



CAVE OWNERS' NEWSLETTER

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Department of Conservation and Historic Resources
Commonwealth of Virginia
for the Cave Owners of Virginia

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Grand Caverns Event

Region Leadership Includes Virginians

The national caving organization, the National Speleological Society, consists of a number of regions. The oldest of these, called the Virginia Region, comprises all of West Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Virginia, as well as contiguous parts of Maryland and North Carolina. At its fall business meeting in October, two West Virginians were named as chair and vice-chair respectively (George Dasher of Buckhannon and Robert Frostick of Charleston). Ronald Morton of Richmond was elected new treasurer, while Tom Spina of Virginia Beach is the new secretary. Ron is a member of the Richmond Area Speleological Society, which has developed a fundraising project (bingo games which it operates under the Virginia law authorizing non-profit organizations to do so) that enables it to underwrite many important caving activities. Tom Spina is active in the Tidewater Grotto, which in 1984 won the NSS Conservation Award for its activities in behalf of cave protection and preservation. The Richmond group, it should be noted, earned this award three successive years, 1981-1983, as well as having shared it in 1978 with a Tennessee individual.

The Cave Owners' Newsletter is an occasional publication of the Virginia Cave Board, an agency in the Virginia Department of Conservation and Historic Resources, and is distributed as a service to cave owners in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The current editor is Evelyn Bradshaw, and correspondence about the publication may be addressed to her at 1732 Byron Street, Alexandria, VA 22303.

On a cloudy mild November 8th, a small group met at Grand Caverns Regional Park for a special cave tour. This event had been set up by the Cave Board to introduce state lawmakers and administrators to some of the underground resources of which citizens of Virginia can be so proud.

Afterward, in a note of thanks, Del. Ken Plum of Reston wrote, "I have a good appreciation of the importance of the work that you do."

Thanks are due to the management of the Regional Park, which opened their visitors' facility and the show cave to our group. During the Grand tour, we were accompanied by Glenda Reid, a former park staffer, who shared with us some historical facts about the cave that she had learned through research. Due to unforeseen circumstances, we did not enter Fountain Cave but instead, through the courtesy of Lyall Steger, a neighbor, toured Madison's Saltpeter Cave on his property on the same hill. Here we were able to see the signature of George Washington high on the wall and also some specimens of the isopod that lives in the lake water there (a small creature so rare that it is known in no other locality in the world and is on the endangered species list). One may wonder if George Washington himself carved his name into the rock there, although handwriting experts say that it seems to be authentic and, in any case, as revolutionary troops were known to have been in the cave, the signature is of historic age. An early map of this cave by Thomas Jefferson is to be found in a book on Virginia by Jefferson.

Cave Board Activity

During 1986 the incident at Cudjo's Cave continues to receive Board attention. This is located on National Park Service property although there is a long-term lease of cave property to Lincoln Memorial University in neighboring Tennessee. Over a year ago cavers were horrified to see a newspaper picture showing students from LMU emerging from Cudjo's with their professor, proudly displaying cave formations which they had removed from the cave. In case you didn't know, it is against the law in Virginia to remove formations from caves, particularly if you don't own the cave. (An owner may sometimes have to remove a few in order to improve access for a commercial cave tour or other needs; that's allowed.) What a lot of people don't realize is how long it normally takes to create these beautiful stalactites and stalagmites, growing drop by drop at a time--hundreds of years. Once gone, you aren't likely to get back the beautiful cave in your lifetime. Not only that, but the glistening lovely formation that you so proudly brought out will soon dry out and its surface crumble and not be so attractive.

Board member Dr. Charles Bartlett of Abingdon has been serving as a consultant for a cave exhibit to the Virginia Science Museum being developed in Martinsville.

New brochures briefly describing the nature of caves and the Virginia Cave Board were printed by the parent Department of Conservation and Historic Resources. One is enclosed.

The Board hopes to have input into decisions involving hazardous waste sites in karst areas. William Davies of the Board has been named as liaison with the Hazardous Waste Siting Council. With his experience around the world with the U. S. Geological Survey, Davies

has experience with some of the problems that can arise in using limestone (which is porous) for waste disposal.

If any of our readers is aware of tentative locations being considered for hazardous waste disposal sites and you think leakage into caves might both threaten the cave and its contents as well as prove unsatisfactory for contained storage, we would appreciate being notified. Underground storage of substances such as oil and gasoline may also pose problems that could be avoided by advance consideration of storage facility location. Sometimes relocation by only a few feet or minor changes in design and material is all that is needed--and inexpensive when arranged before construction starts. Owners of such facilities may avoid future costly liability payments by checking the subsurface situation to begin with.

Often the Board itself is the last to learn of threats to subsurface resources (including, incidentally, groundwater), because of the time it takes for information to be channeled at bureaucratic levels.

