



May 2010
Volume 20, Issue 4

The Near Normal News

A synopsis of what it going on in the Near Normal

White Nose Syndrome Spreading Rapidly

White Nose Syndrome (WNS) is spreading quickly and is now as far west as Oklahoma. WNS has been verified in Missouri and Tennessee as well. All caves on federal and state land in Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa are now closed, including Illinois Caverns and Maquoketa Caves State Park, except for caves that charge a fee in Indiana. Most, if not all, Missouri caves are closed, except caves that charge a fee.

Illinois is also actively pursuing a program to persuade private cave owners to not allow people to enter their caves in Illinois' primary effort in battling White Nose Syndrome.

Please clean your gear with specified decontaminating procedures to comply with USFWS protocols available at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/whitenose/FINALContainmentandDecontaminationProceduresforCaversJune2009.pdf>. Don't enable anyone to accuse you of being a possible transmission vector by not deconning, no matter what you consider the probability.

April Minutes

Near Normal Grotto
Minutes of the meeting April 9, 2010

Present: Ralph Sawyer, John Walther, Jason Kern, Gerry Woltering, Matthew Level, Kevin Rasmus, Todd McCartney, L. J. Tognetti, George Mattson

Todd McCartney called the meeting to order.

Moved, seconded, approved to forgo a treasurer's report.

Minutes of the March meeting were examined and approved.

Trip Reports
Matt Level described a trip to Maquoketa Caves State Park, Iowa.

Old Business
Todd will try to get our wetsuit expert to present at the May meeting.

Tentative June 13, August 15 Vertical practice at ISU's rappelling tower. New Business
LJ strongly suggested that if you are a National Speleological Society member, you should vote!

LJ suggested a few ideas for meeting programs:
a. National Cave Rescue Commission training participants demonstrate a technique learned at NCRC training.
b. View an older National Geographic video on Lechugilla Cave.
c. Decontaminating gear against spread of White Nose Syndrome – demonstration or slide show.
d. Basic horizontal caving gear

We decided on September 26 for the annual Near Normal Grotto picnic.

Announcements
Tentative dates for vertical practice at ISU's rappelling tower are June 13 and August 15.

April Minutes - continued

Near Normal Grotto picnic September 26. Weekend of October 16-17 might be Bridge Day on the New River – an opportunity for those wishing to plumb Golondrinas (1100' pit in Mexico) to train.

Ralph gives a caving presentation at Lincoln Community College on April 22.

Moderate trip to Sullivan Cave on April 24. Contact Kevin Rasmus.

Todd stated there is a possibility of cave rescue training sometime in the future in Pike County, IL.

Contact Bill Morrow to post upcoming activities on Near Normal Grotto's website.

Meeting adjourned. Following the meeting we watched Bill Morrow's video presentation of our experiences at TAG* Fall Cave-In.

*Tennessee-Alabama-Georgia

May Minutes

Near Normal Grotto
Minutes of the meeting May 14, 2010

Present: Ralph Sawyer, Todd McCartney, Laura Pierce, David Carson, Justin Carson, Bill Roth, Bill Morrow, Kevin Rasmus, Gerry Woltering, Chris Haydel

Todd McCartney called the meeting to order.

Treasurer Dave Carson gave the financial report. Our account balance is \$624.86. Dave recommended paying the 40.00 fee for use of ISU's rappelling tower from the NNG treasury. The treasurer's report was approved.

Minutes of the April meeting were examined and approved.

Trip Reports

Dave Carson described caving with Cave Research Foundation (CRF). Dave went on surveying trips while the family remained on the surface. Later the family visited Dogwood Cave. David and Matthew Carson worked together on a restoration project in Mammoth Cave. Because of White Nose Syndrome, a disease of bats, Mammoth Cave officials might in the future require

decontamination of gear before work on a restoration project. Dave reported that tourists on Mammoth Cave's Wild Cave Tour must use gear supplied by Mammoth Cave, not their own.

