

Northeastern Cave Conservancy News

Volume 2, Number 1, March 2000

Next Meeting - The next NCC meeting will be held at 1 PM on Saturday, 25 March 2000 (Snow Day of 1 April) at the [Five Rivers Environmental Center off of Route 443](#). Bill Folsom will be a proxy for Peter Haberland.

Items on the agenda include:

- Reports from the Officers and Committee Chairs.
- Three trustee positions will be up for election to a three year term prior to the June 2000 meeting. Nominations should be given to Chuck Porter.
- O'Classen moves that no cave, karst feature, property owned or managed by the Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. shall be modified in any way without the approval of the Preserve Manager. Approval shall be based on consideration of the impact of the activity on the environment, flora, and fauna of the cave. The preserve manager shall inform the Board of their action at the next regular meeting. Seconded by Kappler. (This motion was postponed from the December meeting and no second is required.)
- Haberland moves adopt the following mission statement: 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, or aesthetic features. To these ends, the NCC combines the resources and expertise of affiliated cave explorers, educators, scientists, landowners, and conservation officials.
- Nicola moves that the Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. join the National Speleological Society, Inc. as an institutional member for \$60.00 per year.
- Warner moves to amend Article XII: Amendments from: Changes in the bylaws shall be initiated by the Board of Trustees. To: Changes in the bylaws shall be initiated by the Board of Directors. (By-Laws change. No action possible at this meeting- requires a 21 day notice and 2/3's majority vote of the membership at the June 2000 meeting at the earliest.)
- Warner moves to amend Article IX: Meetings Section 4. Quorum, have added: c. Trustees. Two thirds of the Trustees shall constitute a quorum. (By-Laws change. No action possible at this meeting- requires a 21 day notice and 2/3's majority vote of the membership at the June 2000 meeting at the earliest.)

IRS Status 501(c)3

by [Bob Addis](#)

In late February, we received a letter from the IRS informing us that we had the status as a 501(c)3 non profit organization. This allows us to solicit donations and offer tax deductions to the donors. Already we have donors committed to giving. John Sagendorf, General Manager of Howe Caverns, has pledged \$500 from Howe Caverns, and the check is promised in the second quarter.

What does this mean to you? If you file the long form of taxes, Form 1040, and itemize your deductions on Schedule A, you can now add one more series of deductions - your gifts to the NCC. Specifically using an example and saying that you are in the 28% tax bracket, you donate \$1000 to the NCC in the year 2000. When you file in 2001, that \$1000 shown in Schedule A deducts directly from your taxable income and you will receive an additional \$280 in your refund check. Or if you are like some people, that \$280 will be used to reduce your tax bill. So, the NCC has \$1000 to spend on its programs, it really cost you \$720, and you later got \$280 back. Coupled with a warm, fuzzy feeling, this is a win-win situation all around!

Think slightly bigger. Some large employers have matching grants programs to 501(c)3 organizations. If it's your contribution, you should have a say in where it's going. Now your \$1000 donation might be doubled

Think huge. Corporations and foundations are out there with programs of gift giving. Anyone can approach them on behalf of the NCC - we don't have to wait for a Fund Raising Committee to act. One twist on giving is the challenge grant. Example: For each \$1 we can get donated from our members or raise with other fund raisers, a certain foundation would donate \$1.

This hard-fought IRS status has every chance of been the springboard to launch the NCC into a higher level of finance and a more meaningful program of cave conservation. Your support is needed now!

News from the Nominating Committee

Three positions of three years each are now available as a Trustee on the NCC Board. The Committee has a few nominations, but we need more. According to the NCC By-Laws, anyone can nominate themselves or others in writing. Here's the time table:

- March 25th NCC Meeting - Nominations from the floor.
- April 22nd Deadline for a brief written platform & paragraph of experience to be submitted to the Nominating Committee.
- May 1st Ballots mailed to all current members.
- May 20th Ballots mailed back & counted in time for the June meeting.

Here's a chance to help the NCC, either by serving or nominating someone who will.

