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July — August 2014

The Massachusetts Caver

Newsletter of the Boston Grotto Chapter of the National Speleological Society



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Submissions of original material for the Massachusetts Caver are welcomed. Please submit articles, photos, or artwork digitally, as email attachment or on disk; or on paper, either hand-delivered at the Grotto meeting, or mailed to: *Chris Taylor, 64 Meeting House Path, Ashland, MA 01721.*

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Membership in the Boston Grotto costs \$15 per calendar year and includes one year of newsletter issues.

Meetings are held the first Wednesday of every month at 7:30 p.m., in MIT's Building 51, Room 145.



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About The Cover

Mitch Berger and Morrie Gasser (left to right), dressed in stylish orange, prepare to enter Piercy's Mill Cave in WV, October of 2014. Photo by Chris Taylor.

The Massachusetts Caver

Subscriptions are in digital PDF format free to club members. To join the club and automatically subscribe to the digital version contact the Treasurer.

Come to the meetings at the MIT campus, held the first Wednesday of every month at 7:30 PM! We discuss recent trips, watch some interesting presentations on caving and related subjects, and plan & organize cave exploration trips.

Meetings are held at Building E51, room E51-145 (the Sloan School at MIT), located at the corner of Amherst and Wadsworth Streets. Parking is against the rear of the building up the ramp from Amherst Street. More parking is available off of Hayward Street.

Send any corrections to the editor ([ctaylor0624\[at\]Comcast.net](mailto:ctaylor0624[at]Comcast.net).)

At the May and June '14 Meetings

Kevin Harris

7-May-2014, MIT Tang Center – E54-145. Attendance: 15. Presiding: John Evans

Recent Trips:

On April 6, 2014, Mitch Berger and the MIT Caving Club visited Clarksville Cave, NY. The group included Emily Tencate, the MIT Caving Club's new president.

On April 13, Ramon Armen, Nick Mercu, Chris Fausnight, Larry Bernier visited Sellecks Cave, NY, and discovered the entrance iced shut. The group then visited Cave 575 and Levy's Cave instead. Both caves have pit entrances, and both were unusually wet and had waterfalls. The group spent about 4.5 hours in both caves in total.

Ramon Armen, Larry Bernier, and Elliot Gordon visited the Lanesboro Karst (MA) on April 27. Caves visited included Baker's Quarry, Elephant's Den, Coffin Cave, and Skeleton Cave.

The same day, Mitch Berger participated in Cleanup Day at Benson's Cave, NY, with the Northeast Cave Conservancy.

On May 4, Mitch Berger, Emily Davis, and several MIT Caving Club officers cleared the entrance path to Crossbones Cave, NY.

During several weekends in April and May, Ramon Armen and the Berkshire Diggers went ridge-walking in the Mt Equinox Vermont area, and found six new cave entrances, one leading to a cave about 120 feet long, with standing-height passage, a waterfall, and an ice plug at the end.

Upcoming Trips:

May 16 to 18, 2014: Northeast Regional Organization meeting, with camping and caving.

May 18 to 23, 2014: National Cave Rescue training, Golden, CO. Contact John Evans.

May 31, 2014: Boy Scout trip to Clarksville Cave, NY. Chris Taylor.

July 12 to 19, 2014: NSS Convention, Huntsville, AL. Contact Ramon Armen.

Business:

The Berkshire Diggers group now has an e-mail remailer. The Boston Grotto voted to endorse Mitch Berger as NRO Chair.

Presentation:

The club watched the gripping "A Rock and a Hoard Place," a dramatization of cave discoveries and conservation in the Mendip Hills of England in the 1960s. The video included the discovery and destruction of Balch Cave and the saving of W/L Cave. See Wikipedia.org for more information. Search for Fairy Cave Quarry, Balch Cave, and W/L Cave.

4-June-14, MIT Tang Center 51-145, Attendance: 18. Presiding: John Evans

Recent Trips:

On April 17, April 19, May 10, May 17 and May 24, 2014, a group of cavers visited southern VT to dig open and explore new caves. The group found eight new caves in over two months by scrutinizing aerial Lidar data, now publicly available, in the Mt. Equinox area. Ramon Armen, John Keough, John Dunham participated. In several caves they found porcupine dens and beautiful ice formations. The newly discovered "Kartusian Cave" has significant size for a Vermont cave, including a surface sinkhole 30 feet across and about 40 feet deep. The cave contains mostly walking passage so far, including a 20 x 30 foot upper passage with bedding detail. The cave has been surveyed to a depth of 130 feet deep and length of 300 feet long so far, with at least 500 feet remaining unsurveyed.

On May 10, Mitch Berger led the MIT Caving Club on a trip to Onesquethaw Cave, NY. Eight people went caving in total.

Several BG cavers attended the Northeast Regional Organization meeting from May 16 to 18. Ramon Armen and Rich Lester, Dave Crusoe, Larry Bernier, Nick Marcoux, Carol Louissaint Vanessa Marcoux and Tom Kinsky went on a digging trip from the NRO. Friday, Ramon Armen, Rich Lester, Dave Crusoe, Larry Bernier visited Benson's Cave, NY for a cleanup trip. The group found a sinkhole near the Benson's entrance full of trash. The preserve had just opened, and so everybody who went was asked to take out a few bags of trash.

