

The FLOWSTONE

Vol 25 Issue 5

May 2018



Submissions Needed!

A Monthly Newsletter of the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society

CULLMAN GROTTO FLOWSTONE

May 2018

Volume 25 Issue 5



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Visit us: www.cullmangrotto.org or facebook

The Flowstone is published monthly by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Items submitted for publication must be received by the 20th of each month for inclusion in the following month's issue.

The Cullman Grotto will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of items within **The Flowstone** is allowed provided credit is given to author and source.

Membership to the Cullman Grotto is fifteen dollars (\$15) per year for individual or twenty dollars (\$20) per year for family. Dues are payable at the first grotto meeting of each year (January) and includes subscription to **The Flowstone**. Subscription rate for non-members is fifteen dollars (\$15) per year.

The Cullman Grotto meets on the first Monday of each month unless the first Monday falls on a holiday or otherwise noted. In those cases the meeting will be held on the second Monday. Meetings begin at 7:30 p.m. and are held at the old L&N train depot, Arnold St., Cullman, AL. All visitors and prospective members are welcome.

Official Grotto Address

Cullman Grotto
c/o Harold Calvert
123 Co. Rd. 250
Cullman, AL 35057
webecavers@hotmail.com

Newsletter Exchange

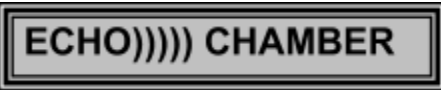
The Flowstone
Sharon or Perry Clayton
1628 Edmondson Rd
Hanceville, AL 35077
dcpbookwyrms@hotmail.com



2018 OFFICERS		APPOINTMENTS	
<p>Chairman Harold Calvert (256)287-9770 webecavers@hotmail.com</p>	<p>Vice Chair Scott Murphy smoothys1@gmail.com</p>	<p>Advisor Vic Bradford <i>by carrier pigeon only</i></p>	<p>Membership/Library David Drake (205)790-1350 dmdrake1@gmail.com</p>
<p>Secretary Evon Thompson binerbat@gmail.com</p>	<p>Treasurer Tracy Calvert webecavers@hotmail.com</p>	<p>Safety Jeff Lynn (256) 558-7042</p>	<p>Webmaster Kuenn Drake kuenn.drake@gmail.com</p>

Front Cover: *A desperate plea!*

Photo by: *Your friendly editor*



US Exploration Session Accepting Abstracts for 2018 Convention

By: Will Urbanski
will.urbanski@gmail.com



The US Exploration Session is accepting submissions to be presented at the 2018 NSS Convention, to be held July 28 – August 3, 2018 in Helena, MT. Every year the US Exploration Sessions feature presentations, photos, and videos from cavers exploring new areas or continuing projects in caves and karst located in the United States.

Please include the title of the presentation, and the name(s), address(es), and email address(es) of the authors(s) or presenter(s). Be informative in your summaries including who, where, why, and keep it below 250 words. Final presentations should include photos, maps, and short videos whenever possible!

The deadline for abstracts is May 15, 2018. Early submissions are encouraged and confirmations will be sent to all applicants. Details on presentation times, dates, and all other pertinent information will be sent to all accepted presenters after the deadline. Talks generally run for twenty minutes and include a Q&A at the closing.

For online details about the convention visit:
<http://nss2018.caves.org/>.

To submit your talk visit:
[https://nationalspeleologicalsociety.s
ubmittable.com/submit](https://nationalspeleologicalsociety.submittable.com/submit)



NSS Spring Appeal Letter 2018

By Geary Schindel & William N. Jackson



Tear down the house. Turn it into a cave preserve. The NSS owns a house across the street from the old HQ on Cave Ave, known as “the white house”. We need to tear it down. The house is on top of Shelta cave, the Lake Room. Once removed the lot will become part of the Shelta Cave Preserve and will initially be a grassy field.

The white house has been used for storage of books, documents, and equipment. Now that we have a wonderful new headquarters with more space, the white house is empty and no longer needed. It is in poor repair, but we have kept the outside reasonably clean and the grass cut. Now the City of Huntsville, based on a complaint, has inspected the property and issued a notice to make repairs to be in compliance with code. Failure to comply will result in a heavy daily fine and possible imprisonment. (The EC has discussed who that would be, and it seems the President is up first.)

The Board has known that this expense would be necessary, but this has come on suddenly and sooner than expected. Funds for this are not in the current budget. The current estimate for complete removal and

making it into a grassy field is \$19,800. This is made more expensive by the need for asbestos abatement.

