

# Northeastern Cave Conservancy News



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.

## Next Board Meeting

Saturday, June 3rd, 2006, 1:00PM  
at the Onesquethaw Fire House, Clarksville NY

## Notes from the Last Board Meeting

- 1) The recent NCC Board meeting took place on Sunday, March 12th at Southern Vermont College in Bennington VT. There was a cleanup of Everett's Cave before the meeting and we had around 20 people helping. Following that was a potluck lunch and the board meeting. It was held in the gallery of the College which was once a very nice stone mansion. There were several members in attendance for the meeting.
- 2) Bob and Christa went to the Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau Dinner and the NCC received an "Albany Ambassador" award. Bob present this to Mike Warner / Emily Davis for their work on the NCKMS (they were not able to make the dinner)
- 3) Al Hicks from NYDEC was present to discuss some possible volunteer work with the NCC on several projects.
- 4) The revised Knox Cave Management plan was accepted.
- 5) Bylaws changes were voted on and passed (Removal of Life membership, Trustee replacements for vacancies)
- 6) Conservation easement was granted to the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy on the Gregory Entrance (Clarksville).
- 7) Vince Kappler was appointed Chair of the Volunteer Value Committee.
- 8) Norm Berg resigned as Webmaster- Thanks for his years of service.

- 9) Mike Chu was appointed new Webmaster.
- 10) The basic liability insurance and accident coverage motion (do we get it or not) was postponed until the June meeting as the final numbers from the insurance company did not come in yet.
- 11) The NCC will co-host the 2006 Cave and Karst Conservancies Forum

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Deadline for next issue – 7/15/2006	

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## Clarksville Cleanup before the next Board Meeting

Come join the work crew and help clean up the Clarksville property. The cleanup will begin at **9am on Saturday, June 3rd.**

Items include:

- Enhancement of the trail from the lower parking area to the kiosk
- Installation of fencing along the backside of the lower parking area
- Garbage and spay paint removal in cave
- Cutting up wood near lower parking area
- Removing trash from a small dump on the property (~behind ladder dig).

Chainsaws and post hole digging machine will be available; please bring tools for working on the trail between lower lot and kiosk would be useful (hoes, string trimmer), etc. If you have any questions concerning the cleanup please contact the managers at [clarksville@necaveconservancy.org](mailto:clarksville@necaveconservancy.org)

The **NCC Board meeting will begin at 1pm** in the Onesquethaw Fire House. There will also be a potluck lunch held at the fire house - same time as the meeting. All members are welcome to attend and encouraged to speak during the Committee of the Whole.

## Cleanup of Everett Cave at the Last Board Meeting

*By Peter Youngbaer*

On March 12, some 24 cavers from all over the Northeast gathered on the campus of Southern Vermont College, in Bennington, Vermont, for a cleanup of Everett's Cave. After a potluck lunch, the quarterly meeting of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy took place in the Gallery of the College.

Everett's Cave is the only cave I know where one walks on marble cobblestone walkways, past a cascading stone stairway and fountain, and even statuary on the way to the cave – a short ten minute walk from the college's mansion.

The campus and mansion are the former estate of Elliot Everett. Everett made his name in the production of glass Mason jars, and his company

ultimately evolved into Corning Glass. Later, the property was a monastery, before becoming the college.

We had arranged for a cleanup of the cave in exchange for not getting charged for rental of the Gallery, a formal meeting room in the mansion.

The cave was in very good shape - we didn't take out a single bottle or can. All that was there in terms of rubbish were some small glass fragments, a little twine and rope, and small pieces of trash. We did remove a lot of wood - mostly rotting fragments of old wooden make-do ladders - but also quite a few long poles that had been placed across the pool of water on the cave's upper level - sort of like a logger's corduroy bridge so that crawlers could stay a little drier. However, it was rotting, and not something that would be in the cave naturally, so it was removed. Finally, there was some graffiti - although not a lot - and it was easily removed with mild hydrogen peroxide solution and scrub brushes.

Several years ago, three of us from the Vermont Cavers Association had undertaken a more thorough cleaning - removing over four large trash bags of beer bottles and other trash, plus a ton of rotting wood. We were pleasantly surprised at how little trash or graffiti had accumulated in the intervening time.

