

Mid-Year Fun

2025

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Caitlin in Glade Cave (photo courtesy Isaiah Vittitow)



Lovin the mud after Glade Cave (photo courtesy Caitlin Vittitow)

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The Front Royal Column is a publication of the National Speleological Society's Front Royal Grotto. Articles may be reprinted by the NSS and its internal organizations if credit is given to the Column and the author.

Newsletter submissions may be submitted by email janete@shentel.net or snail mail, FRG Newsletter, c/o Tinkham, 360 Kings Dr., Fort Valley, VA 22652

Meetings are held every other month on the 2nd Thursday, 7PM. We are currently meeting at the Box Office Brewery in Strasburg, VA which accommodates both in person and zoom. Contact to confirm [janete@shentel](mailto:janete@shentel.net) or 540-550-3108.

Membership dues are \$10/year.

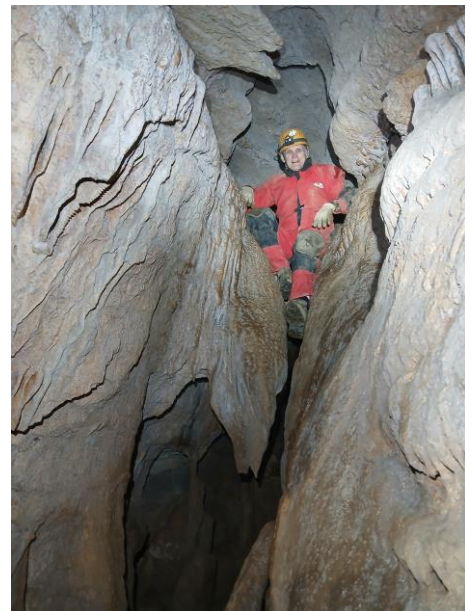
Front Royal Grotto Website <https://frontroyalgrotto.caves.org/>

We have openings for Secretary, Conservation Chair, and Newsletter Editor. Let us know if interested!



ACTIVITY REPORTS

Jones Quarry- March 22, 2025



Above: Luke in Column room

Right: Jeff navigating upper lead

Bottom Left: Olivia!

Bottom Right: Tommy in keyhole.

(Photo credits Greg McCoy & Jeff Jahn)



Sites Cave Entrance Fence Repair

By Carl Pierce

Sites cave is a popular vertical cave in Pendleton County, WV, with a broken vertical entrance drop of about 200 (+ or-) feet. For years it was owned by cavers Bob and Dinae Zimmerman. Several years ago, they sold the land and moved to warmer climates. Earl Suitor negotiated access with the new owner, and as part of this, a fence was installed by cavers to keep the owner's dog from falling into the pit. Several months ago, a storm came through and several trees fell across the entrance and damaged the fence. Earl put out the call for help to repair it. Cavers from Front Royal Grotto, Tri-State Grotto, Cleveland Grotto, Loyalhanna Grotto, and Pittsburgh Grotto answered.

The original date for this repair was to be April 5, but heavy rains in the days before, and forecasted to continue that day, forced a postponement. The new date was April 26. While fewer folks were available to make this revised date, enough showed up to get the trees cut away and part of the fence repair completed. The group included Earl Suitor, Michael Armstrong, Calvin Davis, Carl Pierce, Dennis Melko, Brenda Slagle, and Frank Vlcek, with Cheryl Suitor staying behind at camp to cook up a wonderful chili dinner.

Earl was satisfied with what was accomplished, with completion planned for the following weekend, recruiting help from the PSC party (EARL, please provide an update/addendum to this article with how that went).

Enjoy the pictures!



Above: Carl pointing down at the entrance, over which a tree has fallen.

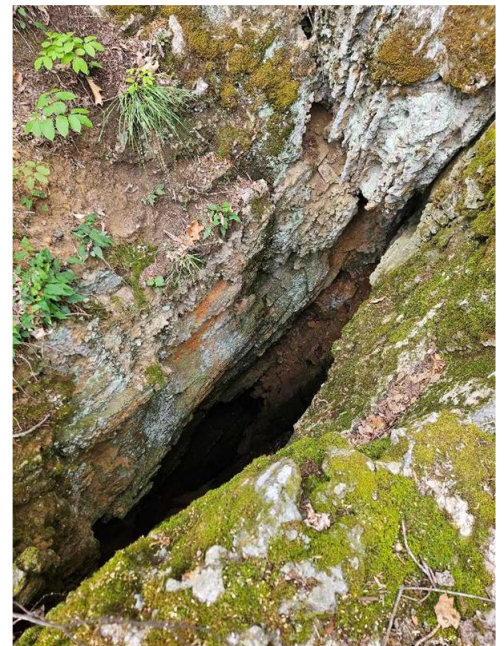


Below: Frank and Earl working on the tree across the entrance.



Above: Given the largest tree's unworkable size, it was decided for now to leave part of it across the entrance. Do NOT use this as a directional for rigging as it is not stable. It may be better to rig from the high side now, as some folks have already been doing.

Above Left: We rigged a rope, and anyone working close to the entrance had to be on a QAS.



Above Right: Looking down at the entrance.

Above Left: The gate was not heavily damaged but the fence on either side was.

Predator Haven

By Jeff Jahn

It was a beautiful day for caving, with spring like temperatures and sunny skies, as we headed off to Klines Gap cave in Grant County, WV on Sunday April 13. A few folks had to cancel at last minute, but we still had a nice size group of six, including Caitlin, Isaiah, Brigit, Mike and Luke. We carpooled from Wardensville and arrived at cave property late morning.

