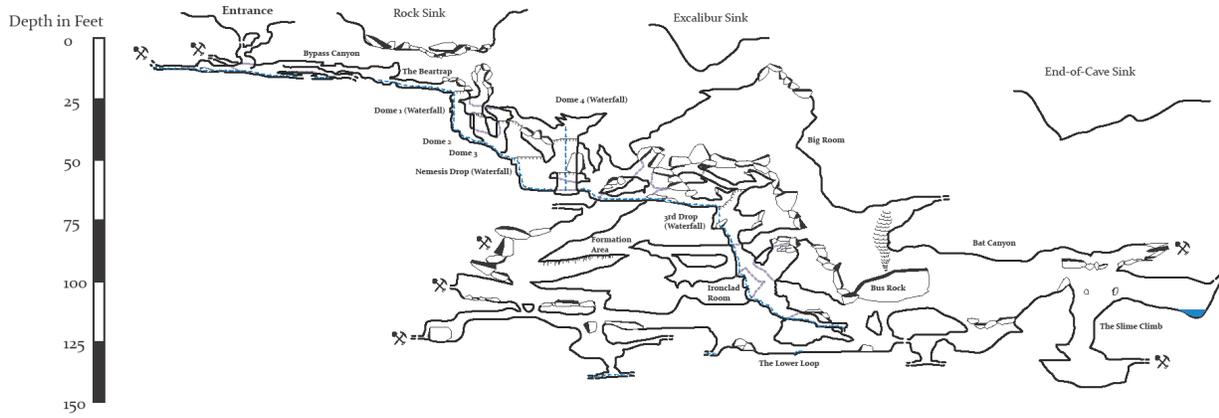
Plan View



- Passage Walls
- Offset or Underlying Passage
- Floor Ledge
- Ceiling Ledge
- Breakdown
- Slope
- Flowstone
- Soda Straw
- Stalactites
- P popcorns
- Helictites
- Water Flow
- Gravel Floor
- Mud Floor
- Small Breakdown Floor
- Ceiling Height (Feet)
- Dropoff Depth (Feet)
- Dig Site
- Dolomitic Marble
- Calcitic Marble
- Schist

Map and all photos copyright John Dunham, 2011

Profile View Facing Northwest



Crosssections