Everett's Cave is a fairly easy cave, formed in the marble belt (Taconic Klippe) that runs from North of Rutland, Vermont, down into Western Massachusetts and Eastern New York. Its total passage length is a little over 300 feet. No one found the mythical passage which leads through the mountain to North Pownal.

There are large rooms with up to 35 foot ceilings, and some very pretty flowstone decorations. In one low spot on an upper level, a periodic sump blocked us from reaching the back section of the cave. With the Board meeting following the cleanup, a two inch air space didn't attract any brave souls willing to completely soak their clothes and then sit through a meeting.

The NCC will prepare a short report for Southern Vermont College, with recommendations about visitation.

## **New Knox Cave Access Policy**

*By Jay Simeon*

The management committee for the Knox Cave Preserve recently presented the NCC Board of Trustees a revised version of the management plan for the property. The Board accepted all of the revisions unanimously. A number of small changes were made to the plan to bring it inline with current management practices. These included allowing for the kiosk to be constructed, allowing Crossbones Cave to remain open during the winter if it is ever connected to Knox Cave, and other small issues (structural and grammatical changes, etc.).

The big change that occurred was in the access policy. The old policy required visitors to the property to obtain a parking permit as well as sign a waiver prior to visiting the property. These items were only available by mail, fax, or a visit to Speleobooks. In order to make things easier for cavers it was decided to do away with the signed waivers. The parking permit is still required for each trip, but will now be available via email as well as by fax, mail, or a visit to Speleobooks for those last minute trips. It is hoped that this new availability of the permit via email attachment and the doing away with the signed waiver will make things easier for people.

While working on the revisions to the plan, the committee discussed a wide range of access policies including everything from leaving the old policy in place to making it into a park and cave situation. It was decided to take an intermediate path and adopt the policy described above. At some point in the future it is hoped that a park and cave policy can be adopted.

The email address to obtain a parking permit is posted on the NCC website along with the entire revised management plan.

## **April Parking lot work at Clarksville**

*By Michael Chu*

The lower parking lot at Clarksville was cleared before the purchase of the preserve in 2004; however it has been largely unusable due to the slanted and uneven surface, and the large muddy spot along the lowest point of the lot.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> a work day was scheduled to remedy these problems, including the installation of a

drainage trench and leveling of the lot. We were fortunate to have good weather, and were able to complete the trenching portion just in time to return the rented backhoe.

Thanks to everyone who helped, especially Bill Zinzow for using his tractor to level the lot and Jon Allison for letting me borrow his truck to transport the rental tractor/backhoe!

Although the lot is now leveled, please refrain from using it for the time being. Once it has some time to settle, a layer of crushed stone will be added to the top to complete the lot.

## The Full Vermonty

By Sean Ryan

*(Apologies for the bad pun in the title, which - like all bad puns involving "Vermont" - is already an ice cream flavor from Ben & Jerry's.)*

The Northeast Cave Conservancy has quarterly meetings to discuss cave acquisitions, fundraising, cave management, and other good stuff. The Schoharie region contributes more than its share of conservation-minded cavers, and it's a central location for everyone else, so most meetings are in within half an hour of Clarksville. That means a long three-hour drive to every meeting for the New Jersey people (me, Joe Levinson and Vince Kappler) and an even longer drive for the Vermont contingent.

Vermont's been getting a real active caving community the past couple years. They might be holding a NSS Convention up there in the next couple years. In the meantime, they wouldn't mind hosting a NCC meeting for practice.

Having an even longer drive to go to a three-hour meeting wouldn't be something I'd traditionally enjoy, but in this case there was going to be a field trip lined up. It's a good idea. You've got 20 cavers in a room together, who have all given up a day to further cave conservation. Might as well get them underground for part of that time.

Southern Vermont College was lined up as the meeting spot. We got the meeting room in an even barter for a cleanup of Everett's Cave, the college's local 350-foot contribution to speleology.

Officially, Everett's Cave is closed. Call and ask to go in the cave, they'll say no. But the cave is on a college property, there's very little else to do in the

immediate vicinity, and campus maps point out the cave just like they do the computer lab. So there's no question about how there might be some excess travel in there.