There are two streams to cross from the parking area and water flow was a bit higher from recent rains. The first stream is crossed by hopping along boulder rubble in one spot along the stream. No problem. The second stream is wider and has a higher water flow. Here, there is one place where a large tree has fallen directly over and across the stream and is the choice for crossing if one wants to avoid getting wet. (unless of course you fall off the tree trunk while crossing). Our group took different approaches to cross the stream.... a couple actually just waded across in the water which in some places was only ankle deep. The rest of us crossed along the tree trunk either as a straddle or side straddle on your butt or if you are brave like Luke, you walked across. I might add that the depth of water where the tree trunk is ranges from 1 to 3 feet so one false move could result in total immersion! But we all got across just fine and set the mood for the trip to follow.

First up is a scramble climb along a limestone vertical face, up about 10 feet to the cave entrance. The entrance is a hand and knee tunnel passage that goes about 50 feet before opening up to walking passage. But wait, just in the first few feet of crawling, a strong odor hits the senses, a most rank feral type smell. As I turned ninety degrees along the passage, I came across a dead carcass in the center of passage undoubtedly the source of the smell. This, along with fresh scat and a myriad of other bones and carcasses highlighted the front section of the cave. Brigit speculated that a predator, like a fox or similar mammal, was bringing its kills back into the cave where it is taking up residence. Fortunately, as we got back into the cave, the smell and presence of the predator dissipated and made caving much more enjoyable.

We continued on to the lower water passage with aid of a hand line. Coming out from the bottom is an awkward climb up and it is always good for some laughs as it is slick and no place to gain purchase.

Next up was the back sections of cave where crawling and stooping is necessary to access. Along the way, we encountered a section of nice formations. One objective was to get to the dry waterfall. Luke ended up being the only one to climb down the pit into a narrow gorge to access the waterfall (which of course was dry). And despite his height advantage, it was still a challenge for him to climb back out and up.

I was dreading having to pass back through the odoriferous passages near the entrance but with no other option so off we went gagging as we neared the entrance. The payoff was a sunny spring day and made for a nice return to our cars after again crossing the two streams without anyone falling in!



Above: Caitlin crossing the stream and group in front of Klines Gap Cave.

Return to Harlansburg Cave

By Jeff Jahn

The completion of Sarah Furnace survey left a void in my schedule. It felt like the survey would go on indefinitely but now that it is over I'm wondering what might fill the gap. Well, there is another Loyalhanna cave, Harlansburg, that MAKC owns and is also being surveyed. Occasional trips are ongoing off and on through the year.

One of the annual trips to Harlansburg occurs on Good Friday so my schedule was open and I made the trip up to Lawrence County to participate. I can't remember when the last time I was in Harlansburg but it had to be over ten years so I was looking forward to getting reacquainted with the cave. What I remember is damp loyalhanna limestone, mazy, and lots of mud!

There were five on this trip including Kim, Kerry, Sunni, and Chance. A good group and cavers that I had not seen or caved with in quite a while so a good opportunity to catch up with everyone. Kim assured us we would be surveying in a relatively dry area. Great! Except she didn't mention that to get to the "dry" area, we had to navigate through passages that were full of slimy boot sucking mud. Occasionally, Kim would say don't step in the center as there is a hole there.....and of course we all proceeded to step in the hole anyway as one could not gauge where to step because of all the muck.

Kim was good at navigating and essential to keep us on track as it would be very easy to get lost in the maze of passages. Before too long, we finally made it to the starting survey point and we broke into two survey groups.....Kerry and I, and Kim, Sunni and Chance.

We kind of stayed in the same area but initially went in opposite directions. Kerry was setting stations and we were both doing sketching. At one point, Kerry start saying, wow, this passage is well decorated. Then a bit later, look at all these ribbon formations. What? Harlansburg is noted for mud, not pristine formations but that is exactly what we were experiencing. Formation Alley for sure, as seemed like every few feet or so there was a group of formations along the ceiling-wall contact, one more beautiful than the last. And to top it off, it was in the same passage as the Tea Kettle, where someone had brought in camp fire like wood and placed an old fashioned tea kettle on top of it like a campfire setup. And on the opposite wall was carbide soot writing indicating we were at/in Camp Marriot. Seems like this whole area was unknown at least there was no record of it so quite a surprise stumbling upon it.

We finished up the day with gaining over 400 feet of passage and I'm still amazed at my good fortune to have come back to Harlansburg on the trip where we surveyed the Tea Kettle room and accompanying concentrations of formations. Was a good way to spend a Good Friday and as I headed home I decided I needed to make it back soon and certainly not wait another ten years to do it!



(Photo credit to Sunni... Jeff and Kim in photo).



Silers Cave 4/26/25

By Chris Woodley

Jeff Jahn, Olivia Ondo, and I (Chris Woodley), met at 10am to start a new survey of Silers Cave, Berkeley County, WV. Jeff led us up the entrance as this was Olivia and my first trip to the cave.

Jeff started in first to set stations and do backsights while Olivia did foresights. Surveying down the ladder to the gate area was interesting. We had some difficulty with some azimuths. Probably due to all the metal in the gate and barrier. We had to settle for some more than +/- 2 degrees azimuths. Jeff pointed out the rock and mortar wall that was built in a small crawlway to block off a way around the gate and barrier.

Once through the gate, we surveyed down the entrance passage for a few stations to the Root Passage. We stopped here and turned around to complete a short loop. Back at the gate, we hopped over a shelf and into a parallel canyon. The ceiling of the canyon is flat (the ceiling of the whole cave so far seems to be at this same level) while the floor goes down and up depending on how much dirt/mud/clay has been washed away. A narrow canyon soon came in on the right. The bottom of the canyon is tight and quickly becomes impassable due to the clay. However, the top of the canyon is open. We climbed up and set a station (A10) to hopefully come back to later. From the top, the back side of the rock wall barrier by the gate is visible across the parallel canyon.