Why not sell? Good question. Are you in the market? The Board had decided some years ago that the long range plan for the house would be to eventually remove it and turn the lot into part of the cave preserve to keep with our commitment to cave preservation and conservation. To sell the house to a third party would leave it open for any kind of rezoning and pollution. Additionally, even if we did want to sell it, it is unlikely that the property would move in current condition except to a buyer with intent to tear it down and build something else on the land. We want to have control since it is over our cave.

What will we do? The EC with the Secretary-Treasurer will find some money to do the job, but it must be repaid to the respective accounts to keep on budget for the year. We will solicit among the Board and expect to get some money there, although many Board members already give to the NSS to other areas. We are looking for grant monies, but this is not promising and in any event will not be fast. Now we solicit our members to assist in carrying out this project.

Can you give for this good cause? Give by sending a check to NSS HQ or going to the website caves.org/donate/. There is an online donation form, on the drop down menu select Nature Preserves Fund. Any money left over from the demolition project will go for maintenance of the many NSS cave preserves. Or donate by PayPal by pressing the yellow DONATE button with characteristic PayPal color scheme. Be sure to write in the purpose of your donation when giving through PayPal. Or from your

own PayPal account you can send money to S-T@caves.org.

Thank you for you for support of our organization, and goals, the NSS.



First Bat Removed From U.S. Endangered Species List

By Michael Greshko
Published April 17, 2018
[National Geographic](#)



In a conservation first made possible by volunteers, scientists, and a splash of tequila, the lesser long-nosed bat is no longer endangered—the first U.S. bat species to officially recover from the imminent threat of extinction.

“The science clearly shows threats to the bat have been eliminated or reduced to the point that the bat has recovered,” said Amy Lueders, the southwest regional director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in a statement. “The Service is proud of our strong, decades-long partnerships with very diverse stakeholders on behalf of the lesser long-nosed bat. Without partnerships and collaborations such as these, successful recovery would not be possible.”

The lesser long-nosed bat is one of three bat species in the United States that feeds on nectar. One of the species’s major subpopulations migrates between the United States and Mexico. They mate and wait out the winter in southern and central

Mexico, roosting together by the thousands to keep warm. In the spring, they migrate north to northern Mexico and southern Arizona, giving birth in many-female “maternity caves.”

The bats colonize a string of caves and abandoned mines along an agave-rich “nectar trail” from southern Mexico to Arizona. For decades, these roosts—and the bats within them—were under serious threat.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, drug and human traffickers operating on the U.S.-Mexico border regularly made use of the caves, disturbing the bats and sometimes killing them outright. Recreational cavers also spooked the bats, and vandals harassed them.

What’s more, Mexico’s efforts to control vampire bats—which can transmit rabies—had too often spilled over into killing other bat species. And the bats’ favorite foods, the pollen and nectar from agave plants and cacti, were getting harder and harder to find.

These various indignities took their toll. When the species was declared endangered in 1988, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that the bats were down to fewer than a thousand individuals, strewn across only 14 known roosts in the U.S. and Mexico.

BINATIONAL BATS

For the last three decades, however, the U.S. and Mexico have cooperated to bring the lesser long-nosed bat back from the brink. Now, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that there are some 200,000 bats living in at least 75 roosts between the two countries.

“This is a great example of binational conservation collaboration—of

people working on both sides of the border to not just monitor but also take actions to protect this species,” says National Geographic explorer Winifred Frick, the chief scientist for Bat Conservation International.

Government agencies in the U.S. and Mexico worked to protect agaves and other food sources, such as saguaros. Conservation groups built “bat gates” that prevented humans from entering caves and abandoned mines that the bats had made their home. And volunteers across southern Arizona regularly called in whenever the bats fed on their hummingbird feeders, giving scientists regular updates on the animals’ range.

In 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommended relabeling the lesser long-nosed bat from endangered to threatened. In 2008, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature made a similar move, upgrading the species from Vulnerable to Near Threatened status. And by 2015, Mexico removed the bat from its endangered species list.

In January 2017, the U.S. first announced its intent to follow suit, a decision finalized on April 17, Bat Appreciation Day. Officials have drafted a plan to monitor the bat species, to be sure that its recovery sticks—an effort buoyed by Mexico’s tequila producers.

BAT-FRIENDLY TEQUILA

To make tequila from agave, the plant must be harvested before it flowers, to ensure that the plant’s valuable sugars remain in its piña, its iconic, spiky base. Bats can’t feed on these flowerless agave—a cruel irony, since bats are agave’s natural pollinators.

