



The Region Record

Vol. XXV No. 1 Winter 2011/12

Spring 2012 VAR Meeting Coming April 27–29

by J. C. Fisher

Seasons Greetings from the Members of Tri-State Grotto.

As visions of sugar plums and going underground dance through your head, let us invite you to Spring VAR instead.

Once again Tri-State Grotto is hosting the Spring Meeting of the Virginia Region of the NSS. The event will be held at the Poor Farm Festival Grounds in Williamsburg, West Virginia. The dates for this event will be 27th, 28th, & 29th of April. We have lots of cave trips planned, including some on site plus lots of non-caving activities such as biking on the Greenbrier River Trail, canoeing or kayaking on the Greenbrier, hiking, geocaching, antiquing, and more.

To start off a great weekend, Tri-State's Chair, –John DiCarlo, –will host a wine and bluegrass get-together Friday night at 7 p.m. at the stage. To participate, bring a bottle of wine costing under \$10.00. The theme of the wine tasting will be Berry. Your wine should have a Berry on the label or be a type of berry wine.

Saturday morning Vice Chair Bob Bennett has a very large lineup of “led trips.” Those who pre-register will have an opportunity to sign up early. Some of the trips we're working on include Culverson

Creek, Windy Mouth, McClungs, Bone, Lost World, Poor Farm (Pocahontas), Poor Farm (Greenbrier), Organ (Lipps Entrance), Maxwelton (photo trip), Cabble and Briar Pits, and others. John Pearson has an on-site conservation project building some steps at Poor Farm. Saturday night's dinner will feature pit barbequed pork and chicken with beans, potato salad, coleslaw, and drinks, and we haven't forgotten you vegetarians. The owners of Poor Farm will cater the meal. We're working on a Saturday night speaker. John Fox will DJ with the traditional caver's libations available on Saturday night. The always-popular VAR business meeting will be held Sunday morning for you speleo-politicians. We'll try to convince Front Royal Grotto to do its wonderful Sunday Breakfast.

A preregistration form is included with this newsletter. We strongly advise you to use this. By preregistering you also insure we have a meal for you and it makes planning a whole lot easier.

We look forward to seeing you in the spring. More information will be in the Spring *Region Record*. For now – have a wonderful holiday from all of us at Tri-State.

Fountain Cave/VAR Grand Caverns Project Update

by Jim McConkey

The VAR's Grand Caverns project has been concentrating on Fountain Cave for most of the last year. Bill Biggers and his dedicated team of diggers have continued working a dig begun in 1873, when the owner attempted to tunnel his way to another cavern he believed adjoined Fountain Cave. To the best of our knowledge, no such adjoining cave has ever been found, but the passage was inexplicably filled from floor to ceiling before being abandoned. Bigger's Diggers have been eagerly excavating the man-made fill and have recently uncovered some interesting finds. Over the past several months, a number of wood boards have been dug out of the mud, but they were too decomposed to discern their original use. In October 2011, the team uncovered an 18-inch iron rod with a flattened end bent over at a right angle [Figure 1].

After much puzzling and research, we believe this artifact to be a blasting “spoon,” most likely used when the passage was first blasted in the 1870s. The spoon was carefully stabilized, removed from the cave, and turned over to the Park for restoration and display. Such spoons were used after a hand-hammered star drill bored a 1¼-inch hole for dynamite. Star drills do not remove the waste from the hole they are

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The *Region Record*

The *Region Record* is the quarterly publication of the Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society. Any articles, announcements, or other materials of general interest to cavers in the Region are welcome. **Send all material to Bob Hoke (6304 Kaybro St., Laurel, MD 20707 (301)725-5877, e-mail editor@varegion.org).** Electronic submissions (e-mail or disk) are encouraged, but any form of input is welcome. Non-copyrighted material contained in the *Region Record* may be reprinted by organizations that are affiliated with the VAR or the NSS, provided that proper credit is given to the *Record* and the author. The opinions expressed herein are those of the individual author, and do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, the VAR, the NSS, or their internal organizations.

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- When a person attends a VAR meeting he/she is automatically added to the list to receive the next four issues. If he/she is already on the list, four additional issues are added to the subscription.
- When multiple people live at the same address only one copy of each issue will be sent to the address unless a box requesting individual issues is checked on the VAR registration form or a request is sent to the Circulation Manager.

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Regional Calendar

- Mar. 15 **Deadline** for submitting material for the Spring issue of the *Region Record*.
- Mar. 29 - Apr. 1 **Orientation to Cave Rescue** class in Harrisonburg, Virginia. See www.er-ncrc.org for more information.
- Apr. 28 **Spring WVASS meeting** at 9:30 am at the Spring VAR Meeting site.
- Apr. 27-29 **Spring VAR Meeting** in Williamsburg, W. Va. See additional information and registration form in this issue.
- June 25-29, 2012 **NSS Convention** near Lewisburg, West Virginia. See www.nss2012.com for info.
- Aug. 5-9, 2013 **NSS Convention** in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania. More info later.