Back down in the parallel canyon, we surveyed through a formation constriction and up a clay slope. Breakdown forms the right (northwest wall). To the left, a tube goes off and leads back to the angle iron barrier by the gate. We completed the loop by shooting through the barrier. The loop didn't close good, merely okay. Before leaving this area, we checked out a crawlway that looked like it would connect into another canyon but we weren't able to make any voice or light connections. After crawling in a bit, the floor rises slightly with a little nub that makes it just too small to fit through. Just beyond the nub, it opens up a bit into a small room. That might be all there is but the nub would be easy enough pry up with a crowbar.

We still had some time so we decided to survey into the Tire Passage to complete another loop. Getting down into the Tire Passage requires a steep climbdown to a deep mud pit that has several tires in it to stand on. Never seen that in a cave before. This mud pit room was the biggest room we saw during the trip. Continuing west in the Tire Passage, we surveyed by a canyon on the right and took the first canyon on the left. This took us back to station A10 and we finished the loop.

We packed up and headed out. It was a beautiful day on the surface. We made 27 shots and 417.9 feet of included survey with a total depth of 38.6 feet. Leads at A6, A18, A21, A24, and A25 remain. Only ~95% of known cave left.

First VAR and First Trip Lead

By John Lenox

Upon arriving at the Spruce Knob Education Center where the Spring 2025 VAR was being hosted I made my way to the registration area and checked in with Tally the host and member of Out of Bounds Grotto. It was about 4 in the afternoon, and she asked me if I wanted to lead a trip as only one person had signed up to lead a horizontal cave and at 8pm trip sign ups opened. I was hesitant at first as I had never led a trip, had never been to any of the caves on the list, and did not know where to even access the caves from. I was curious though and Tally reassured me everything would be fine. I told her I would think about it.

I headed to the camping area where I found Greg, Lauren, Jeff, and Mike about to set up a tarp. The thing about the camping area is, there are no trees, and wind was howling across the bald with regular gusts in excess of 20 mph. This made for a very comical few minutes rassing a tarp before we decided to call it quits. Let's just hope it doesn't rain. I then talked with my fellow grotto members about me potentially leading a trip for the VAR. I was interested in Hamilton and New Trout as I read about there being lots of fossils in both. There was a sense of hesitation from some, mostly about Hamilton which is a mazy cave. Tally told me if I get lost just chose the biggest uphill passage and I would be fine, Jeff said something along the lines of, it's a little more complicated than that. After a little deliberation and guidance, I was feeling confident about leading. I decided I would walk down and check out the vendors, where I bought some first aid supplies, and if nobody had signed up to lead the trip by the time I was done, I was leading, and that's exactly what happened.

At 8pm I walked down to check if anybody had signed up yet. To my surprise it was full and had a waitlist. Back at camp Eric, Jeannie, Carol and Craig had all shown up and we sat around discussing what I should do tomorrow. The plan was to enter New Trout first, as it's much less complicated, and I could get an idea of what the group's abilities were. Then if some people wanted to leave and there was enough time, I could take the remaining group into Hamilton. There was a good chance that one of the 11 people that had signed up had been to the cave before and could help if needed.

It was windy and cold, most people had gone to bed early that night. I headed down to the bonfire to hang out and warm up before retreating to my hammock off in the woods. The frog chorus was loud enough to drown out most of the nighttime activity at the gauntlet and hot tub, but sleeping conditions were not ideal with temperatures dropping into the 30's.

I awoke and headed up to the FRG camp around 7:30. Most everyone was out and about, and I let them know that my call out time was 5:30 back at the campground. We hung out eating and chatting until 9:15 when I headed to the porta potties where my cavers were supposed to meet me. I got everyone's emergency contact info, and asked if they had any medical conditions I should be aware of, but I was most curious if anyone had been to Hamilton or New Trout before. Nobody had and three of them had never been in a cave at all. I felt my responsibilities grow.

After caravanning down the road for about 50 minutes from camp we found the road pull off with a bunch of cavers gearing up to go into one of the 3 different caves on site. I loaded my pack up with a bunch of extra food and snacks trying to be prepared for anything. Then we headed up the road and ascended the short but steep trail to New Trout. After a nice group picture at the entrance, I went to turn on my head lamp and nothing happened. After messing with it for a while it still did not work, on to light number two.

As we started down the entrance passage of New Trout I was taking it pretty slow and looking at the fossil. It's a crouch walk on a slanted floor and Bob who was behind me seemed to not be too steady on his feet. On the ride to the cave he told me he had been caving for 50 years and been to caves in every state and 30+ different countries, he had the experience, but I would have to keep an eye on Bob. As we made our way to the register room two of the new cavers Anna and Ernesto were taking pictures and videos of everything, amazed at their first time underground. Thankfully New Trout does not have many off shoots from the main passage and there are arrows marking the way in and out pretty frequently as the map provided in the VAR guidebook was blurry.

Before I knew it, we were in the Third Room, the largest chamber, about 200 feet long and 40 feet wide. I expected this to be the end of our trip and told the group they could explore as they wanted while the rest of us took a break. At the far end of the room however it dropped down to a lower level and the group wanted to continue. Before long everyone got to an area where a more technical drop was required or a long crawl on uneven ground. I had to call it here as going back up the drop or doing the crawl would be pushing the limits of the group.

