

How to Have a Healthy Grotto

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No, this article doesn't prescribe medical advice for grotto members ("Get your cholesterol level below 500 before you go into Garrison Cave") nor does it advise one on how to maintain the "health" of a room in some cave (you know, "a grotto! 0 but instead focuses on the state of being of our caving grotto itself.

Probably it is correct to say that OHG is quite healthy now, and there are, I believe, at least four indications of this health. One, we have a steady influx of new and enthusiastic members; two, we are not losing these members when it comes time to renew; three, those new members are active in planning and going on caving trips; and four, these new members have violated the seemingly strict taboo against anyone but older, long-time members becoming officers of the grotto — great! In short, there are many new members and they are active.

In seeking the causes of this health, I look at what I'll call the "Six Cs," six factors I've isolated that I think have helped make the grotto the success it is now. Perhaps we can also prescribe these factors in the future ("take a bit more consensus and that will make you better") so that they can continue to provide for the grotto's proper "care and feeding." All just happened to start with the letter "C" (will coincidences never cease) and are

CAVES
CAVING
COMMUNICATIONS
CONSENSUS
CONTINUITY
C-----

1. **Caves:** Naturally, as a lover needs his or her beloved, a caver or caving group needs the object of their desire (in a non-Freudian sense). Without caves to go to, the grotto would become little more than a social club, perhaps a soon-to-be-extinct one. So we are fortunate to have an abundance of large, small, surveyed, unsurveyed, explored, and possibly unexplored caves in southwest Missouri and northern Arkansas. Garrison Cave aptly demonstrates that opportunities remain for us to find vast lengths of virgin cave even in a cave that has long been known, both to organized cavers and the general public. (Garrison Cave is one of the earliest recorded caves in Christian County.) Moreover, many other long-known caves await mapping despite our mappers' efforts over the last thirty or so years. Of course, since all of these caves were around even when the grotto wasn't

doing so well, the sheer existence and availability of caves doesn't explain precisely why the grotto is working so well now. Nevertheless, caves are perhaps a near necessary substrate for a successful caving club. This is so, unless the grotto is in a very large city (which Springfield is not) where sheer numbers of potential numbers can make up for lack of nearby caves.

2. **Caving:** More relevant to the question at hand is caving, that is, going caving. After all, the presence of caves mean little unless you can and do go to them. This means that caving trips have to be set up, have to interest members, and should be well communicated to the membership. The last will be dealt with in the section on communication, but the first and the second are looked at here. With the first of these, setting up trips, we have a lot of them going out and something is happening almost every weekend. One important duty of OHG's president (or the members of the trip committee he or she appoints) is to set up two regularly scheduled trips — a recreational trip on the Saturday following the business meeting, and a project trip on the third Saturday of each month. Many other planned or spontaneous trips also go out each month, but these are either announced beforehand at the meetings, in the newsletter, or just passed along by "word of mouth."

Leo Thompson, our president for 1995 and 1996, provided a very important ingredient for the success of our trips, as he was a caving president extraordinaire who not only made sure that regular trips were going out but who also showed up for most of them, often at an inconvenience for himself. He provided the kind of top-down support OHG needs to ensure that grotto members have the opportunity to do a lot of caving. Our current president, Ed Simmons, has continued this tradition inasmuch as possible in a year with so much distracting activity taking place, e.g., the NSS convention. And it looks as if Ed will continue working hard to ensure that we have caves to visit during 1998.

With the second of these necessary trip ingredients, the grotto leadership has worked hard to find interesting caves to go to. This interest is maintained both by the selection of caves to go to and by the variety of trip-types that we have. We go to a lot of neat caves (Ellison's, Fitton's, Berry, Tunnel/Spring, Cathedral, and many more) and go on a large variety of trip-types, not just recreational or mapping, but also ones

involving cave gating, graffiti cleaning, speleothern repair, etc. The project-type trips let grotto members contribute to the understanding and preservation of caves and lets them utilize their own areas of expertise to help further the goals of the grotto. With recreational trips the emphasis is on going to interesting or fun caves, ones that occasionally may be new to the grotto, but more probably, are just new to some of the members (e.g., some of us have made many visits to Fitton Cave, but we still enjoy taking new members there — their awe at the huge cave and beautiful speleothems is always fun to see). Moreover, recreational trips are usually to caves that do not require either expertise in some aspect of caving or special equipment, i.e. vertical or special equipment, i.e., vertical or wetsuit caves, rather we go to caves with somewhat normal levels of difficulty. However, when the recreational trips are to caves which do involve vertical work or are to ones which have set limits on the number of cavers allowed within the cave at one time, alternative caves are found for others to see. Lately, however, thanks to Doug Feakes and his vertical workshops, few in OHG remain vertically challenged (even though I'm often "caught short"), so the vertical character of some of the caves is not a deterrent.

3. Communications: Good communication concerning upcoming trips, meetings, and other grotto happenings has, I believe, been essential to the grotto's success. The pre-planned weekend trips are very important, as members can almost always count on a trip going out on those days — if you want to go caving, you can! And the particular caves selected for these trips are usually set up far enough in advance for members to plan and are rarely changed. Most other trips are also announced well in advance.

Besides regular announcements at meetings and personal transmittal of information, we have two publications that keep members informed and involved. The main purpose of our newsletter, *Under the Highlands*, is to inform members of upcoming trips and meetings, so that the names of the caves or cave areas, any special equipment needed, the particular one of our five standard meeting places they should meet at, and the name of a person to contact, are available to those unable to attend the meetings (it also serves as a reminder to those who do). It goes out ASAP after the business meeting. Of course, if all else fails, most of us have that marvelous device, called the telephone, [Ed. note: and now the Internet and Web.] to contact members. Our quarterly journal, *The Ozarks' Underground*, focuses more on presenting detailed records of our members' caving activities and serves as a creative outlet for those who wish to produce articles, photos, maps, and artwork.

