

The Caver's Resource Workshop

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Abstract

In 1997 and 1998, Rob Robbins and the Southport Chronic Cavers developed a prototype for a Caver's Resource Workshop, the first of which was held at Fall Creek Falls State Park in Tennessee in March, 1998. The workshop was a response to a perceived need to help cavers become aware of, and be able to work with, various professionals and agencies involved in the study and management of caves. After extensive planning, the workshop was attended by more than fifty persons and produced positive results. This model can be usefully emulated in other sections of the country to further exchanges of information and cooperation between cavers and resource professionals and agencies.

History

During the fall of 1997, Rob Robbins was involved in the cleanup of Hubbards Cave in Warren County, Tennessee. This specific cave contains not only a biological significant population of the gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*) but also some very significant historical artifacts.

Having been a caver off and on for many years and with very little organized caving, Rob was unaware of the scope of the contents of caves and how to go about protecting their contents as outlined in the National Speleological Society's Conservation Policy that follows:

NSS Conservation Policy

The National Speleological Society believes: That caves have unique scientific, recreational, and scenic values; That these values are endangered by both carelessness and intentional vandalism; That these values, once gone, can not be recovered; and That the responsibility for protecting caves must be assumed by those who study and enjoy them.

Accordingly, the intention of the Society is to work for the preservation of caves with a realistic policy supported by effective programs for: the encouragement of self-discipline among cavers; education and research concerning the causes and prevention of cave damage; and special projects, including cooperation with other groups similarly dedicated to the conservation of natural areas. Specifically:

All contents of a cave—formations, life, and loose deposits—are significant for its enjoyment and interpretation. Therefore, caving parties should leave a cave as they find it. They should provide means for the removal of waste; limit marking to a few small and removable signs as are needed for surveys; and, especially, exercise extreme care not to accidentally break or soil formations, disturb life forms, or unne-

cessarily increase the number of disfiguring paths through an area.

Scientific collection is professional, selective, and minimal. The collecting of mineral or biological material for display purposes, including previously broken or dead specimens, is never justified as it encourages others to collect and destroys the interest of the cave.

The Society encourages projects such as: establishing cave preserves; placing entrance gates where appropriate; opposing the sale of speleothems, supporting effective protective measures; cleaning and restoring over-used caves; cooperating with private cave owners by providing knowledge about their cave and assisting them in protecting their cave and property from damage during cave visits; and encouraging commercial cave owners to make use of their opportunity to aid the public in understanding caves and the importance of their conservation.

Where there is reason to believe that publication of cave locations will lead to vandalism before adequate protection can be established, the Society will oppose publication.

It is the duty of every Society member to take personal responsibility for spreading a con-

sciousness of the cave conservation problem to each potential user of caves. Without this, the beauty and value of our caves will not long remain with us.

The Plan

It was at a bat flight count in late September 1997 that a talk with Geary Schindel, then of the Nashville Grotto, brought to light the concept of a workshop where cavers and scientist could get together sharing information. We hoped that the scientists from many fields would enlighten cavers as to their particular interest in caves, enlisting the cavers' aid. It would become a two-way street where the cavers would learn what to look for and whom to contact and the scientist would gain more help in the way of eyes in the various caves.

The first thoughts were to keep it reasonably priced and centrally located to better benefit the majority of the cavers in the area. Accommodations were also taken in account for those having to travel. To keep the price reasonable, the only payment for the speakers was that lunch would be provided for them.

The Preparation

As soon as a date, time, and location were ascertained, the Southport Chronic Cavers set out to contact numerous scientists and organizations they thought might be interested in participating. It was astounding the replies received. "Why hasn't this been thought of before?" to "I'd be more than pleased to participate. What do I need to bring?" More speakers than time were invited to participate. As it ended up, there were 18 speakers with each being allotted only 20 minutes as we only had the conference room at Fall Creek Falls State Park near Pikeville, Tennessee, for just the one day.

Each speaker was requested to submit a brief biography and outline of his presentation. Audio-visual equipment was to be supplied by Fall Creek Falls State Park. The brief biographies and outlines were used to prepare a handout booklet containing all the pertinent information.

The Presentation

On Saturday, March 14, 1998 the first ever Cavers' Resource Workshop was under way in a conference room at Fall Creek Falls State Park. The following speakers put on a program for the cavers that was second to none. Ground

was broken for an unheard of cooperation between those in attendance and the presenters. There were many slide presentations and handouts along with question and answer periods.

The Workshop was broken into four sections:

Government and Cave Preservation
Bob Hatcher - TWRA/Endangered Species Coordinator

Bob Currie - USFWS/Federal Endangered Species Act

David Withers - Natural Heritage/Zoologist

T. Hill Henry - TVA/Zoologist

Humans and the Cave Environment

Dr. Jan Simek - UT/Knoxville/Anthropologist

Nick Fielder - State of Tennessee/Archaeologist

Joe Douglas - VSCC/Historian

Cave Fauna

Dr Michael Harvey - Tennessee Tech/Biologist/bats

Dr Ronald Caldwell - Lincoln Memorial University/Biologist/Tennessee Cave Salamanders

Dr Thomas Barr - UK/Lexington Ret/Biologist/cave beetles

Non-governmental Organizations, Cave Preservation, Research and Stewardship

Helen Galloway - The Cumberland Spelean Association

Geary Schindel - The Southeastern Cave Conservancy

Beth Guidera - The Tennessee Nature Conservancy

Stuart Carroll - Fall Creek Falls/Naturalist

At the end of the program, a standing ovation for the presenters was given to show appreciation for their participation. The total cost to the cavers attending was \$8.00 plus the cost of their food and lodging should they have decided to spend the night.

Understanding the need for more trust and cooperation, a second Cavers' Resource Workshop is being scheduled for the spring of 2000.

Future Assistance

To set up such a program in your area is really quite simple. You can follow the above example, which also gives clues to the type speaker that may be of interest, or you can be more selective for the exact type of program you wish to put on.