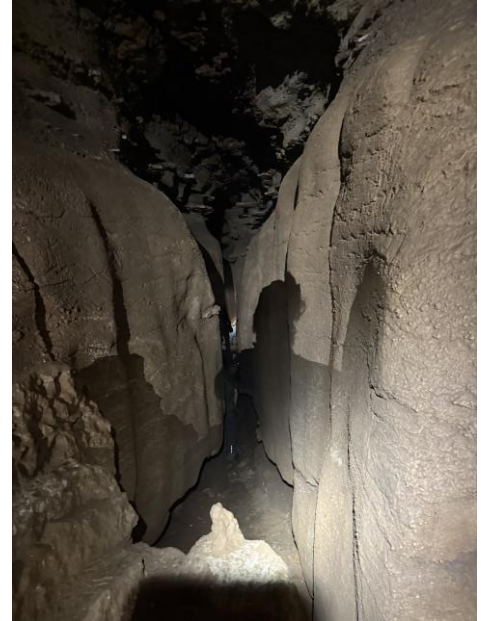
As we headed out, we stopped in the register room and everyone put their name in the book. Then it was time to exit, we all made it out around 1:45 after about 2.5 hours in the cave. Bob was able to hitch a ride with Paul, Tara, Anna, and Ernesto back to camp while Tory and Jeremy headed off to get pie and celebrate her birthday. That left Cassie, Grace, Caitlin, and Sarah who all wanted to enter Hamilton. I had not spent too much time with them at this point as they were pulling up the rear while in New Trout, but as we started walking back up the trail to enter Hamilton they were moving right along and all seemed quite fit.

We took a break at the entrance to Hamilton and entered around 2:20. The girls wanted to go to the Airblower a tight, steep, and tricky passage I was told to specifically avoid by others the night before. I did not think we could make it there as my call out time was 5:30 back at camp, but maybe we could get our eyes on it. Since Hamilton was quite mazy our plan was to take as few turns as possible, also since I lost the reflective markers Lauren had loaned me the day before I was playing it safe. The plan was working, we were making good progress towards the slab room, and I was able to follow our route on the map. I doubt people familiar with this cave take this route though as I think I was only able to stand up once or twice the whole way back to the slab room. The girls were right at home though as they said most of the caving they do back in PA is crawling. Glad I live in VA.

Once we got to the slab room we continued straight as it had been serving us well so far and it looked like the passage on the map connected and had higher ceiling heights. In reality you had to crawl here too as the walls had shelves extending into the passage that made it difficult to navigate. We were not able to connect as the passage pinched out and we had to return to the slab room. Here we ran into another caving group who were returning from the Airblower and gave us directions on how to get there. We had run out of time though and needed to head back. I was getting comfortable with the cave and decided to take some passage that looked more appealing on the map even if it meant taking turns. This was a great decision as we were able to walk and got to see more cool features before exiting the cave around 4:30.

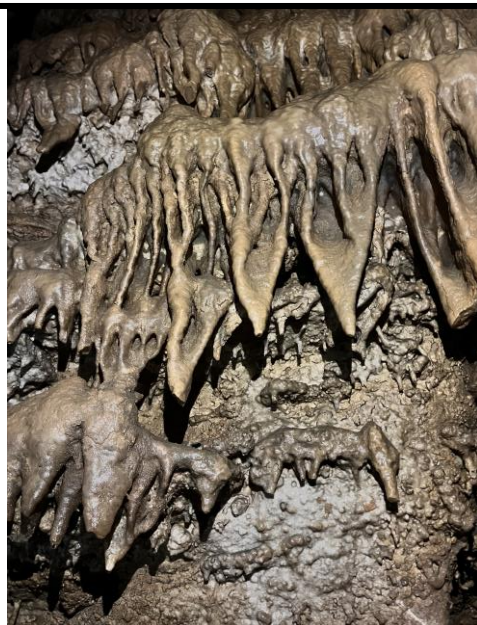
I was happy with my first time leading a cave trip and would do it again. I do wish I established a later call out time as the Hamilton group still had energy and was probably hungrier to see more cave than to eat dinner. I made it back to camp just 15

minutes past 5:30 and was glad to report to everyone that I had led a successful trip. I did not really know what to expect when I signed up to go to the VAR but was pleasantly surprised and will plan to attend another in the future.



VAR trip to New Trout and Hamilton Caves in Pendleton, Co., WV.

(Photo credits: John Lenox)



Peaceful Easy Feeling

By Jeff Jahn

I wasn't sure what to expect driving down to the Burnsville VA area for an adventure weekend of camping and caving. Tom Griffin organized the event but it was originally suggested by Barry Duncan, who unfortunately could not attend for health reasons. On paper it had everything going for it, from having a nice combo of grottos from Franklin County, York, and Front Royal, to exploring new caves, and camping in a place where no one had been before, namely, Peaceful River campground.

To be honest, "Peaceful River Campground" sounds like something cooked up by an advertising agency. Is it really going to be peaceful and is the river just another name for a low flow creek? Well, turns out my fears were unfounded, as the campground is not only peaceful but also in a beautiful setting along a high flow river with a backdrop of forested cliffs and blossoming flowers scattered throughout. We had the entire campground to ourselves and the use of all the choice river camp spots. Many were tent camping but some had trailers and a couple just set up in their cars and van.

Folks were busy cooking breakfast when I rolled in Saturday morning and I even spied Greg McCoy along the river relaxing casting a lure in an attempt to catch a wayward trout or bass. This first impression was a good sign and could only signal good things to come. It wasn't long before everyone came together to discuss plans for the day. Introductions were made and it seemed like a nice friendly group. Think there were about 18 people in total including two FRG members, Blake and Casper, who just came in for the day and of course we can't forget Link and Tag, the rambunctious black labs owned by Tom and Red.

One group decided to head Hamilton Cave led by Earl Suitor. The rest of us planned to spend the day at the Water Sinks, a property managed by the Butler Cave Conservation Society. Johanna Neller secured a permit to enter into Helectite and Subway Cave which allowed for up to 8 participants and that left Greg and Lauren McCoy and Janet Tinkham deciding to explore Owl Cave also on the Water Sinks property.