Fund Raising Committee Vacant

The committee head for fund raising has become vacant because Robin Strashun has taken on greater work responsibilities. The NCC Board wishes to thank Robin for her efforts, and she leaves behind a solid foundation to build upon in the future. We are looking for someone who might have some background in corporate fund raising or someone open minded enough to learn from others. A vast arena of grants and foundation giving lies out there, particularly since the NCC has its 501(c)3 nonprofit status from the IRS now.

Please contact a Trustee, Officer or the Office Committee if you would like to explore this opening.

A Trip to Onesquethaw Cave by [Bob Addis](#)

No, this isn't going to be a trip report, and even if it was, it would be boring! Rather, I would like to discuss a feeling or a comfort level that has come over me in recent years.

Until 1999, I hadn't been in Onesquethaw Cave since the late 1960's. The NCC has been slugging along for approximately nine years to gain access to the cave and to assure that it would be open for future generations to enjoy. We had our initial surface cleanup last year and a short trip followed that. I've had two other short trips in there, one with some photography in the decorated entrance area and another to expand the caving log of a local Boy Scout troop that I have been guiding. Guess what? Those trips were fun! Somewhere in there the feeling crept over me that we as Northeastern cavers were quite lucky to have cave conservation so much at work for us.

Not many years ago, the United States Cave Conservancy, Inc. was formed, Benson's Cave purchased and opened to all qualified cavers. When I took my first trip in there in the 90's, I was struck by the beauty and challenges of Benson's. I equate it to a mini-McFail's; many of the same challenges but not as long a commitment of time to visit it. I made it a point then to thank the USCC for that opportunity. Along these lines let us not forget the NSS and their presence in the Northeast. With forethought, the NSS has named its cave holdings "cave preserves", and that reflects their national viewpoint and mission statement.

You don't join the NCC and give it your volunteer supply simply to get into caves because that's clearly not necessary. But you do join and support the NCC because you believe in cave conservation and you feel that a group effort, no matter how unwieldy or bureaucratically slow, is the best way to make a difference.

We have an exciting road ahead of us in the NCC and a strong group of volunteers. Please get involved with your time or donations.

Thank you.

The Diverse Caving Community (Part 1)

by [John H. Ganter](#)

Note, due to this article's length, The Diverse Caving Community will be presented as a multi-part series. If you're impatient and like to read ahead, the complete article (with pictures) can be found at <http://nerve-net.zocalo.com/jg/c/pubs/exconcat/>

Introducing: The Diverse NSS

One of the most striking aspects of the organized, or 'card carrying,' caving community is the diversity of people who choose to belong -- to call themselves cavers. We include the sedentary newsletter reader, the twice-a-year cave visitor, the deep explorer dragging a camp duffel, and the cave diver. The unifying force in this mixture is a curiosity about caves, both existing and unknown. Together we wait expectantly for new discoveries. Whether directly or vicariously we are all explorers, accepting and enjoying the proceeds as one of the last terrestrial frontiers is pushed back. The caves are never the same, because as we explore we also destroy. Frontier is not a renewable resource.

The recognition that we wield a double-edged sword has resulted in a kind of group schizophrenia. Some argue for totalitarian control; caves are sacred and must be completely preserved from the boots of all cavers. Others rebel and become outlaws at the slightest attempt to regulate or even influence their behavior. The majority stand between these two extremes, painfully aware that we are in danger of loving our caves to death. Is this perception correct? When and where is the damage taking place, and can we minimize it?

In this essay I analyze our behavior and beliefs in exploring and knowing caves, making an important distinction between individuals who accept caves as given and those who actively reveal caves to us. I will suggest that cave damage is both subtle and poorly understood, and explore the role of technology and the limits that we must impose on our use of it through individual ethics.

The Consumer and the Producer

One of the most fundamental causes of caver schizophrenia is the division between two broad classes of cavers: those who enjoy known caves and those who explore and describe new caves. Many of us fit into both classes, yet each extreme has a different view of the same problems and it is here that misunderstandings may arise.

