

Minutes of the Kansas City Area Grotto
August 2020 Business Meeting
Held Tuesday, August 18th, 2020 – 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
Meeting Held Remotely on Zoom

The meeting was called to order by president Seth Colston. The following members and guests were present: Nick Anderson, Jen Bell, Tierney Bowman, Seth Colston, Jim Cooley, Julie Cottrell, Ginny Friedrich, Bill Gee, Jennifer Gleason, Kristen Godfrey, Rick Hines, Laura Jaynes, “Jodi”, Jay Kennedy, Nick Kennedy, Jeff Page, Adam Weaver

Black Hills Caving

Adam Weaver of the Paha Sapa Grotto joined us from out of state to give a talk on caving in the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming. Adam’s caving accolades include surveying more than fifty miles of caves in the US, leading nine and participating in twenty-six four-day underground expeditions, and serving as a team member in four eight-day Lechuguilla Cave expeditions. He is the vice president of the National Speleological Society (NSS) and is a member of the Fort Stanton caving team, as well as a long list of caving organizations.

Caving in the Black Hills, Adam explained, is very project-oriented, and there are many opportunities to participate due to the large number of caves and small number of active cavers. One major cave in South Dakota is Jewel Cave, which is currently measured at 208.18 miles long. In 2019, Black Hills cavers led twenty-four exploration trips, in which they surveyed 8.18 miles of the cave and established a new camp, named Holey Hell. Jewell Cave closed in 2019 for construction and has not reopened yet, but in 2020, Adam intends to push leads on the western edge of the cave. There are many long unmapped leads large enough to walk upright through, including one with ceilings greater than one hundred feet high. Jewel Cave has great potential for further project work.

Another major cave in the region is the 155-mile-long Wind Cave. Black Hills cavers led many exploration trips here in the last year and intend to continue exploration when the cave reopens in October. Wind Cave closed in 2019 due to malfunctions in the elevators that serve as the primary entrance, and the closing was extended through 2020 as the coronavirus situation compounded the problems with elevator repair. When they are functional, the elevators make Wind Cave a logistically easier cave to explore than other large caves. Wind Cave has many unsurveyed leads, and Adam hopes to push these next February.

In recent years, much work has been completed in the Black Hills. In one cave, a breakthrough in 2019 in what was previously believed to be a wall led to the discovery of more than 3,000 feet of new cave passages, and a resurvey of the cave has brought its total length to 6.5 miles. Cavers recently completed a resurvey of Mystic Cave, bringing its total length from 2,650 feet to 1.13 miles. Several remapping projects were completed in 2019, including Rainbow Cave, Ice Cave, and Blue Rock Crystal Cave.

Many caves have a lot of work left to do. One of these is Persistence Cave, where cavers are currently using drills to enlarge passages. Reeds Cave, which is located in a rock quarry, is also a subject of recent investigation. Though the quarry is currently active, the Black Hills cavers previously convinced the owners to pause quarrying to allow mapping of the cave, and Adam hopes that cavers will regain access in the near future. Bethlehem Cave, which is distinguished by its large rooms, is Adam’s personal project. Prior to 2019, his grotto had no access, but improved landowner relations have opened the cave back up

to surveying. Bethlehem Cave was originally measured at 3.1 miles, but Adam expects that his resurvey will bring the total size to greater than seven miles.

Two caves are of additional interest: Rainbow Cave's remapping project has been completed, but it is now the location of a long-term archaeological dig, where Adam's wife is investigating Ice Age fossils. Finally, North Cave hints at great depths left to be discovered: The source of the thirty-five mile-per-hour wind that races through the cave has yet to be found, but based on the speed, North Cave may be as large as the 208-mile Jewell Cave. Cavers have dug through extensive piles of rat midden and continue to dig through dirt in search of the source of the wind.