We left camp at about 10:30 for the 40-minute drive to Water Sinks. It is a scenic drive but to get there one travels along a winding road but saying it is winding is an understatement. It is narrow, heavily forested on both sides, and the line of site is never more than a couple of hundred feet or so. To top it off there was a stiff wind blowing so besides needing to be wary of cars coming in the opposite direction there were also occasional tree limb obstacles appearing unexpectedly in the middle of the road needing to be avoided. But the sun was out, a really beautiful day and before too long we turned onto the property on an appropriately named road, Owl Lane.

Funny thing about the name Owl Cave too. I just assumed it was named based on an actual Owl having been observed at the entrance at the time of the cave's discovery. But no, it was named based on the two side by side oval entrances being angled in just the right way to resemble Owl eyes at the base of the headwall. Pretty Cool!

From the parking area, we suited up, spent a bit of time looking at the kiosk map which showed the trails and relative locations of the caves on the property and then off we went. Wow, what a property! Even if you did not cave, there is so much to see hiking on the property to make it worthwhile. It is scenic throughout and interspersed with trails crossing suspension bridges over chasms where streams and waterfalls are present. Evidence of karst is everywhere and the change in elevation along the way is pretty extreme too over short distances, culminating in an awe inspiring view of the Water Sinks head wall where the Subway cave entrance is located. This massive headwall towers a hundred feet up in a protected alcove. An active stream courses down into the base of the headwall into depths unknown. Hell, I'm already worn out and we haven't even made the entrance to Helectite cave yet!

Not too long after that though, we made it to the Helectite Cave entrance which is a pipe entrance located at the bottom of fissure crack at the base of another towering headwall. Pat, Tom, Red, Eli, Art, Erin, Johanna, and I made up our group. Johanna got the key from the lockbox and in we went. The wooden ladder in the pipe went down changed direction and ended with a rope on the ground to ease one down the rest of the way to the first series of maze passages. I couldn't help but think how similar this drop was to Cleversburg sink where everything from ladders, ropes, and rebar are strategically placed to make for a safe and efficient passage through the cave.

It didn't take long and a burst of formations hit us first in the ceiling but then everywhere you looked was a beautiful vista of columns, helectites and stalactites. Things came to a temporary halt as route finding was done and we even took a side route up to the Peak-a-boo Room, another heavily decorated room. Two urns were observed in one alcove and it was after the trip I found out they are to hold the ashes of Phil and Charlotte Lucas upon their passing. The Lucas's owned the property for many years and spent much time exploring and developing the entire site for the benefit of cavers so it is only fitting that is where they will be laid to rest.

After our side trip, Eli and Johanna went back into a smallish crawl along the main path and discovered it continued and was the way forward by pushing up at one point and slithering through a crack in the ceiling. Passages now seemed to follow a pattern where one scrambles up and down into rooms all connected with crawls but then went downward again, and downward again, sometimes with ladder assists or just free climbing down. Eventually we came to a large breakdown room and could see the White Lightning Room which was one of the objectives for our trip. This feature is located in a 60-foot-high room where white flowstone adorned the top of the room and then dropped to a splatter of white formations on the floor. To continue on from here, an additional climb down of about 40 feet or so is necessary to reach stream level and continue to the next section of cave.

Decision was made to split the group at this point. Johanna, Eli, Art and Erin wanted to continue on but the rest of us decided to slowly head back to the entrance. Tom was concerned about his knee and I know I was thinking how much effort it might require to go up elevation out of the cave and did not want to push it. Turns out getting back to the entrance was not as bad as we thought and we made it much quicker than expected.

We agreed to wait at the cars for everyone, so with extra time, we decided to check out Water Sinks and Owl Cave. Water Sinks is interesting close up as there are multiple cracks and ladders placed to access various parts of the headwall. Some active digs are ongoing and a maze of passages within the face. One passage led to top of the Subway tube. I pulled on the handle to open the lid but could not make it budge. Turns out I didn't try hard enough as the Johanna group was able to pop it when they came out later in day. They did a quick recon and found it to be a decorated borehole with passages going off in different directions. Certainly a must see to check out in more detail on a future trip.

Owl cave had its own charm too with clean fluted limestone cracks leading to crawls with intermittent rooms, all in a mazy labyrinth of passages. After a bit we changed out of our suits and hung out at the parking area. Some time passed by and I decided to head back to camp both to update everyone back at camp and also so I could call home and give the all clear on being out of cave.

Funny thing though, as I rolled into camp, no one was there?! I saw Greg's and Janet's car so assumed they were out hiking. And the Hamilton folks were not back yet. So there I was sitting in a chair watching the wind blow through the hay fields all by myself, peaceful for sure, but uncomfortably so! It just felt like the Earth Apocalypse, where I was the only remaining human left on the planet. I enjoyed the solitude though and eventually, cars start rolling into camp and Greg and others popped out of their trailers having just taken an afternoon nap. Tag and Link were especially excited to get out of their trailer and ran and played all around the campground.

Evening ended with telling tales around a campfire including many about Barry since he wasn't there to defend himself, setting off some sparklers, and relaxing. At one point, Pat asked and thought the Water Sinks had another name historically. We weren't sure but after some research, he was correct that the Old Water Sinks Cave was formerly known as Siphon No. 2 Cave. Temperature began to drop that night and made for nice sleeping. There was just a bit of fog Sunday morning and made for a beautiful sunrise in the mist. Turns out it got down to 43 degrees!