The Saturday of the NRO (apparently, but exact date not certain), a group visited Knox Cave, which was very wet after all-night rain on Friday night. The same Saturday, a group visited Hollyhock Hollow Sanctuary, Selkirk, NY, a property of Audubon International. The group consisted of Paul Rubin, a noted NY geologist / hydrologist. Mitch Berger, Thom Engel, T.J. Wilkinson and others went as well. The group found and sur-

veyed several small caves, most very shallow with passage close to the surface.

The following Sunday another group of BG cavers visited John Boyd Thacher State Park and hiked along the base of the cliffs. The Northeast Cave Conservancy is working on an agreement to explore and survey the caves in the park.

Also on Sunday, Tom Kinsky and several Canadians visited Knox Cave.

On May 31, Ramon Armen and NY diggers visited Ella Armstrong Cave, NY to dig in the downstream end.

Chris Taylor's boy scout trip was May 31. The water level was unusually low, and the group did a through-trip, through and past the ear-dip (Brinley's Sump).

Upcoming Trips:

Date to be determined: Beginner and photo trip to Clarksville Cave, NY.

June 15, Merlin's Cave, NY. Contact Ramon Armen.

NSS Convention, July 14 to 18, Huntsville, AL.

Fall NRO: Mid-September (stay tuned for more information).

Business:

Congratulations to Mitch Berger, who is now NRO Chair. Paul Rubin recently got remarried. Mitch Berger says he has learned cave surveying. Michel Girard, a very long-time member of Societe Quebecoise de Speleologie (SQS), noted for leading the effort to dig the bypass to "The Gunbarrel" passage in Know Cave, has terminal cancer. We will miss his energy and enthusiasm.

The judging of the photo contest was moved to the Sept. meeting.

The MIT Caving club will place a discounted order for caving equipment with Karst Sports. Contact Mitch Berger by the end of June to participate.

Presentation:

The club watched a documentary film from Morehead State University (KY) about the saltpeter industry in Missouri and Kentucky, and how this was involved in the War of 1812. This was probably the least riveting cave-related presentation we have ever seen.



Veenfliet's Cave

by Pat Connors

It started out a bad day. I was collecting my gear for a trip to Veenfliet's Cave and couldn't find my wallet. I thought I might have dropped it in the field after registering for the Spring NRO that very rainy night before, but a search revealed nothing. I looked over to the meeting location, and saw that the trip leader Bill Folsom was gathering the participants together. With a sigh, I grabbed my backpack and headed over.

Tom Walker's car had some extra space, so I carpooled with him, Kyle Martindale and Rob from the CCG. We rode to a nice farm in Schoharie and parked just beyond a field. We followed a fast running stream up a hill, and although the stream had some nice features it didn't produce a cave so we headed back down to the cars. Bill said the cave was located closer to the road and that the stream could be dry. SO, we walked up the hill closer to the cars and spread out searching for another stream. Tom must have had his cave radar on because he found the entrance quickly at the end of a grassy field.

When I got to the cave, Tom, Kyle and Rob were entering. The entrance was dry but downstream the water was flowing from the caves resurgence. After briefing by Bill, I crawled into the entrance and soon caught up with the group. They had stopped at Rew's Lake and were peering into the going passage. It was a little daunting with what appeared to be an ear dip to get further on. We all took the plunge and floated on, Rob getting the worst of it with just a t-shirt on! We soon came to Gebhard's Grotto, and the nuisance climb up. Here there was a "log" wedged into the floor to assist with the climb. We all soon made it up and then we came to the Y junction. Right went to the dry part, and left went to the dreaded "Pudding Passage," spawning tales of boots getting sucked off feet of the unwary caver. We chose left and pressed on.

The passage reminded me somewhat of the Crystal Crawl in the back of Knox Cave. We hands and knees and belly crawled through and came to the pudding, but because of the higher water level, the pudding really didn't live up to expectations. Though certainly mucky, I escaped with my boots intact! We next passed by some nice flowstone and an interesting hole going straight up into the ceiling.

After a while we were rewarded with some walking passage and some nice domes at Helma Hall. The end of the upper

passage had a sketchy climb with an etrier fixed in place. We declined to climb it, and headed back toward the entrance. Kyle and Rob raced on back, feeling the effects of the chilling water. I will say that my wetsuit made the cold water quite tolerable and recommend one in Veenfliet's! On the way back, we met up with two ladies, Kara Pivarski and Alisa Werst, who decided to exit the cave with us. They had smartly rigged the nuisance climb, and climbed down. As I was last, I removed the hand line and started climbing down, n, using the log to brace myself. Suddenly, I heard a crack as the log snapped in half! Lucky me I came straight down and landed on my feet!

From the climb, we did a fast backtrack to the entrance, and exited to a nice sunny day. We changed into clean clothes, and headed back to Hideaway Campsite and the MET Grotto's dinner at the NRO.

It turned out to be a good day after all; on returning to the campsite, I found my wallet in the glove compartment, right where I had left it!



Alisa and an unidentified caver negotiating the nuisance climb in Veenfliet's Cave. Kind of blurry picture taken by Kara Pivarski.



First Class Mail

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