List Your Event Here

If you have a caving event that is of regional interest please send information to the Editors listed above so it can be included in the calendar.

Grand Caverns

(continued from page 1)

drilling, so such spoons need to be inserted to drag out the debris before packing the hole with dynamite. A number of the original dynamite holes are still present in the passage and the spoon is just the right size for them. Typical usage is shown here [Figure 2] in one of the 1800s dynamite holes.

I continue to lead an effort to discover the original tourist route through the cave in 1835, the year it was discovered. I discovered an obscure text from that year that describes a complete trip through the cave in painful detail, and we have identified most of the formations and rooms in the original tour. There are only a few questions left in a large breakdown room. We have also been documenting the numerous signatures in Fountain Cave, and the cave biota, when we can find them. A recent trip turned up a pseudoscorpion and several blind cave millipedes.

The dig and historical research in Fountain Cave have unfortunately come to an end for the winter. Even though only a few bats call the cave home, the Town of Grottoes, worried about WNS, has closed Fountain Cave until such

time as state biologists can count the bats and issue a report. That report is expected later this winter. In the meantime, we are taking advantage of the cooler weather and receding foliage to do some ridge-walking on the hill. One rabbit hole in the bottom of a sinkhole that we have been keeping our eyes on for a couple years has definitely gotten a lot bigger, and we hope that eventually it will open up into a cave. We need some torrential downpours to help open it up. Several smaller caves have been found in the last year on the south end of the hill, but hunting season and a possible change in landowners has kept us from surveying them yet. We hope to survey them in the next month or two. As the weather gets too cold for ridgewalking, we will again turn our attention to Grand Caverns and its history.

All VAR cavers are welcome to join us the first full weekend of every month at Grand.

2011 VAR Outstanding Service Award

by Meredith Hall Weberg

Rick Lambert and Marian McConnell won the 2011 VAR Outstanding Service Award. Congratulations and many thanks to them both for all their service to the Region.

The VAR That Almost Wasn't

by Victoria Paul
Chairperson, Tidewater Grotto

There I was, enjoying myself in a peaceful manner at the Spring VAR in Durbin (a wonderful event— for those who may have missed it) when I was approached by Meredith Weberg. Having been involved in caving in the area for the last nine years and attending a fair share of VARs and OTRs, how could I not know who she was? Little did I know that what I thought was just going to be a friendly hello had a much more sinister undertone. “So,” she said sweetly, “when is Tidewater Grotto going to host a VAR?” I was



Figure 1. An 18-inch iron rod uncovered in a dig in Fountain Cave in Grottoes, Virginia. The rod is believed to be a “spoon” from the 1870s that was used to clear debris from holes drilled for dynamite during an attempt to expand the cave. Photo by Jim McConkey.



Figure 2. The “spoon” in operation. The star drills used in the 1870s were not self-clearing, so the spoon was used to clear rock debris from the drilled hole prior to inserting a stick of dynamite. Photo by Jim McConkey.

stunned. I couldn't hide— I couldn't deny my affiliation with Tidewater Grotto - we had a huge banner hanging proudly over our gigantic carport so I took the 'she must be joking' position! She wasn't. Numerous emails, texts and a phone call or two later I found myself committing the grotto to host the Fall event.

The primary task was to find a campground and when the first facility on board fell through, I was ready to wave the white flag. Then the Richmond Area Speleological Society (RASS) offered to allow the use of their campground. This was a good sign and an "event saver." Half of our grotto members (we have a small active number to begin with) had a conflict with the planned date so it was going to be a hard row to hoe, but with the additional help – especially with tasks beyond our capabilities – I felt optimistic.

Rich Geisler from RASS had an invaluable task list that shed a realistic light on what is involved in putting this meeting together. We worked from that list and though overwhelming at times, it kept us all on track.

Despite the Fall VAR meeting being held the weekend after TAG's Fall Cave-In, and coinciding with another meeting, we had 83 pre-registrants (not counting the RASS members who registered directly with Rich).

The weekend of the event, the weather was not very cooperative at the beginning. We had five members of Tidewater Grotto arrive on Wednesday to cold rain. The rain continued through Thursday and on Friday morning the rain ceased and the wind arrived. The first registration enclosure literally folded in the wind while everyone was trying to keep B&C Wunderwear's tent from taking off during set up! The final registration count was 156 (less a few no-shows) and the weather on Saturday was perfect.

There were numerous cave trips and a clean up at Island Ford. We had attendees from as far north as New York and Canada and as far south as Texas. It was exciting to see a number of first-timers and young people as well as the familiar faces!