We ate breakfast and chatted as a group deciding what to do for day. Johanna was contemplating doing some more caving but decided to leave that for another day. It did feel like we all wanted the good vibes to continue and not end but eventually we broke camp and headed home. All agreed it was a weekend worth doing again even talking about making it an annual event to both have more time to explore all the caves we didn't get to and to enjoy the camaraderie and peacefulness that we experienced throughout the weekend at the campground. Can't come soon enough for me!

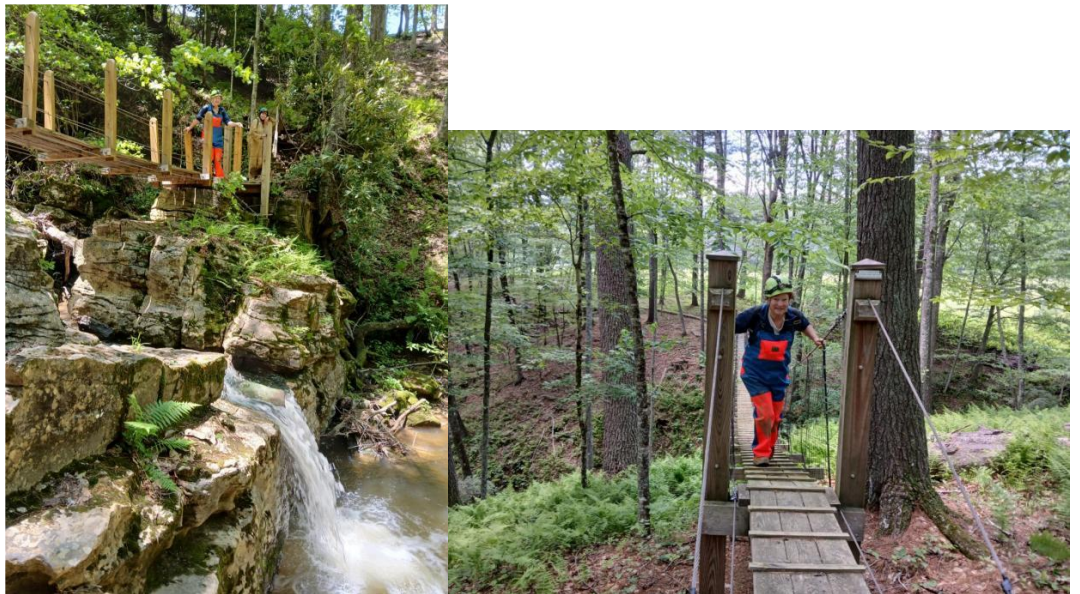
Owl Cave
 Bath County, Va
 May 31
 Janet, Greg, Lauren

I was surprised to see so much mountain laurel blooming on both sides of the curvy road on route to the cave.

Not sure she was quite ready (imagining the mud to come) but Janet broke in her bright new bib overalls and new pack. While the others headed for Helictite Cave, we hiked around until we spotted a covered pipe. Around the corner is the wide, owlish-looking entrance. A caver-friendly cave, we easily made our way to the pipe but thought about turning back to the more inviting entrance. There were SPIDERS between all the rungs of the ladder! And egg sacs! With a few peeks and shrieks we climbed up and out.



Wandering the beautiful woods we found a swinging bridge, other cave entrances and an inviting waterfall pool. The day was not hot enough, though, to take a dip. Next time....



Huge thanks to Tom and Red for organizing this memorable camping/caving trip.

Lauren

NSS Convention

Cobleskill, NY

June 23-27

Lauren and Greg

Schoharie Cave, an NSS preserve, is 12 miles from the fairgrounds/campground where we parked our new-to-us camper. It was so hot we were excited to get underground anywhere.

Nancy led us and 6 others to the fieldhouse, within sight of the inviting cave entrance. The cave is cooler than we're used to at 45-degrees and has stream passage the whole 4000 feet. Half of that is only caved by scuba. We walked about 2000 feet in water that was, at times, thigh-high.

Some pristine flowstone and draperies decorate the cave, and the gate is an awesome spiderweb design that includes a metal spider of menacing size. Nancy offered the sweater she was wearing to a young gal who was cold but she would not accept it. Instead she borrowed Greg's extra base layer and hat. She was among the first to get out and get warm. Our frozen, numb toes thawed quickly.

We joined Sue Biggers in **Secret Caverns** - an entertaining show cave. At the powerful waterfall a gal tilted back her head and opened her mouth wide to drink some of the spray. We shook our heads. In the gift shop a caver guy asked me, "Have you been to the men's room?" I gave him a look. "Follow me," he said. Fortunately, his wife came along. Wow; the art is truly unique! All over, in every nook and cranny, are amusing painted characters, scenes and messages. The decorations and paintings inside and out of the gift shop, along with the cave's waterfall made up for the lack of formations and the 103 steps.



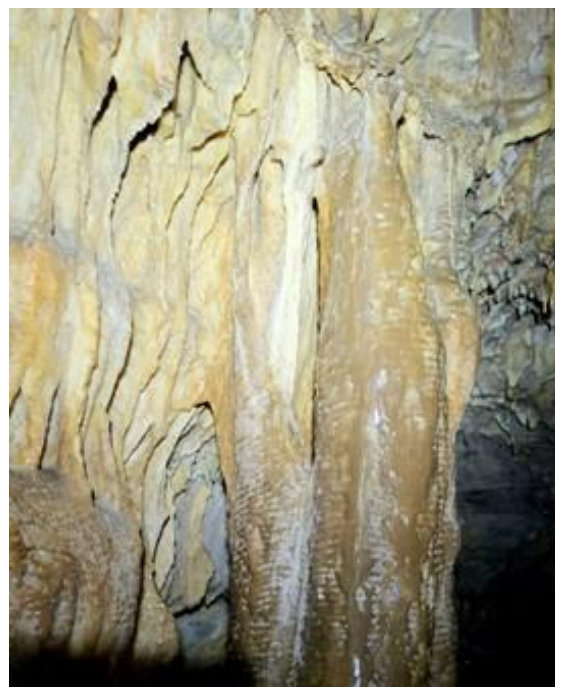
More Highlights of this NSS Convention:

- Using the air-conditioning, refrigerator, propane stove, awning, comfy bed and toilet that our little camper provides
- Hiking several nature preserves, some with waterfalls. At Vroman's Nose every intersection of the trail had a map, making it difficult to get lost.
- Hanging out and playing cards with friends
- Enjoying the photo salon...when it finally showed
- Buying a couple of books at the Catnap bookstore
- Dancing to 3 great bands at the campground
- Attending some fascinating sessions
- Shopping convention vendors
- Getting relief from the heat; the last 2 days were cool and breezy.