National Geographic explorer Rodrigo Medellín, who has tirelessly worked to conserve the lesser

long-nosed bat, has helped solve this quandary. A program he recently started certifies tequila producers as “bat-friendly” if they let some of their agave plants flower, effectively serving them up as bat food.

These and other efforts will be needed to secure a future for the lesser long-nosed bat, as well as its relatives. Frick emphasizes that the Mexican long-nosed bat, a closely related species, remains endangered—in large part because it has a less flexible, agave-heavy diet than the lesser long-nosed bat.

“We can fully celebrate [the delisting] as a conservation win,” says Frick. “But we also need to be paying attention to species that aren’t in as good a position.”



Student Organizations Lose University Recognition After Risk Analysis Review

By Steve Connelly

[Onward State](#)

4/18/18

The Penn State Outing Club, Nittany Grotto Caving Club, and the SCUBA Club will no longer be recognized by the university after a Campus Recreation review deemed that the trio of on-campus organizations’ activities posed an unacceptable amount of risk to its student members.

“Campus Recreation made the decision to proactively evaluate its supported organizations, with the main goal being to keep student safety as the top priority for these groups and their activities,” Penn State spokeswoman Lisa Powers provided in a statement.

Following the review, the university recommended changes to 20

registered student organizations, including the three ousted orgs, based on the criteria below:

- *Environment and location of organization activities

- *Access to emergency facilities and distance to medical care

- *Risk associated with various types of impact likely in an activity

- *Impact the equipment used in an activity has on the risk of an activity (For example, life-sustaining apparatuses are higher risk than equipment like helmets, gloves, rackets, etc.)

Members of the organizations stated that they were informed of this decision at a meeting two weeks ago.

Michael Lacey, president of the Caving Club, felt that this was a long time coming for his organization. He said Nittany Grotto was removed from the club sports umbrella, along with other non-competitive sports, and into Adventure Recreation in the fall of 2017, which cost the organization direct funding opportunities. Lacey wasn’t made aware of this switch until he attended a club sports presidents meeting. With the move to Adventure Recreation, members of the organization also needed to go through increased safety certification in the months before the university’s decision to disaffiliate with the club.

“If you think about it, they moved us under their grasp, if you will, in the beginning of the fall semester. And then they waited all the way until a month from the end of the academic year to say, ‘Oh yeah, you’re no longer a thing,’” Lacey said. “There’s no time to fight it because finals is coming up and everyone’s busy, and they didn’t describe [the review] at all. It was super vague.

“The people they sent to tell us weren’t the people that made the

decision. It was less of a meeting and more of an assertion, like, ‘Oh yeah, this is what’s going on,’ and we’re like, ‘Oh, great.’ You can’t argue with them because they’re not the ones who made the decision.”

These organizations have a long history attached to Penn State.

Nittany Grotto has been a resource that introduced students to caving with regularly scheduled Wednesday trips for 70 years, while the Outing Club is nearing the century mark in bringing students together hiking, backpacking, kayaking, and enjoying the outdoors in whatever capacity possible.

“Losing affiliation with the university as a recognized student organization or club sport at Penn State means losing all privileges granted to a student organization,” Outing Club president Christina Platt said via email. “These privileges include the ability to reserve rooms to meet on campus, to be protected with \$1,000,000 liability insurance, to use ASA to manage club funds, to fundraise through special university funding opportunities (such as stadium cleanup), to recruit at the Involvement Fair, and to use the university name on merchandise.”

While these clubs are no longer affiliated with the university, Penn State says it is meeting with the officers and advisers of these organizations to discuss the transition and figure how the university can “still support its goals.”

The Outing Club said it’s working with Penn State officials and making progress in finding its role in the student activities landscape. The Caving Club is still backed by a community-based caving organization that brings the student organization together with non-students interested in the area.

TAG Calendar

May 7

Grotto Meeting

L&N Train Depot, Arnold St 7:30PM

May 19

Grotto Trip

Gourdneck Cave

Contact Harold Calvert for details

May 10-19

NCRC National Training Seminar

Camp Skyline - Mentone, AL

July 28 - August 4

2018 NSS Convention

Helena, MT



(Editor's Note: In the absence of any new trip reports or articles this month, I am re-printing a report from the past. Seriously, people, I KNOW some of you are caving...send me some content, please!!!)

We'll Turn Back Now

By: Patrick O'Diam

From the September 2004 Flowstone

"Do you guys ever get to a point where you say, 'Okay, this is it. We'll turn back now.?' " asked Tom as he looked up to the top of a particularly difficult and muddy climb he was about to ascend. His long silence was finally broken as the reality of where he really was began to sink in.