The pure Consumer is interested in doing caves; their concept of 'a cave' is tied to visitation. He or she engages in a physical and psychological excursion, carrying away a remembered environment and, more importantly, the response that it evoked. Recollections of overcoming obstacles and visiting specific landmarks --rooms, formations, drops-- may form a shared social experience, with memories rehashed endlessly around campfires. Sometimes the Consumer has simplistic ideas of where caves come from, rather like the urban child who thinks food comes from the supermarket. Caves, the naive Consumer believes, come from friends, or Guidebooks, or the Grotto. As we will see, this simplification may cause turmoil when the Consumer is made aware that consumption is not without cost.

The cave Producer derives many of the same satisfactions as the Consumer, but these come from a much more involved, unknown and risky endeavor. The Producer begins with a potential cave or passage, often a lead found

through research and fieldwork. Intensive work commences, often a long-term investment of time and money with an uncertain outcome. Locating an entrance (or extension), passage enlargement and route-finding may take months or years. At some point, a distinct and exciting breakout may occur, or with no returns the effort may simply trail off. Throughout, motivation in the face of uncertain odds must be maintained and even with rewards much misery may have to be endured in exploration and mapping. The Producer must be a manager, patiently recruiting assistance and scheduling work. Special talent may be brought in from great distances to tackle specific obstacles. Dealings with the cave owners or stewards are often long-term and exceedingly delicate. Thus the Producer often has a massive investment of time, money and emotion in a single cave project: he or she may spend more time on the telephone scheduling a trip than a Consumer spends in the cave. In this context, we can see the potential for misunderstandings. The obstacle that sends the Consumers out for a beer will likely send the Producer out for other things. Digging or blasting are simply more steps towards the goal -- exploring the cave.

The Producer has to be persistent. Imagine a dig project going on for a couple of years, far from home, consuming weekends and holidays. All for the slim chance of reward. Recruits are rare and skeptical. Why shouldn't we go somewhere else and have a good time? Digging is work. Call us when you find something.

And then imagine that you are in the lucky few percent that succeed: a huge breakout occurs! Now, everyone wants to help. Hundreds of cavers from across the country and around the world pour in to Consume. Where were they when work needed to be done? Today, Lechuguilla Cave has been seen by millions on television and in national magazines. Few understand that all of it --the formations, the huge boreholes, the unprecedented insight into the Capitan Reef, the re-thinking of our theories of speleogenesis-- was made possible by a handful of cavers taking a risk and destroying a portion of the cave.²

We can see a clear dichotomy in that Producers and Consumers deal with the same things, caves, but consider them from differing points of view. This difference appears whenever we become aware that we are damaging the caves that we enjoy so much. Each group points the finger. Producers break things as they explore; they are bad. Consumers go on useless recreational wanderings; they are bad. Or we band together and point outward at the great unwashed masses; it is the faceless vandal who destroys caves, not us.³

The truth is not so simple. It is fruitless to pursue the first two arguments. Producers and Consumers are locked in a symbiotic relationship. We need new caves; those who truly want to preserve caves are not cavers, by definition.⁴ And we all like to be Consumers, to be able to read about and have the option of visiting a wide variety of caves. There are too many caves and too little time, and so we have publications, slide shows and films. Together we form the community which provides both concrete and intangible support to Producers. Periodicals, meetings and Conventions are all necessary for communication, sharing, recognition and praise of accomplishments. Together we form a massive information pool on caves and caving techniques, as well as a market for specialized equipment. Thus we cannot condemn either the cave Producer or Consumer for damage to caves, nor can we transfer blame outside our ranks. What we can do is distinguish between types and sources of damage to caves, and develop voluntary guidelines that will serve the individual.