Next year's NSS Convention will be in Corydon, Indiana July 6-10, and in 2027 it may be in Texas.

Biking and Dellinger's Cave along C and O Canal 6/29/25

Photo Credits: Jeff Jahn



Ice Cave and Ape Cave in Gifford Pinchot National Forest

Washington, the Evergreen State

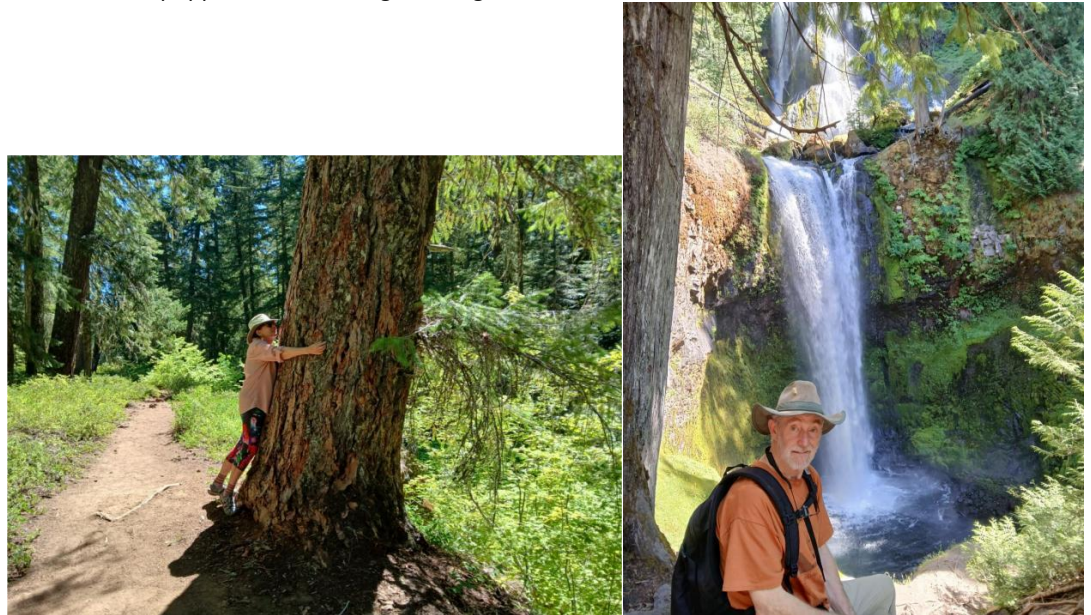
July 12 -14

Lauren and Greg

Escaping the rain and high humidity of Virginia, Greg and I visited my friend, Cathy, in Vancouver for a few days then rented a portable cabin in a campground with 40 such cabins. We were about 20 minutes from the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. It was warm but a lot less humid and no rain. We packed in many attractions during that week such as natural bridges, waterfalls and forests of huge, lichen-draped trees. I will just note a few attractions here.



From camp we traveled between the spectacles of snow-covered Mt. Hood and Mt. Adams. Over some washboard, potholed roads we found our way to **Ice Cave**. Inside, wearing our caving helmets, we walked and climbed over lava rock passing globs of ice. Daylight became visible at the other end. Though we didn't expect it, we did a thru-trip of about 400 feet. Short but fun and my first lava tube. We popped outside to a gazillion gnats.



On the way to Ape Cave there it was...majestic, snow-covered Mt. St. Helens. In the same woods we walked a 1/4 mile boardwalk loop to view tree molds. "Bring a flashlight," the sign said. We entered the biggest one of the **tree molds** - formed by lava - down a ladder then lighted the length to the right and to the left. It's a 50-foot tube that was once a mighty tree. Not a cave, but close.



Ape cave is the longest lava tube in North America at 12,810 feet. It was formed 2000 years ago from an eruption of lava which flowed for 3-6 months.

The only ones with lights on helmets, we got some curious looks. A sign asked that we clean our shoes on the brushes provided, both before entering and after leaving the cave, to help mitigate white-nose syndrome. The lava tube is immense with the ceiling reaching 50 feet, and it's a chilly 42-degrees. We were moving fast. The story goes that in 1947 a logger nearly drove his tractor into the entrance. Members of a local outdoor club named the Mount St. Helen's Apes explored the cave in the 1950s.