Vince, Joe and I got to the college at 9:00, which was a full hour earlier than the official meet time. (The NCC meeting was slated for 12:00, giving us two hours of cleanup time.)

The college is mostly housed in one building, a giant stone mansion converted into classrooms and administrative offices. It's at the base of a steep cliff: stairs and a series of carved waterfalls were built up the slope into the woods.

The building was formerly the summer residence of the Everetts, the heir to the Mason Jar fortune. There's a lot of money if you think up of something like a Mason Jar. Don't know why they didn't name it after themselves; at least they've got a marble cave bearing the family name.

The mansion was converted from a residence into a monastery in the '50s. A couple decades later, St. Joseph's College relocated into the building, changing their name to a more secular title despite moving into a building with stained glass on half the windows.

The building is full of Italian marble on the fireplaces, which I thought was incredibly stupid. The land is sitting on a huge block of New England marble. Why no use the local stuff? Shipping charges for hauling tons and tons of marble halfway around the world have got to be more expensive than giving a local a pickaxe and a wheelbarrow.

My mushmeaded imagination couldn't help but see this magnificent college structure as a video game level. Video game architecture tends for giant, dramatic structures - construction materials are free in video game world. The mansion has lots of balconies and parapet: just the place where medkits and extra ammo would be hidden. The big non-operational gates would all be locked at the start; you'd have to kill guard or open treasure chests to get the keys. And what video game with a mansion level wouldn't also do well with a cave level?

Vince, Joe and I were here early, so we'd scout out the cave before anyone else. We looked at the campus map, and headed off in our street clothes. We followed the path past a few icy puddles. The ground rose dramatically on our left. Several side

paths led off, but none of them looked like what we were looking for. We walked to a mini-clearing near the backs of some houses. Cutting through backyards wasn't on the map. We probably overshot it.

I began bushwhacking back, walking parallel to the trail but high up on the hill. It'd just be hit or miss if I found the cave this way, but I'd try it. Turned out to be a miss, unless I was looking for thorns.

Just after we got back to the cars, the first of the other attendees began pulling into SVC. We suited up and talked to Peter Youngbaer, who had been to the cave before. We'd follow him this time.

That clearing by the houses' backyards was on the right path. An undefined path led from there, curving on the side of the mountain in beeline to the cave. Aha.

The cave entrance had a tiny bit of spraypaint visible, or was that just moss? Vermont cavers had done cleanup trips to this cave before, so there wasn't much evidence of college life left. Beer cans, broken bottles, spray paint, all of that was taken care of. What was left was ... well, we'd find out.

A small bit of hands and knees crawl led into a marble junction room, which was cranked to 10 on the Impressive scale. Flowstone coats the walls, creating massive rippling effects. How come Vermont's dinky caves get this treatment? In New Jersey's caves the only shimmering is probably a diesel spill.

The scenic wall was hung with bad pieces of rope, from the colleges students' attempts to make handholds to climb the wall. (There's nothing up top, but from some angles the passage looks like it goes.) The rope was left, under the theory that if removed, the bad rope would only be replaced by worse rope.

The trunk of the cave (otherwise known as dead end in a non-northeastern cave) turned to the left, up a small canyon passage into a few rooms with shallow pools of muddy water.

These rooms were inundated with thick wooden branches, brought in to bridge the pools. It was inventive technology for a non-engineering college. Stone age technology, granted, but a good idea using materials at hand. The problem comes with the wood slowly rotting away; wet

caves can handle a bit of debris naturally, but giant branches like this could never get washed in a little cave naturally.

I got as far as a room with a particularly deep pool of water leading into ... I didn't know. The ceiling dropped down at just the right spot, so I'd have to do a full duck-under at what could very well be an endless sump. Dying from cave diving wouldn't surprise a lot of people, but finding a way to do it in Vermont might.

This final chamber (judged final by myself, since I wasn't going any further) had some older logs in it, half-buried in the rising mud. It'd be a pain to haul each one of these out, but there was no need for that, since we had 20 people looking to get their hands busy.

I fed them out one by one. At first it was carefully threading the opening of the chamber with the thick piece of wood. As that got cumbersome, I just started chucking them in the hole like javelins into a wood chipper. I aimed away from the cleanup crew - plus, it's not like I'm any good with a javelin, so I'd be missing them even if I was aiming.