As large and numerous as the known caves of the Black Hills are, the region contains many caves that have yet to be discovered. In 2019, Adam Weaver and Nick Anderson conducted a ridge-walking trip in Bear Canyon in the Black Hills National Forest and found several small caves, including Soda Cave, a "low and crawly" cave that they intend to map later this year. As a part of an additional project known as "Karl's Karst Kanoodling", ten new caves and more than 2,400 sinkholes were found through Lidar imagery, geological expertise, and a lot of hard work. With large areas that have not been searched at all, there is potential for another large cave like Jewell or Wind Cave to be found in South Dakota or Wyoming.

One exciting event in caving in the region is the founding of the Black Hills Cave and Nature Conservancy, a new nonprofit that is now an NSS cave preserve. The BHCNC owns and operates the eight-cave Dark Canyon Cave Preserve. This conservancy has good information on how to get into caving in the Black Hills region, and they can be contacted on their website (blackhillscaves.org/contact-us).

Since many of the largest caves in the Black Hills are closed due to the pandemic, Adam has been turning his focus westward for future caving activities. He is currently planning a trip to the Bighorn Mountains in Wyoming. Wyoming is an ideal place to cave at the moment, since there are few cavers and many open caves in the state.

In addition to his report on Black Hills caving, Adam gave an update on NSS business. The NSS will have a new website up and running by February of 2021, will have new education programs running in the next few months, and has formed new partnerships with some of the largest conservancies in the country, which will give the NSS access to more caves. In addition, the NSS has already added two new preserves this year and expects a third within the next sixth months.

Adam emphasized that the NSS is always in need of volunteers. It is a very large organization, and many of its committees, including the IO (Internal Organizations) committee and the membership committee, need assistance. The annual report committee is in particular need of help, since currently it does not have a single member. Anyone who has an idea or something that they would like to get involved with should email Nick Anderson, the chair of the NSS directorate, or Adam Weaver, who can both then connect volunteers with the relevant NSS members and committees.

Officer Reports:

President: Seth Colston reported that the caves in Missouri are still open even if minimal caving has been taking place. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has updated their protocols to advise wearing a mask while in any cave that contains bats.

Treasurer: Bill Gee reported that there was no significant bank activity in July.

July beginning balance = \$2711.37 (Commerce Bank)

Deposit = \$0.00

Checks = \$0.00

Debit card = \$0.00

Bank fee = \$5.00

End balance = \$2706.37

Activity:

Income: \$0.00

Expenses: \$0.00

Bank fee = \$5.00

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July beginning balance = \$427.16 (Paypal)

End balance = \$427.16

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July beginning balance = \$67.00 (petty cash)

End balance = \$67.00

Vice President: Jim Cooley reported that all is fine underground. No other updates.

Secretary: The May meeting minutes were accepted. No other updates.

Quartermaster: The digital quartermaster's list will be available in the future. Until then, contact Seth Colston or Bill Gee to borrow gear.

Fundraising: No updates. Contact Seth Colston (swcy92@gmail.com) or Bill Gee (bgee@campercaver.net) for more information.

Presentations: A fair number of people have postponed presentations until they can be held in person, so KCAG is in need of presenters for future meetings. Please contact Seth Colston at swcy92@gmail.com if you are interested in giving a meeting presentation or have a topic idea.

Carroll Cave Conservancy: The two to three-hour CCC annual meeting occurred on July 25th via Zoom. As noted in the July minutes, the new president is Jeff Page, the vice president is Jay Kennedy, the secretary is Bill Gee, and the treasurer is Kristen Godfrey.

The Springfield Plateau Grotto has recently made a significant donation to the CCC in honor of Pic Walenta, KCAG's late president, to fund the campground project that she would have worked on had events gone differently. Jay Kennedy has sent SPG a letter of thanks. Jay additionally reported that since no one at the meeting could think of any major downsides, the CCC intends to share the cave maps with the public on their website if Bill, Rick, and others can work out the technical details.