Not a caving trip report, but Chris Haydel turned in a time of 3:05 in the Boston Marathon. Encouragement from the crowd helped Chris run and finish faster than he had planned. 26,000 runners participated in the Boston Marathon.

Ralph described his experience presenting caving to a group of Lincoln Community College students. Todd reported on a trip to Wayne's Cave in Indiana. Cavers endured the 1200 foot crawlway, twice, to visit the RPI Passage and Camp 4.

Todd, Laura, Bill Morrow and kids visited Maquoketa Caves State Park, Iowa, the day before the caves were closed as a control measure against White Nose Syndrome.

Bill Morrow informed us the discovery of White Nose Syndrome in caves along the Current River in Missouri, and in Camp's Gulf Cave in Tennessee.

Are your dues past due?

Send them (\$15) to:

Near Normal Grotto

P.O. Box 813

Normal, Illinois

61761-0813

May Minutes - continued

Dave added some details of a White Nose Syndrome information meeting that he attended recently at the University of Illinois.

Old Business

June 13 and August 15 Vertical Practice at ISU's rappelling tower are confirmed. Vertical practice is not open to the general public, but NNG members can bring guests. Ralph formally moved that ISU's fee of \$40.00 be paid from the Grotto treasury. Motion approved by a vote.

New Business

An Experience with Bad Air? By Ralph Sawyer

In August Todd McCartney, L.J. Tognetti, Andrea Tognetti, Dan McCartney, and I visited an unnamed cave in Pike County, Illinois. Todd had located the cave months earlier and had descended the pit entrance with Don Coons.

For this trip I was privileged to be the first to rappel in. Tight vertical entrances like this one are always disconcerting. Because of the tightness I could not see my brake hand, and I had no belayer below me. What would happen if my hand jammed into some unseen crack or was pinned against the side of my leg? I raised my bursitis-plagued left arm, expelled some air from my lungs and committed to the descent, hoping I would not become lodged in a painful position. With relief I eased down into the darkness with no problems.

The rappel was never free of contact with rock – no dramatic free-hanging descent past magnificent formations, no misty waterfalls, but this was Pike County. A cave with any vertical aspect here is a respectable find.

The reason that I was first to descend was that I had brought what

Todd can arrange a trip to Bluesprings Cave in Tennessee for June or July. This could be a trip for newer cavers. We talked of a family trip to Sullivan Cave in Indiana.

Meeting adjourned, followed by a presentation on wetsuits by Mr. and Mrs. Dick Smith, owners of Wild Country.

Andrea has named Ralph Jr. – a pack containing about eighteen pounds of camera, tripods, and flashes. Once I got off rope I went to work setting up some closeup photos of the cave walls, which seemed in places to be composed of pasted together fossils of crinoid columns, the stalklike body parts of ancient marine animals related to starfish.

Once Andrea was down and off rope, and we started conversing, I noticed that I was a little short of breath. Andrea complained that she felt like she was out of shape. Neither of us was doing anything particularly strenuous.

Soon Todd appeared to help me with the lighting of photos. A little later Andrea, L. J., and I worked on a posed caver photo, but my attitude suffered. I "phoned it in", that is, I settled for the first result that was passable. While we worked on the photo, Todd ascended to keep Dan company. Dan, who is a weight lifter with a generous chest size, had wisely decided this tight pit should not be his first vertical cave experience.

An Experience with Bad Air? - continued

The three remaining cavers soon gave voice to their shared concern that something was not right. We had not been exerting ourselves much physically, yet we were all out of breath, as if we had just completed some mild exercises, or were hiking at a high altitude. We decided that I would pack up the photography gear as L. J., then Andrea ascended. We already knew that despite the limited vertical extent of the pit – probably around seventy feet – the twists and turns of the pit made voice communication unreliable. Three good tugs on the rope would mean “Off Rope” to the caver waiting his turn to ascend.