The logs got bucket-brigaded out of the chambers and out of the cave quickly. By the time I had crawled out of my chamber, the logs in the adjacent room were on their way out. A big job was knocked off very quickly, thanks to teamwork.

One guy was kneeling down against a patch of ground, with a contractor bag open. There were very small chunks of broken glass, brown and green. They had been worked into the mud and the gravel, where they might not cut anyone but all the same exist as foreign matter. He was picking them out one by one, and tossing them in the thick contractor bag. This is the sort of cleanup that you wouldn't bother doing on the surface.

This cave was in good shape to begin with, and now it was in better shape. The cave suddenly seemed a lot more empty, so I figured to make my retreat. The daylight illuminated some more garbage mashed into the mud: bits of cloth, bits of broken glass in corners. I pulled them out, dumped them into an empty spackle bucket at the base, and went back to find more. Didn't have much luck, but I pulled out some more pieces of wood. (Disposing of wood outside a cave usually involves heaving the damn stuff as far from the entrance as you can. With the big branches, I imagine the scene looked like caber tossing.)

Back down at the mansion, lunch was waiting for us. We changed back into clothes appropriate for a Mason Jar kingpin and went inside to pig out. And then talk caves.

The meeting normally seems a bit of the frustrating side, since the whole point is cave conservation and all we're doing is talking about stuff we've done in the past and what we'd like to do in the future. But this meeting had a field trip attached; I can say I did more at the meeting than just keep a seat warm.

The next NCC meeting's scheduled for Clarksville Cave on June 4th. The meeting's 1:00-4:00, and the cleanup is beforehand from 9:00-1:00. As usual, all are welcome. Maybe we'll have a few more takers this time around.

## **A Brief History of Ella Armstrong Cave**

*By Art Palmer*

*The following article is a bit of early Ella Armstrong history compiled by Art for the updated Ella management plan.*

The modern history of Ella Armstrong Cave dates from 1960, when it was entered by local cavers including high-school students Jim Proper (Berne, NY) and Jim Lane Delanson, NY). The two Jims explored the entire cave and noted evidence for previous visits dating back to the mid-1800s. On July 23, 1960, they invited Art Palmer (Pittsfield, Mass.) for a tour. Art was involved in exploration and mapping of nearby Knox Cave and Skull Cave for an undergraduate thesis at Williams College and was a link to the various NSS grottoes in the Northeast.

The group noted various faded signatures at the base of the main entrance drop, with dates as old as 1808. Most of them were from around 1879. The latter date was accompanied by a bold but puzzling "ELLABM2BONG" carved into flowstone. Art wrote this down and after some puzzling he realized that the "Bs" were simply florid versions of "R" and the "2" was a backward "S." Arbitrarily doubling the "A," he came up with "Ella Armstrong," and hence "Ella Armstrong Cave."

On July 31, 1960, Art led a mapping trip with his brother Dave, along with Jim Hager and Al Holt. All were members of the Berkshire Hills Grotto. Mapping was not completed until November 21, 1961, when Art was joined by Chuck Porter, Lew

Harvey, and Rich Garland (all of Williams College), and Laurie Cone (Bennington, Vt.). The map and a brief description appeared in the **Boston Grotto News**, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1962). In June of 1962 Art submitted his thesis, which included a geologic summary of the cave.

Soon afterward, Art and Dave were speaking with Mrs. Robinson, then-owner of Knox Cave, about early cave exploration in the area. She mentioned that the cave we called Ella Armstrong had an entrance at one time on the west side of the road, at the southwestern end of the cave. She said that groups would often visit it during the previous century, but that the entrance had been filled during road construction and the cave had been left almost unknown for many decades. She also mentioned an Armstrong family that grew up nearby (ha!), and a strapping lad, who was one of the more adventurous sons, named Ell (whoops!). "Ell" was probably a nickname, short for Elbert or something, but our hypothetical woman caver "Ella" evaporated in a puff. But we continued to call the cave Ella Armstrong, as people still do today. Anyone who would carve his name into flowstone deserves a change in gender.

The entrance we had used, and which is still the only accessible one, leads to a 23-foot sheer drop into the main part of the cave. The entrance used by earlier groups involved a chimney of only 15 feet, which was not difficult to climb. This explains why the signatures were located at the base of the 23-foot drop, because that was as far as the early explorers could go without rope.