Rick Hines noted with pleasure that the CCC does now have workable maps due to improvements that have taken place over the last few months. He has applied for a grant to get the ArcGIS software for CCC members: This software will make possible many new map features, including multiple layers, panning, zooming, photos and data linked to specific locations, and options for exporting and sharing the maps.

Bill Gee, Seth Colston, and Jim Cooley recently talked with Vona Kuczynska, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) gray bat specialist, and Laurel Hill, a USFWS cave fish specialist, and learned that CCC may potentially be loaned a sonic detector for bats, which would greatly improve the accuracy of Carroll Cave's bat counts.

Missouri Speleological Survey (MSS) and Missouri Caves and Karst Conservancy (MCKC): Jim Cooley reported that the January MSS meeting is still up in the air but added via email that he MSS Fall meeting, and probably the MCKC meeting as well, will be held at Berome Moore Cave in Perry County, Missouri on September 27th. There will probably be caving in Berome, the second longest cave in Missouri, on Saturday the 26th. This will be an in-person meeting with no Zoom component.

International Year of Caves and Karst (2021): Contact Seth Colston if you have ideas presentations or want to lead a trip in 2021.

NSS update: See presentation notes for Adam Weaver's updates.

MVOR: KCAG and MoBat will no longer be holding an MVOR in fall 2020. Seth will have more information within the next few months on whether KCAG will reschedule to fall 2021 or 2020 or cancel the MVOR plans altogether.

Novice and Scout Trips: Jim Cooley suggested a novice trip to Cleveland Cave over Labor Day, but this tentative trip was dropped in favor of the KCAG trip to Lewis Cave (see details below).

Hickory County: Gary Johnson was not present, but Jim predicts that Gary's yearly landowner trip in October has most likely been cancelled.

Cloud 9 Ranch: No updates from Lee Krout. Jim is waiting to finish up his pending cartography before he returns to Cloud 9 to do more map QC.

Stark Caverns Survey Project: The most recent survey trip occurred back in June, as recounted in the July meeting minutes. Bill Gee had considered a trip to Stark Caverns in early August but has postponed this due to virus-related concerns.

Old Spanish Cave Restoration Project: No updates.

Cave Spring Park Association: No updates.

Devil's Icebox: The trips scheduled in September are still proceeding, but these trips will be socially distanced, with one person per canoe instead of two. Kristen Godfrey noted that Roxy has not completed the trip roster, but most likely trips will be limited to one per person.

Seth Colston reported that earlier this year, during the spring, he helped put a safety fence around a sinkhole in Hog's Graveyard at Devil's Icebox.

White Nose Syndrome: See <https://caves.org/WNS/> for the most current map of the spread of WNS.

MeetUp: Contact Seth Colston (swcy92@gmail.com) or DJ Hall (rangerdjhall@gmail.com) to add trips to the MeetUp schedule.

New Membership Nominations: None.

Trip Reports and Other News:

On Labor Day weekend, from Saturday September 5th through Monday September 7th, KCAG held a socially-distanced trip for KCAG members to Lewis Cave in Ripley County. Lewis Cave is about a six-hour drive from Kansas City, and is between Van Buren and Doniphan on Highway C. One additional nearby cave was be monitored under the auspices of the Cave Research Foundation (CRF).

Jeff Page noted that the August NSS magazine included a tribute to Pic Walenta. This tribute is now on the CCC website. Seth has emailed out a copy via the KCAG email list.

Seth Colston and Jim Cooley visited Stallcup Cave with Max White, Tyler Skaggs and two Oklahoma cavers, Steve and Rebecca Obermark, to construct what was designed as a 22-foot-tall ladder up the "Jacob's Ladder" pitch in the cave. The new ladder is 19 feet tall, is anchored to the wall, and was constructed from lumber donated by Jim. They also dug a squeeze open so that Jim, and now pretty much anybody, can get into the large passages in the back of the cave beyond Jacob's Ladder. In addition, the group surveyed 1,100 feet, including 625 feet of the interior, out of the (wildly) estimated half mile of total cave passage. There will be more survey trips to this cave in the future, as the landowners are very caver-friendly. There is much yet to map within the cave.