Defining Damage to Caves

Many of our ideas about damage to caves are vague and conflicting, reflecting our emotional response to the alterations that we perceive in 'natural' state. What exactly are we reacting to? Speleogenesis, the formation of caves through physical and chemical weathering processes, is notoriously messy. Structural weaknesses such as joints and bedding planes are enlarged by chemically aggressive water, widening and collapsing as roofs and walls fall in. Sediments transported from the land surface or resting in-situ from the dissolution process lie about in untidy heaps. Calcium carbonate and other minerals fall from solution and ooze about in messy deposits. What is appealing, even attractive, about this chaotic order? It is wild. The works of humans are absent. Caves are wilderness -- which has been defined as a state of mind.⁵ We like caves because there is no one there and no evidence to suggest that there ever has been. Cave damage is not simply physical reality, but also an emotional suggestion and response.

Another way to consider cave damage is in terms of its spatial distribution: where and how does it appear? We can identify concentrated damage to a single location; for example, a removed speleothem or widened passage which is visible from a limited area. Dispersed damage, on the other hand, is widespread, affecting substantial lengths of passage and broad views. Damage to caves also occurs over time: it has a temporal distribution. Damage may be acute, concentrated in a short time period, or it may be chronic, occurring over long periods of time. Since many caves do little to 'repair' themselves, at least within humanly-perceivable spans of time, temporal spacing is important. Acute effects may gradually vanish, while chronic damage accumulates and encourages still more damage since the effects of an individual visitor are less and less visible. Clearly we cannot assess damage simply by magnitude: we must also consider how it occurs across space and time.

Damage Tolerance

Cavers often discuss 'cave conservation' with an unspoken assumption of what is being conserved. One caver may conjure up the image of glittering carpets of crystals and delicate helictites; the other a raging river cave. Both are caves, yet each will necessarily color the individual's assessment of what conservation is and how to achieve it.

This example illustrates a useful distinction between types of caves: their energy level.⁶ High-energy caves tend to flood at least annually and often carry a substantial base-flow. Bedrock erosional features such as scallops and potholes are common. Abundant sediments may be well-sorted by water movement and lying in piles which change shape and size frequently. Speleothems are rare, as they are quickly scoured away or broken off. Damage from visitation does not tend to accumulate in this type of cave.

Moderate-energy caves are disturbed by much smaller amounts of water, and often contain a variety of surface-originating debris transported by animals, wind and gravity. Speleothems tend to be large masses of flowstone, reflecting abundant saturated water but conditions that are too active for the growth of finer crystals. Moderate-energy caves accumulate some damage, but it may be masked by occasional flooding and sediment re-arrangement.

Low-energy caves are extremely quiet. The falling of a water droplet is a major event. Speleothems are small and delicate, resulting solely from the minute forces of crystal growth. Low-energy caves are highly-susceptible to damage and do not repair themselves. These extremes of energy exist, and may exist in different parts of the same cave. It is within these varied contexts that the effects of human visitation must be considered. The concept of current damage becoming indistinguishable from previous damage is paramount. Conduct that is utterly insignificant in a high-energy cave may indelibly affect millions of years of natural process in a low-energy cave.

Along with this consideration of energy level is that of size, both absolute and relative. Absolute size is a popular obsession among cavers who devour lists of numbers purportedly describing the lengths and depths of caves, rather like shoppers perusing the weights and prices on cuts of meat. Perhaps more important to this discussion is relative size. A particular cave and its contents must be seen in the context of the region wherein it lies, and the other caves surrounding it. What constitutes a formation, or even a cave, is much different in New Jersey and New Guinea. What is sacrificed without a thought in one place might be considered a treasure in another. It has been observed that the narrow and careful trails of Lechuguilla Cave have destroyed a greater volume of formations than exist in the caves of whole states elsewhere.⁷ Clearly, context counts.

Damage Prevention

To our credit, organized cavers have reluctantly admitted our guilt in damaging caves. As Consumers, this often stems from our enthusiasm in introducing those with a demonstrated interest in caves to the reality of a trip underground. Often we are so preoccupied with the details of lights, climbing, not getting lost, wearing the proper clothes and shoes, etc. that we neglect what is much more difficult to talk about: caving softly. It is this "extra bit of awareness and focus"⁸ that makes it possible to be a Consumer without being a destroyer.