Saturday's dinner offering was RASS' Brunswick Stew and a vegetarian soup prepared by Tidewater Grotto. After dinner there were numerous door prizes donated by the West Virginia Cave Conservancy. We were then provided an overview of the upcoming MayaCon [the 2012 NSS Convention] and followed by a fantastic presentation by Steven Stokowski on Project SIMMER. After the presentation, the crowd was entertained by the popular DJ John Fox and the brave souls took on Charles Kahn's Guillotine Trough squeeze box. The bonfire was a sight to behold and the wood ran out as if on cue.

The VAR meeting was held Sunday morning and afterwards, the grounds were vacated. Everyone did an amazing job in taking their trash with them and making sure the RASS facility was as clean as when they arrived.

This was definitely a challenge and I have a newfound respect beyond my appreciation for the grottoes who hosted before Tidewater and those that will host going forward. My advice for first time hosts? Plan, schedule in detail, delegate and budget. Check and double check cave status, incorporate a clean up or project if you can. Use your resources. This group is definitely a community and there are so many willing to help!

I would like to extend my thanks to Michael Greene, Drew Rhodes, Andrew Craine and Anthony Rivera from Tidewater Grotto—the 'on the ground' team!

Especially Michael Greene who had to endure my months of planning and moments of panic! Mike Loyd who couldn't make it but helped facilitate the awesome t-shirts. The RASS group as a whole and Rich Geisler, Kibbie (for everything!), Jeff Benford, Billy Pickett and Crystal Biggers (without whom I couldn't have left registration!). And Meredith Weberg, who was my go-to person on everything. A special thanks to B&C Wunderwear for attending and Steven Stokowski for the presentation!

Thank you to all who attended, I look forward to seeing you in the spring and at MayaCon.

Guillotine Trough Being Retired

by Charles Kahn

Sadly, I have to report the demise of the Guillotine Trough. After six years, and many, many through trips (darn, shoulda' kept count!), I had to take the Trough out of service.

Safety was a major concern in designing the Guillotine Trough, and



Charles Kahn's Guillotine Trough in operation in 2004. Cheryl Suitor is pulling herself through the triangle-shaped opening. Photo by Charles Kahn.

I always gave it a thorough inspection after bringing it home from a VAR. Alas, my most recent inspection showed wear beyond what could be reasonably and safely repaired.

So, now is your chance!!!! If you have been contemplating making a squeeze box with new and exciting features, we have an opening! And when you get the email from organizers of a VAR asking you to bring it... you'll find it a great way to meet lots of new people.

I tried to remember after each VAR, but just in case... Many thanks to all of you who helped me operate the Guillotine Trough. I look forward to the next squeeze box to show up, and who knows... I may even go through it myself! (You go first!)

Spring WVASS Meeting on April 28

by George Dasher

The Spring Meeting of the West Virginia Speleological Survey (WVASS) will take place at 9:30 a.m. on the Saturday of the Spring VAR, April 28th. The meeting will be at the VAR site and will (hope-

fully) be short so people can go caving.

This is an open meeting and anyone can attend, and anyone with an interest in documenting and surveying West Virginia's caves should attend. For more information, contact Brian Masney at 304-288-2705 or masneyb@gmail.com.

2012 NSS Convention Registration To Be Raffled at VAR

by John Pearson

The 2012 NSS Convention will be in Greenbrier County, West Virginia, on June 25–29, 2012. Communications Design Consulting Group (CDCG) is a corporation that is helping support the convention. CDCG has offered to donate the cost of a full convention registration, convention Guide-book, t-shirt, pin, and patch to be raffled off to a lucky caver. Tickets will be available for \$10 each at the Spring VAR meeting and the drawing will be held at the VAR's Saturday evening party.

More information about the 2012

NSS Convention is at www.nss2012.com.

Orientation to Cave Rescue Class March 29–April 1

by Scott Davis

An Orientation to Cave Rescue class will be held at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg Virginia from March 29 through April 1, 2012. The National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC) Web site, www.er-ncrc.org, will be updated soon with more information about this orientation.

These orientations are presented in various caving areas periodically and every active caver should attend. The orientation typically consists of classroom and above-ground training on Saturday and a mock cave rescue on Sunday. This orientation won't make you a cave rescue expert, but you will learn some of the issues involved with participating in a rescue. Perhaps more important, you will learn why you want to cave safely so you don't have to be rescued.

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Please make checks payable to VAR and send to: **John Fox, 204 Fifth St., Radford, VA 24141**

Spring 2012 VAR Meeting

April 27-29, 2012

Registration Form

The Spring 2012 VAR Meeting will be held at the Poor Farm Festival Grounds located in Williamsburg, West Virginia. The Grounds are off Route 219 near Williamsburg, West Virginia, just north of Lewisburg. Make a left in Frankford and follow the signs.

Early registration by April 1st 2012 –Full = \$30.00 _____

Early registration by April 1st 2012 –under 15 years old = \$26.00 _____

On–site registration – Full = \$35.00 _____

On–Site registration –Under 15 = \$31.00 _____

Please check if you want Vegetarian Option _____

Make check payable to: Tri-State Grotto

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