Seth Colston, Jim Cooley, and Vona Kuczynska participated in a gray bat colony assessment and survey trip to Slough Bottom Cave. This cave was tracked down by Ken Grush after he found mention of it in the "Caves and Mines" Facebook Group. Slough Bottom was believed to be a gray bat maternity site, so gating had been considered in the past. But it is now known not to be a maternity site, so it falls way down the priority list for being gated. The cave is around 500 feet long but has a lot of vertical relief. The survey was not completed, so more trips will occur in the future. The cave is on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property, but the adjacent landowner is very caver-friendly, even allowing cavers to stay in his extra trailer.

Jim gave a list of miscellaneous updates: First, he has been asked by Scott House to design gates for four caves in Mark Twain Nation Forest. He has also been contacted by the Missouri Department of Conservation on behalf of the chief of natural resources at Fort Leonard Wood about gating fourteen caves that contain Native American archaeological sites, some of which have experienced vandalism. This project will be funded by the Corps of Engineers. Third, Bill and Jim have talked to a consulting firm that is in contact about commercial development with the owner of a private, abandoned KC-area limestone mine. Bill and Jim might do a bat assessment in this mine and potentially survey the mine as well. Lastly, Jim reports that there may be other potential mapping projects of KC mines.

Additionally, Jim described a small project that he worked on with Vona Kuczynska, the USFWS gray bat national restoration coordinator. The Bagnell Dam, the dam that creates the Lake of the Ozarks, has an interior space (void) directly below the roadway that, as it turns out, hosts a colony of thousands of endangered gray bats. The Missouri Department of Transportation intends to completely remove and replace the roadway in an upcoming renovation project, so Vona was contacted to assess and report on endangered bat status before construction begins. Interestingly, Jim noted, though gray bats are supposed to be prone to a self-defeating behavior known as “panicked flight,” the bats in the void inside Bagnell Dam show little or no reaction to the deafening sound of the cars passing on the roadway directly above.

New Business:

Seth proposes that KCAG September business meeting be held in person outdoors, with social distancing and masks both in use. Some discussion of this possibility occurred, with Jim supporting the continuation of the Zoom meetings and Kristen Godfrey suggesting a hybrid meeting with both in-person and Zoom components. Two potential locations were suggested: Rick Hines volunteered his house, which KCAG members know as the traditional location of the summer picnic and Christmas party, and Jeff Page suggested a more centrally-located park with pavilions at 95th and Nall.

As of September 8, Seth has announced that the September KCAG meeting will be held both in-person and online on September 15th. The online component will begin at 6:30 via Zoom, while the in-person component will take place in the Roe Park Shelter at 6 pm. The shelter will be disinfected prior to the meeting, and attendees will be required to wear masks. To RSVP for pizza (available for a cost of five dollars per person), visit the following link: <https://forms.gle/VBevFnUp4qU4XrJM6>

Unfinished Business: Seth Colston confirmed that there was no unfinished business. The meeting adjourned with, as is now normal, a tragic lack of in-person pizza and conversations.

Upcoming Trips and Events

COVID-19 update: Some restrictions have been lifted. Restrictions or not, please make your own decision regarding your own health. The caves are not going anywhere.

September 15th – KCAG September business meeting

Held online via Zoom at 6:30 pm

Held in-person at the Roe Park Shelter at 6:00 pm

RSVP here for pizza: <https://forms.gle/VBevFnUp4qU4XrJM6>

October 16-20 - Devil's Backbone Wilderness (DBW) backpacking, camping and survey. Contact Shawn Williams for more information. sosifr@yahoo.com, 314-583-7039. DBW is in Ozark County, Missouri. The plan calls for surveying five caves.

October 24 - Carroll Cave annual bat census trip.

All day at Carroll Cave. This is a difficult and strenuous trip. Wetsuit required! Contact Bill Gee bgee@campercaver.net for more information.