Unfortunately, it appears that many 'experienced' cavers are destructive. Technical competence or even prowess does not necessarily imply restraint and the ability to cave softly. Many can power their way up, down, over and through obstacles like climbs, drops, water, even speleothems, but low-impact caving requires complementary skills and outlook. It requires discipline, awareness and planning. The experienced caver who goes off of an established trail can cause dispersed damage over wide areas, instantly negating the care of hundreds of predecessors.

What I will term the Angel's Paradise Phenomenon⁹ occurs when Consumers trash what Producers have so carefully conserved. The Producer/explorer has great respect for the cave they are pushing, brought on by the intensity of the experience. Everything is unknown and undisturbed; the Producer is acutely aware that he or she is engaged in a creative process. For a time, the cave is an extension of the explorer themselves. Once exploration subsides, the cave becomes community property. Consumers who follow must traverse and experience much more in order to gain satisfaction. The Consumer is there to be entertained, and as a result often lacks awareness and respect. Damage to caves is often evolutionary in nature; it involves an increasing rate of total damage over time. Starting with discovery, the exploration phase causes relatively little damage. But in the visitation phase, damage may increase rapidly, especially when the visitor cannot distinguish new damage from that of the past.

What can we do to prevent the Angel's Paradise Phenomenon? Educate and police ourselves. Use restraint in leading guests who have not demonstrated their ability to cave softly. Apply peer pressure. And, of course, we can limit access.

Limiting access to various degrees has been compared to a library which has open circulation areas, a reserve room, and a rare book room.¹⁰ Extraordinary 'rare book rooms' can be additionally protected by the Lascaux Policy, which involves closing of a cave or section almost completely, on the grounds that viewing or experiencing it directly is not necessary and does permanent and unjustifiable damage. In these cases, vicarious experience has to do. The only individuals admitted are those with special talents in creating and sharing the experience or some new knowledge; accomplished photographers or researchers, for example.

Do cavers have the self-discipline to respect 'rare book rooms' that are not world treasures like Lascaux? Consider the Chandelier Ballroom of Lechuguilla as an example. Surely, this spectacular display has been photographed and described in such depth that we should all be able to enjoy it vicariously ad infinitum. But instead we feel compelled to go there, to experience it directly. Why? Why, as the stench of the latrines hundreds of feet away in this low-energy cave become unbearable, do we insist on crowding into this corner of wilderness? I don't know. But by being Consumers, we are also destroyers, as the necessary and judicious damage done by the Producers dwindles to insignificance under the bootprints of the hordes.

Notes

1. This expression is adapted from a discussion of human impact on wilderness in Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Yale Univ. Press, revised ed., 1973), p. 264 and 268.
2. Based loosely on Vi Allured, *Lechuguilla Cave: The Dig*, *NSS News*, Jul. 1988, p. 292-294.
3. For example, the propaganda posters developed by the Cave Vandal Deterrence Commission show a scowling masked vandal with hammer and broken formation (*NSS News*, Nov. 1984, p. 340).
4. This observation is from Red Watson, *The Philosophy of the Cave: Instant Cave* in *NSS News*, November 1983, p. 305.
5. Nash, p. 4-5.
6. The following definitions are based on Tim Heaton, *Caves: A Tremendous Range in Energy Environments on Earth*, *NSS News*, Aug. 1986, p. 302-304.
7. This comment was made to me by Jim Smith and Bill Steele.
8. Rob Stitt, *Cave Conservation*, *NSS News*, Oct. 1986, p. 360.
9. Bill Steele tells the story of being the third person to gingerly move through Angel's Paradise (Ellison's Cave, Georgia) in 1969. Three years later a large trail and other damage marred this extremely remote and difficult-to-find area. The only people in Paradise had been vertically-competent cavers, many from a nearby Convention.

10. This powerful analogy comes from Rick Smith, Cave Wilderness and Lechuguilla: A Park Service Viewpoint, NSS News, Nov. 1988, p. 432. Smith uses it to discuss the levels of cave access necessary within a national park, ranging from wheelchair access to 'wilderness' (wild caves for the experienced caver). In this discussion, I change emphasis and re-apply the analogy specifically to these wild caves and features within them.

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