A Board subcommittee is developing plans for publicizing the need for protecting Virginia caves from vandalism. Television spots, videotape programs for science classes, and classroom posters are among the projects being studied.

Board Meetings Open to Public

The meetings of the Virginia Cave Board are always open to the interested public. The next meeting is set for Saturday, May 16, 1987, in Farmville. If you would like to be on the Board's mailing list to receive notices of meetings or other releases, notify the chairman of the board at the return address given on this newsletter.

Cave Board Leadership

Since Roy Powers indicated last year that he did not wish to serve as Board chairman for another year, a nominating committee presented a new slate of officers to the Board meeting in Roanoke, on Jan. 18, 1986. New chair is Evelyn Bradshaw of Fairfax County, who has been a member of the Board since its creation. She got her start in caving when she was persuaded to take her Senior Girl Scout troop in Virginia Beach on a caving trip. Philip Lucas continues as treasurer.

Last summer Governor Baliles appointed a new Board member, Jean Simonds of Blacksburg. Ms. Simonds is a lab specialist with the Pesticide Residue Lab at Blacksburg, and is an active member of the Virginia caving community.

Vandalism at Madison's

Some teenagers were convicted under the Virginia Cave Protection Act for breaking into Madison's Cave this past summer. Just why anyone would want to force a locked door and enter a cave simply to sit down and have a campfire is hard to understand. Luckily no real damage to the cave itself occurred and the juveniles were put on parole and required to do twenty hours of community service work.

Endless Caverns Reopens

Our best wishes to the Berdeaux family for successful operation of Endless Cave. For several years the cave stood unvisited and unused, while it was on the market for sale. One family tried to operate it with a gourmet restaurant as a drawing card but this didn't work out.

Who Owns Virginia's Caves?

An ambitious project being planned by the Virginia Speleological Survey, if private funding can be located, is to research at county courthouses the names and addresses of all those who own Virginia's caves, and most importantly those with title to the ten percent considered "significant" caves. The cave owners whose names/addresses we do know receive this newsletter (the mailing label identifies you if you are known to us as an owner). If the ownership status of your cave(s) has changed since we were last in contact with you, do let us know. Write to the newsletter editor, Evelyn Bradshaw, 1732 Byron Street, Alexandria VA 22303 tel. (703) 765-0669.

Cave Board Treasurer Written Up by Virginia Power

Included in this newsletter, by permission, is a feature about Philip Lucas which first appeared in Virginia Power's *Powerline* for Winter 1985-1986, an in-house organ (Phil works for the utility in northern Virginia). Phil is one of three individuals who has been on the Cave Board since it started out in 1978 as a study commission to assess the needs of Virginia's caves (the other two being John Holsinger and Evelyn Bradshaw). Since the article appeared, Phil has stepped down as president of the West Virginia Association for Cave Studies. He continues at the helm of the Virginia Speleological Survey, which is currently embarked on a plan to publish a series of newsletters about Virginia caves and caving.

Lucas finds cathedrals beneath the earth

"You can find footprints the Indians made hundreds of years ago."

By Mark G. Lazenby

Don't get Phil Lucas wrong. He insists he is not an action junkie. He says he does not do what he does for the sheer thrill of it. Lucas will tell you his attraction to the caves is cerebral, that he's curious and wants to go places where nobody else has gone.

But if you look at Phil Lucas and see what he does for work, and then see what he does for fun, you might be fooled and think Lucas is on some kind of Indiana Jones adventure kick.

Here he is in the middle of the week: The manager of Virginia Power's Fairfax District, a

man who must oversee the often grinding routine of running a staff that serves 62,500 customers. Family man. Age 42. Average height and weight.

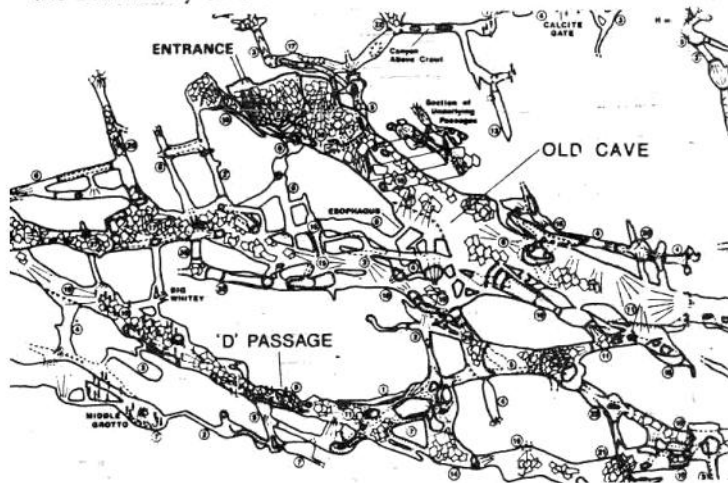
Then, on time off, here is Lucas: His face is coated in grime and mud. A helmet with a hissing carbide lamp is perched on his sweaty, brown hair. He is carrying caving rope, cable ladders, cams and slings, maps and a breakbar rack.