The cave received very little visitation during the later 1960s, and for several decades afterward it remained closed by the property owner. The Northeastern Cave Conservancy acquired the property in 2004 and has made the cave available for recreational caving.

## **Volunteer Value – A Reminder**

*By Vince Kappler*

*Volunteer Value (VV) is the monetary value of recourses, time, and expertise that individuals donate to a recognized non-profit organization.*

Officers, Trustees, Committee Chairs and Property Managers, and other volunteers

Just a reminder to tally up the time, mileage and expenses you incurred for the NCC since the

March meeting. You can go to [http://www.necaveconservancy.org/add\\_vv.php](http://www.necaveconservancy.org/add_vv.php) and enter the data where it is automatically recorded and forwarded to me ... or ... you can give me the totals at the June meeting.

The web is designed to collect data for singular activities. Example: hours spent performing Vice President duties, or time and expenses preparing the election ballot. Please continue to use the NCC paper forms to list participants, mileage, and expenses for big projects like cleanups and the Clarksville parking lot. I will collect those forms at the meeting.

### **Earth Day at Howe Caverns and Baugh Cave**

The NCC again set up a display at Howe Caverns for the annual Earth Day celebration. One of the highlights of the display was a video shot that morning at Baugh Cave of volunteers continuing to remove the trash from the cave. This particular crew consisted mostly of a group from VCA down for the weekend. Thanks to the VCA and Joe Armstrong for the work at the cave, and to Mike Chu for the video work.

### **Dr. Dominick DeLisa 1918-2006**

Dominick DeLisa died peacefully at his home, surrounded by family, on Monday, April 10, 2006. Dr DeLisa donated the 8 acres surrounding Knox Cave to the NCC back in 1978, effectively starting the conservancy. The NCC has made a \$100 donation in his memory to the Schenectady Community Hospice and sent the following letter to his family:

To the Family of Dominick DeLisa,

It was sad to learn of the passing of Dr. DeLisa. Twenty-eight years ago, he donated a parcel of land that contained the entrance to Knox Cave to a fledging nonprofit corporation, the Northeastern Cave Conservancy. Nearly three decades have passed since then, and the NCC has grown and taken on the management of several other cave parcels. We have also worked to protect water sheds and drinking water aquifers, and we strive to educate the public about the importance of caves in our environment.

I have enclosed a copy of the article in the Albany Knickerbocker News dated June 27, 1968 when Dr.

DeLisa acquired the property. By the early 1970's, I had met him as I co-authored the first draft of a management plan for Knox Cave. By 1978 I wrote the final management plan as my thesis for an MBA from SUNY-Binghamton, meeting with him and his attorney to work out the details that would ultimately protect forever this unique underground wilderness.

Quoting the preface to the 1975 draft management plan for Knox Cave, co-author Rob Stitt and I were thanking those who had assisted and we said:

“Finally, but not the least of our thanks should go to Dr. DeLisa who made the report possible by offering to donate the cave to the Society. His concern for the future of the cave sets a good example for other landowners, and it is hoped that if the Society should accept ownership of the cave we can live up to his expectations and preserve the cave for future generations of cavers and the public.”

Quite clearly Dr. DeLisa's wishes have been and continue to be realized at the Knox Cave Preserve. His generosity those many years ago jump-started the Northeastern Cave Conservancy and in reality made possible that impressive branch of cave conservation that we pursue today. He was truly a friend of the caves and the cavers, and we miss him.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

**Robert P. Addis, President**

## Upcoming Events

### **NCC Board Meeting**

Saturday, June 3rd 2006, 1:00PM

at Onesquethaw Fire House, Clarksville NY

**Cleanup of Clarksville Cave starting at 9 AM**



Cavers removing trash from Baugh Cave during a raining Earth Day cleanup, picture by Mike Chu



Cavers outside the entrance of Everett Cave during the cleanup before the last board meeting, picture by Peter Youngbaer



Cavers passed old wood and logs from an upper area of Everett Cave down the drop and out of the cave as part of the cleanup, picture by Peter Youngbaer.



Volunteers working on the parking lot at Clarksville, picture by Mike Chu