"Well, sure, we say that sometimes," Micah responded, but then added

with a laugh, "but we rarely listen to ourselves when we say that. We keep going anyways."

"That is what I was starting to think," Tom said in a quiet tone.

Over the past two months, I have done more caving than I have done for the last two years put together. David kept asking for a trip report. From Limrock Blowing to Ledbetter Saltpeter, and from hikes in the Bankhead Forest to hanging from a pulley in my backyard, I just didn't have anything that sparked my writing desire. It was true that I had been on quite a few trips, but they were surrounded by normal events. The most unusual things about the trips were the large numbers of ticks and rattlers and other snakes I kept encountering. After pushing the passages in Valhalla for an hour or so, I knew I finally had the events I had been looking for in order to take the time to put the events down on paper. I had also hoped this would get David off my back about the trip report I had been promising him for months.

On June 4th, I had taken Dr. Tom Oliver to Neversink for his first taste of vertical caving. He seemed to really enjoy the experience, and thus started weekly cave trips that each offered a unique experience. We visited War Eagle the following week and enjoyed the borehole passages and the beautiful formations. Next, it was time to see how Tom would do with the exposure of Painted Bluff overlooking the Tennessee River. He seemed to really be enjoying himself, so Micah and I decided to turn it up a notch or two.

About 7:30 on the morning of June 21, Micah, Tom, and I left from my house and headed for Valhalla. Upon arriving and spreading a bag of mulch around the top of the pit, we

dropped a rope and Micah went down to offer a belay for Tom. The day reminded me of my first experience at Valhalla back in the early '90s; the weather was warm, there were large, puffy, white clouds in the sky, and bright beams of sunlight shown down into the pit. From the first time I visited the pit, I fell in love with it and I returned numerous times before its closing. I am so grateful to the SCCi for all their work in obtaining and reopening pits like Neversink and this one. The marker of the two boys that lost their lives when a large rock fell at the bottom of the pit still stands at the top as a reminder of the dangers that are involved with the sport.

As Tom rigged into the rope, I instructed him over the lip and watched him disappear into the pit somewhat quicker than I had expected. After some adjustments under the lip, I listened to the rope sing as he dropped the 227 feet to the floor. I rigged into the rope and made it to the bottom where we left our gear and proceeded into the cave. On a previous trip, Glenn Ledbetter, Micah and I had tried to find the Mega Dome, but did not have a map with us. I'm not for sure where we ended up, but I know we were not close to the Mega Dome. This day, armed with a map, we continued into the cave only to quickly realize we kept ending up in the same room, time after time. I am sure Tom was doubting our caving ability; here we are, not even 10 minutes into the cave, and we find ourselves going in circles.

After climbing up into another passage, we finally determined we were back on the right track and continued through some crawls. This was the first time that Tom had experienced tight spaces in a cave and was unsure about it at first, but started taking a liking to it in a snug

chimney passage. After consulting the map several times and finding an interesting spiral formation (yes, Harold, it really was spiral, but it didn't change colors), we eventually found ourselves in a small room with seemingly no way on, when some purple webbing was spotted going up one of the walls. Tom later told that at this point he was thinking, "Okay, this is it. We'll turn back now." I noticed how quiet he became as I walked over to the webbing and, aided by Micah's back as a climbing brace, headed up the 17 foot climb. After about 10 feet, I had reached a difficult spot where I could not go out and over the rock. Tom, still not a sound coming from his direction, was thinking, "Okay, this is it. He can't make it any further. We'll turn back now." His eyes became quite large as I followed Micah's suggestion to go down and try coming back up through a tight crack in the rock. To Tom's horror, I made it up and he decided he was not going to wimp out without trying. As he squeezed through the crack, the rock was hugging his body tightly and made it difficult to move, but he was able to worm his way up. Micah, still as wiry as ever, scurried up the wall and pushed onward.

With Micah in the lead, he called back to us, "Hey, there's a rope going down. Y'all hang out there and let me go take a look."

Now, at this point, Tom was once again thinking, "Okay, this is it. Surly this rope will be too tough to get down without a rack. We'll turn back now."

It turned out the rope was knotted and dropped only about 15 feet. Micah returned to the bottom of the rope a few minutes later and said, "You can come ahead. I found another rope going back up and I think we should be able to climb it easily enough."