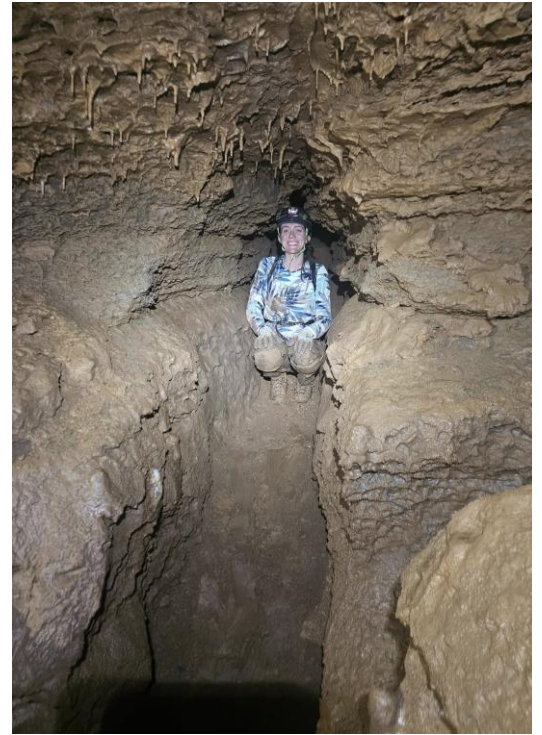
Back at the cabin which was well equipped, even with a packet of S'mores-for-Two, we grilled dinner and waited for our guest to arrive. The campground had only 3 rules, one of which was to "speak softly and don't play music outside." There was no rule saying, "Don't feed the animals." So it felt OK to gift a visiting chipmunk with some cherry seeds and a few raspberries.

Glade Cave 7/6/25

By Caitlin Vittitow

Day started at 12pm where the group of fearless cavers met up at the 7/11 in Bridgewater, VA. Our fearless leader, Eric, had a list of names and he checked it twice. We were ready. The group rolled out at around 12:17pm after a very kind gas man informed us if we didn't leave right that second, we'd be stuck for 45 mins while he refilled the gas reservoirs.

Glade Cave is located in a cow field out in picturesque Virginia farmland. The landowners have a knack for swinging by whenever we arrive and when we are about to leave. Friendly folk, seem happy to see us there. Around 12:40pm we were underground. The cave is in an unassuming part of the field, one wouldn't know it was there. The Descent is gradual but steady. With the recent rains it was a bit muddier and slicker than usual. Portions of the cave were flooded to include the Pool Room which is typically navigable but now resembled more of a Lake. A couple of highlights include myself and Jeanie taking a plunge here and there (unable to cross the access points) and newcomer Jane leading the charge up a tight optional route. What a pro already. Everyone came out a lot muddier than when they went in. Time out was approximately 3:40pm with dinner at a local Mexican joint wrapping up at approximately 5pm.



GLADE CAVE

Above: Jane squeezes into passage Above Right: Cora loving the mud!

Below: The lake room Below Right: Caitlin wading through unusually high water.

(Photo Credits: Caitlin and Isaiah Vittitow)



BITS & BREAKDOWN

 **Knots for Cave Rescue Training**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=saaefhy5xXY>

 **Congratulations to Jace and Kaitlyn on the birth of their son Zayn 5/2/25!**


Submitted by Lauren McCoy:

How the Trees on Summer Nights Turn into a Dark River

by [Barbara Crooker](#)

how you can never reach it, no matter how hard you try,
 walking as fast as you can, but getting nowhere,
 arms and legs pumping, sweat drizzling in rivulets;
 each year, a little slower, more creaks and aches, less breath.
 Ah, but these soft nights, air like a warm bath, the dusky wings
 of bats careening crazily overhead, and you'd think the road
 goes on forever. Apollinaire wrote, "What isn't given to love
 is so much wasted," and I wonder what I haven't given yet.
 A thin comma moon rises orange, a skinny slice of melon,
 so delicious I could drown in its sweetness. Or eat the whole
 thing, down to the rind. Always, this hunger for more.

"How the Trees on Summer Nights Turn into a Dark River," by Barbara Crooker from *More*. © C & R Press, 2010.

 **Want to join me in supporting a good cause? I'm raising money for Central Appalachian Cave Rescue Team and your contribution will make an impact, whether you donate \$5 or \$500. Every little bit helps. Thank you for your support. I've included information about Central Appalachian Cave Rescue Team below. Cave Rescue Team serving the mid-atlantic area. We are an LLC and a 501(c)3 Cheryl Rudolph•August 18, 2025 <https://www.cacrt.com/>**

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Thursday, Sept 11-** 7PM grotto meeting at Box Office Brewery in Strasburg.
- **2025 NSS Perkins Cave Preserve Open house September 12-14**
Register online at <https://form.jotform.com/252197072658162> as well as submitting the online release form required for visiting. The link is <https://permits.saveyourcaves.org/release-form.html...>
You should receive a confirmation email once the form is submitted. There will be a cookout Saturday evening (BYOB).. Guided cave trips into Perkins Cave will take place Saturday morning/afternoon, according to demand and available trip leaders. There are also other caves in the area which are open to visitation, and the Channels Natural area is just up the road.
- **September 20-** Shenandoah County Cave Survey contact Carol Tideman if interested ctider@ymail.com
- **Sunday, September 21-** trip to Long Lead a non-commercial section of Skyline Caverns. Contact Jeff if interested gsci75@gmail.com
- **September 26-28** – Fall Mid-Appalachian Region (MAR)- Lincoln Caverns and Whisper Rocks Huntingdon County, PA Hosted By: Nittany Grotto mar.caves.org
- **October 3-5-** PSC is having its annual Fall costume caving party at the Lutz Fieldstation in Pocahontas County WV. If you have any questions, email Cheryl Suitor at cavefox216@gmail.com
- **October 4-** trip to Silers Cave. Contact Jeff if interested gsci75@gmail.com
- **Oct 17-19** – Fall Virginia Region (VAR) -Rass Field Station Millboro, VA. Hosted by VAR Officers. <https://var.caves.org/index.php/events/fall-var>
- **Oct 18-** Bridge Day New River Gorge Bridge Fayetteville, WV 46th Anniversary www.officialbridgeday.com
- **January 22-25, 2026** – Winter Adventure Weekend at Carter Caves State Resort Park <https://winteradventureweekend.com/>