It is also one important way of showing off our accomplishments to other grottos, and to our parent organizations, the National Speleological Society and the Missouri Speleological Survey. It is also one tangible way that we get something for our dues. As editor of the *Underground*, I try to keep up its quality and work hard to make it a source of pleasure and pride for members (and not so secretly hope that it has done its part in helping the grotto to attract and keep quality members).

4. Consensus: We are fortunate to have a substrate of "older" or at least long-time members who help provide continuity for the grotto. These older members contribute at least four things up front to help the grotto: One, after many years of caving they know where the caves or caving areas are as they've been to most of them at one time or another; two, older members often have certain skills they are willing to share (e.g. with me these skills are surveying, photography, and what not to do in vertical caves — the last is the result of painful experience); three, they usually have a good sense of caving do's and don't's or at least some sense: (e.g. "No, you don't break into a locked cave."); four, they know and usually have good reputations with many cave owners (including government agencies, commercial cave owners, and wild cave landowners). And have tried their best not to "break faith" with them or let other grotto members do so. Trust is, after all, built up over time.

Beyond these four direct attributes of our long-time members is their support sometimes by just "being there." Besides occupying chairs at the meetings and "after the meeting meetings," they often have helped hold the grotto together during lean times when few new members join (times which are hopefully in the past for OHG). Older members can also serve as grotto officers if needed, but usually will do so only in the direst necessity (as a duty), greatly preferring to pass the "reins" of power on to younger, hopefully more enthusiastic, members. This passing on is, after all, necessary if the grotto is to continue, for older members may also eventually "pass on" one way or another. The "taking over" of grotto responsibilities by younger members may be the most positive thing that has happened to OHG lately. Too, having the same older officers year after year, even if they are enthusiastic, may actually cause younger members to leave, since the latter may feel left out of running the grotto or even of planning trips. For some time, the retention rates of newer members wasn't very good but that seems to have changed lately.

Naturally, if OHG's younger members stay around long enough, they'll become those older members I'm talking about, but staying around isn't likely unless he

or she develops more interests in caves than just running to their ends. Recreational caving sooner or later will become boring if that is all you do; so stop and look around, there are many interesting things the surveyor, photographer or scientist sees that you pass by. These activities also provide something you can take home with you. So, get involved with other caving activities. Perhaps it is here that OHG's variety of trips will help develop multi-interest cavers. Activities such as cave restoration, the cave sciences, surveying and photography are very important to this expansion of interest.

5. Continuity: We are fortunate that there seems to be a general consensus among grotto members concerning conservation and other issues, and little or no "political B.S." going on, as many organizations break apart through either personal or political differences. Heart of the Ozarks Grotto (HOG), the original caving group that formed at Southern Missouri State University in the early 1960s, broke up due to a mix of these issues. (Though this wasn't all bad as it led directly to the formation of OHG.) Though originally a caving club, HOG's members had begun to segregate into two groups in the early 1970s, a caving group and an outdoor group. The strength of this segregation was partially fueled by a reaction against a top-heavy emphasis on cave mapping that the grotto had at the time, e.g., most grotto trips were mapping trips and nothing that wasn't map-related or "scientific" was printed in the Ozark Caver, the grotto's journal. Finally, the outdoor segment gained control, and as those members wanted it to become primarily an outdoor club with caving as just one possibility among many, the cavers left and (along with other non-students) formed OHG. As the heart and soul of OHG is caving and as there is no undue emphasis on any one aspect of caving (e.g., mapping), perhaps this particular type of trouble will not befall OHG.

6. C -----: In hopes of making this list exhaustive I've included one last item. Beyond the first five C's given above, there is at least one more "something" that should be included, the C----- This "C" stands for all that I haven't included here that has contributed to the grotto's success. (Since everything else started with a "C" I thought that this might as well.) When there is an abundance of this "c-thing" the grotto thrives, and when it is lacking, things go, well — to hell. Obviously, it is the grotto's president who is responsible for supplying this last element when needed and conserving it when not — so work on it, Ed.

To sum up, whatever it is that OHG members have been doing, we've been "doing it right" lately. Let's hope that we continue to do so. I'm sure that some

readers may be able to think of more factors that contribute to the success of the grotto. I would be more than happy to print your views, what I've written should be considered as only "c-eed" for your thoughts to grow upon.

Guidelines for a Healthy Grotto

Adapted from another organization.

1. A healthy grotto knows what its purpose in being is, and tries to persuade all its members to work toward the same goal. It accepts everyone's version of that goal.
2. A healthy grotto numbers in its membership all types of people. It supports each of its members where they are, and does not form cliques that exclude those with limitations. All members are encouraged to perform to their potential.
5. A healthy grotto encourages the participation of the young. Some of its older members may work well with the younger members.
4. There is a real sense of community within the healthy grotto. Everyone knows everyone else. Some members may have a special talent for maintaining contact with all the members.
5. The healthy grotto maintains good ties with regional and national levels and encourages participation in events and projects offered by regions and the national organization.
6. In a healthy grotto, some conflict is inevitable. The members work it through to a deeper friendship and cooperation. Such effort is repaid by the greater strength of the corporate group.
7. The healthy grotto makes some allowance for difficult members, but knows that sometimes a line must be drawn. For instance, drug abuse (including alcohol) should not be tolerated at grotto events when it harms the individual and may endanger others.