It was at this point, when we were at the bottom of the next drop and looking at the rope and trying to find footholds to aide in our climb, that Tom's thoughts finally exited through his mouth, saying, "Do you guys ever get to a point where you say, 'Okay, this is it. We'll turn back now.?'"

Micah's reply did not seem to comfort Tom very much, but Tom was doing an excellent job keeping up with us we were going to push on as long as he was willing. With the final climb, we crossed through the canyon passage and climbed on up and down and up again and back down and finally heard the splashing sounds of Rain Drop Falls.

As we entered the Mega Dome, standing at the bottom of this 200 foot void above us, a feeling of accomplishment and pride came over us all. We had reached our goal for the day; we had achieved what we had set out to do. We sat in the darkness for quite some time, listening to the dripping water and contemplating the reality of where we were. In reality, we were only about 50 feet from the bottom of the pit where our rope waited, but the solid rock wall prohibited us from it. We would have to return the way that we had come. We had just reached the halfway point of our trip. I looked at Tom and smiled, congratulated him for making it to this point, and told him, "Okay, Tom, we'll turn back now."

Upon reaching the daylight at the bottom of the main pit, Micah climbed first and then I attached to the rope and Tom climbed underneath. This was Tom's first time to climb tandem and he pushed me up the rope. I thought after the events of the day, he would be tired and take a while to climb, but he stayed right on my heels. With a meal at the Liberty, we continued

home and hung our muddy caving gear out to dry.



Grab Bag Section

(Random selection of cave related stuff - New or Old)

The announcement below was pulled from the Jan 1998 Flowstone - Anybody know which pits these are?

TAG STRIKES AGAIN

For those living elsewhere, we in TAG are really not trying to rub your noses in it or anything, BUT, our cornucopia of big caves and big pits has coughed up two more deep ones. A couple of virgin, open air pits were recently discovered on Sand Mountain in the northeast comer of Alabama near Stevenson. One measures in at 292', the other is a measly 252' and both are completely "free". Pardon us, but it bears repeating, "COME SOUTH WHERE THE BIG ONES ARE!"



Minutes of the Meeting of the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society

March 5, 2018

The regular monthly meeting of the

Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society was called to order on Monday, March 5, 2018, at 7:35 p.m. by Harold Calvert, Chairman. 8 were present.

The minutes from the March meeting were read. A motion was made by David Drake to accept the minutes as read and was seconded by Harold Calvert. The motion was approved.

The treasurer's report was given.

The editor needs submissions for the Flowstone. *(Editor's Note: really, I do! Please!!!)*

Announcements:

SERA will be held from May 3-6.
NCRC will be held from May 12-19 at Camp Skyline.

Old Business:

No old business.

New Business:

No new business.

A lot of reminiscing about previous caving adventures was done.

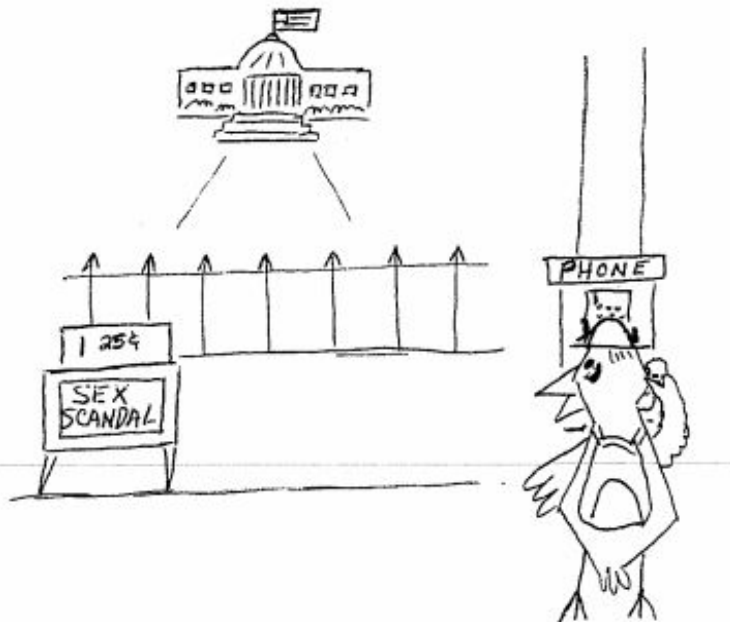
Trip reports were given by Harold Calvert on Tumbling Rock and Kuenn Drake on Limrock.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.



The BOAF below is recycled from 20 years ago...
The more things change the more they remain the same!

BIRDS OF A FEATHER



"Hello, I understand the president is looking for a cave to crawl into"