Imagine this in the midst of a black eternity, where water drips ever so slowly in the darkness, where your lamps and lanterns highlight the trails of vapor hanging high from human breath.

Around you are cliffs and tunnels, cathedral-sized caverns hundreds of feet high with bats and the ancient, jagged rock sculptures carved by the patient hand of water streams centuries old. Lucas likes the water. Sometimes he caves in a wetsuit because he must transport himself floating on his back.

"The enormity of time is overwhelming," says Lucas, who on this particular day is somewhere deep inside a cavern along the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains in northwest Virginia, near the community of Grottoes. Lucas has been in

Phil Lucas uses instruments to map underground labyrinth.



the dark about six hours and he is scanning initials carved on a wall to read the dates. Some go back to the 1800s. This is an easy cave by the standards Lucas and any of the other 500 or so active cavers in Virginia apply. People have been back here before.

Caves preserve their contents eternally because the erosive elements are few. The museum-like nature of the giant recesses helps fuel the mental fires that send Lucas back to the caves, year after year. On one recent expedition, Lucas crawled through a tiny opening and found a fresh filterless cigarette butt. The smoker had jammed his wooden match in the mud beside the butt and written his initials and the date. It was 1943.

"Those initials were just as crisp as if they'd been put there an hour ago," Lucas recalls.

"When you go into a cave, it is a natural laboratory. It has been in existence for tens of thousands of years. It is unchanging as far as our concept of time goes. It can also be said caving is one of the last frontiers on earth.

"These are museums," he says, springing down an eight-foot rockface with the easy dex-

terity of a man who has leapt over far more jagged walls.

"You can find footprints the Indians made hundreds of years ago."

Thrills, in the mind of Lucas, don't come from the sometimes dangerous task of scaling a slippery cliff in the dark, or rappelling down one.

Thrill comes from discovery, and underground discoverers like Lucas have their own lexicon. An unknown cave with no evidence of human visitation, for example, is known as virgin cave.

"Where else can you say you're putting footprints where no other man has gone before?" Lucas says. "It's a special treat.

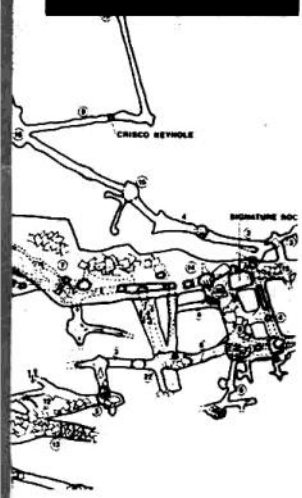
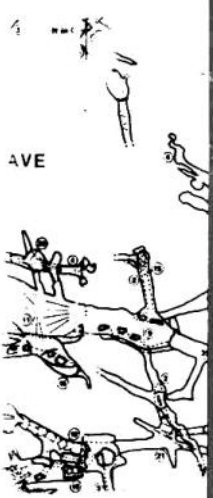
"Most cavers, if you define it, are in an intellectual pursuit."

Lucas shares his fascination with almost boyish enthusiasm, lecturing would-be cavers on the large number of caverns located in both Virginias, the names and physical descriptions of mountains, the type of limestone in often traveled caverns and explaining the desire among people who cave to preserve the interiors of "these great natural resources."



Tom Wright

Some passages are barely big enough to crawl through.



Virginia itself features more than 2,500 known caves, many of which are mapped — and sitting in the extensive filing system that Lucas keeps at home.

Lucas confesses an attraction to the paperwork of caving that is nearly as strong as the actual act. He uses draftsman-like precision in logging the coordinates and shapes of the caves, creating with his instruments long maps and diagrams, penciled and inked. Some look like an architect's rendition and smack of the lost fron-

tier, or, to those with fertile imaginations, another planet altogether.

To gather those dimensions and coordinates necessary for mapping, Lucas and his colleagues have spent hundreds of hours clawing through the dripping darkness with compasses and other measuring instruments.

His caving credentials show him to be a leader in the state. Lucas is president of the Virginia Speleological Survey, an arm of the National Speleological Society. He is also president of

the West Virginia Association for Cave Studies Inc., a state where he often pursues his exotic quest. Additionally, Lucas is a member and treasurer of the Virginia Cave Board, a position that requires gubernatorial appointment.

"It's not a hobby," Lucas says, somehow managing to squeeze through the crumbling remains of a tunnel that looks no wider than the hips of a snake, "and it's much more than a sport. It's the type of thing where it's not everybody's cup of tea. It's kind of an odd thing really."

With this, Lucas disappears in the darkness, beyond the lantern's golden embrace, pressing ever onward to see still more undiscovered cave. ■

Right: *Cavers must take their own light sources to explore the world below.*

Opposite: *Lucas rappels down a cave wall.*