As Andrea awaited her turn, I fumbled with the switch of my headlamp, intending to turn it off (later at home I had no difficulty with the switch). Then I became aware of the urgent need to pee. I headed into the next room where a tiny stream made its way across the floor. Attempting to ignore the painful pressure that was building in my bladder, I tried instead to concentrate on the cumbersome task of removing my harness. Once the harness was off and I had attained relief, I studied the little streamway. It hooked left into a low, jagged crawlway that appeared to pinch down after about twenty feet. Appearances can be deceiving, I thought. Crawl in, shine a light into some of those shadows, and who knows what you might find. Probably nothing. Maybe something. Maybe a passage that goes. It only takes a minute to find out.

At this point Andrea was ascending. Should I shout to her, tell her that I am real quick going to check out a crawl? It occurred to me that I might not be thinking straight, even if it felt like I was. Sticking to the plan, I put my harness back on. I double checked my gear out loud: “The maillon that fastens my harness closed is screwed shut. Here is my QAS, attached to the maillon. Here is my upper ascender and my chest ascender, both attached to the maillon. Here is my rappel rack, if I am

forced to change over to descent. The carabiner that attaches the rack to the maillon is locked.”

I stood just out of the fall zone, the beam of my headlamp focused on the rope. Now and then I thought I could hear a muffled, barely discernable voice, but the sound of my own labored breathing made me unsure of what I did or did not hear. The rope shifted a few times, probably because of the tight spots Andrea was encountering. Finally I saw the three upward tugs I had been waiting for. I yelled “On Rope!” as loud as I could, and clipped my chest ascender and my upper ascender onto the muddy rope. I was breathing hard before I even started. I found that I could only sit/stand five or six times before I needed a rest. I was never aware of my heart pounding in my chest, just the need for more air. I kept working my way up with frequent short rests. Tethered to my harness, Ralph Jr. hung about ten feet below me. At one point the pack became snagged on a lip. It never occurred to me to downclimb. I struggled repeatedly with the tether, trying to push it sideways with my foot. I got lucky and hauled the pack up to a muddy ledge, rested again, and resumed my ascent.

The really tight spot is only a few feet below the surface, so I could see a patch of sky and the leaves of overhanging branches as I approached it. I’m so close, I should just be able to climb out now, I thought. But I was breathing too fast. I would rest a bit. “Can someone take my pack?” I croaked. Someone’s hands appeared above me, and with great effort I heaved Ralph Jr. upward. The pack blocked out the sunlight for a moment and then I could see sky and leaves again. Now I needed a rest from lifting the pack. A mild sense of panic crept into my thinking. I need to rest, but can I afford to rest? What if I pass out right here? My friends will have to try to rescue me. What if, in trying, they pass out? I cut the rest break short.

*Don't Forget!
Picnic is September 26!*

An Experience with Bad Air? - continued

Near Normal Grotto

P.O. Box 813
Normal, IL 61761-0813

Meeting at Bromenn Medical
Center, Normal, Illinois.
Second Friday of the month.

E-Mail:

nngwebmaster@yahoo.com

We're on the Web!

See us at:

<http://www.caves.org/grotto/nng>

The only thing that made the tight spot difficult was dealing with the sense of panic, and soon I stood on the surface with my friends. In five minutes my normal rate of breathing had resumed, just as it had for L. J., Andrea, and Todd.

I was glad to be out, but the cave presents some unfinished business, as caves usually do. In National Cave Rescue Commission training, we learned that carbon dioxide is slightly heavier than normal surface air. In a cave such as this one, down in a hollow that had little air movement to begin with, it was possible the cool cave air was laden with more CO₂ than was healthy for cavers. We wondered if, in winter, there might

be more air exchange as relatively warm air rose from the entrance pit. And would a cigarette lighter ignited at the bottom of the cave display a different flame than it would on the surface? And what about that little crawlway? Unfinished business.



Caver in Western Illinois Pit
Photo by Ralph Sawyer



Fossiliferous rock in Western Illinois Pit
Photo by Ralph Sawyer