

RASS REGISTER



Richmond Area
Speleological
Society

February, 1999

Volume 27, Number 2



Whole
Lotta

*Cavin'
Goin'
On!*



ISSN 1045-4896

The Richmond Area Speleological Society (RASS) is an Internal Organization (Grotto) of the National Speleological Society. RASS holds its General Meeting on the first Thursday of each month at 5300 West Marshall Street, Richmond, VA (see map). The doors open at 7:00 P.M., and the meeting starts at 7:30 P.M.

The RASS Board of Directors meets the second Thursday of each month at 5300 West Marshall. Board meetings are open to the general membership and attendance is encouraged.

Our office is located at 5300 West Marshall, and is usually staffed during the mornings. The phone number is (804) 673-CAVE. Please leave a message at other times.

Annual membership is \$10.00 for NSS members, and \$15.00 for non-NSS members, due in January. Both memberships include a subscription to the *RASS Register*. If you would like membership information, please call the office, or write for an application.

Material contained in the *Register* may be used and/or reprinted by other NSS affiliated organizations, provided credit is given to the author and the *RASS Register*. Opinions expressed herein are those of the article's author, and not necessarily those of RASS, its Board of Directors, or the NSS. Grottos interested in exchanging newsletters should contact the Editor.

Material for publication in the *Register* can be submitted via hard-copy (delivered, by mail, or fax), 3.5" Macintosh disks, 3.5" and 5.25" PC formatted disks, in just about any popular word-processing format, or preferably, via email to jgmurphy@richmond.infi.net. Deadline for submissions is the second Friday of each month. Fax submissions can go directly to the Editor, at 804-796-3815, or to the RASS office, at 804-673-0118. Computer generated material is the easiest to work with, and "wordsmithing" services are available if you'd like to submit, but feel the need to have an English major help out. We'll even return your disks (eventually). Pictures, preferably high-contrast glossy prints are also welcome. Slides can also be reproduced. They will also be returned.

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ISSN 1045-4896

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Margot Geisler, Historian	261-1214	
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Art Heifetz, Quartermaster	672-2800	262-6595
Jeanie London, Membership, Rescue	282-5138	358-7866

Office Staff

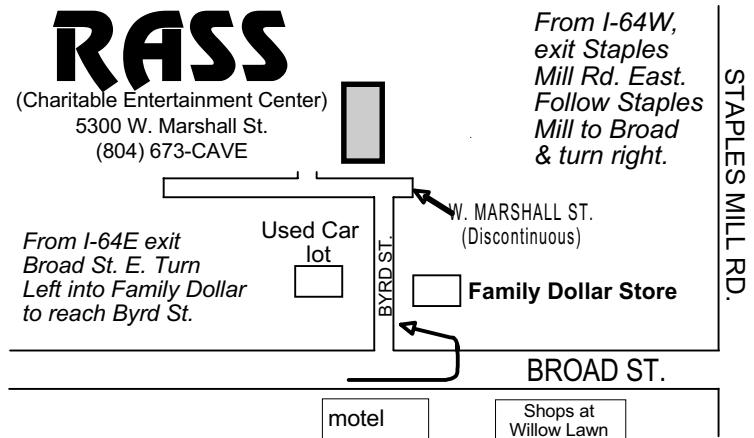
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Office e-mail: rass@richmond.infi.net	

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	zokaites@usit.net

RASS Field Station, Bath Co., VA

How to find us:



On the cover: Top: A RASS group after a trip into Paxton's Cave on November 7th. Photo by Mike Williams. Bottom: A group of Rockbridge County surveyors (l-r) Patti McDonald, Gail Robertson, Ted Andrus, John Murray, Janice Preston, Bob Thren, Tony Preston, and Cindy (?). Photo by Bob Barns



Caver Happenings

January, 1999

7 General Meeting
14 Board Meeting
TBA Grotto Novice Trip - Porters Cave Survey -
Glen Todd

February

4 General Meeting
11 Board Meeting
TBA Learn-a-Cave - Organ Cave - Glen Todd
TBA Grotto Novice Trip - Mike Friedenberg

April

3 Dixie Caverns Cleanup - VAR Project, see
flier in this issue for more details
17 Island Ford Cave Cleanup - hosted by Blue
Ridge Grotto, contact Leonard McGann,
(540)297-6077 for info
30 - May 2 Spring VAR - hosted by Tri-State Grotto at
Natural Chimneys, see flyer in this issue
for more details

May

1 Grand Caverns Cleanup (during Spring
VAR), see flyer for more details

July

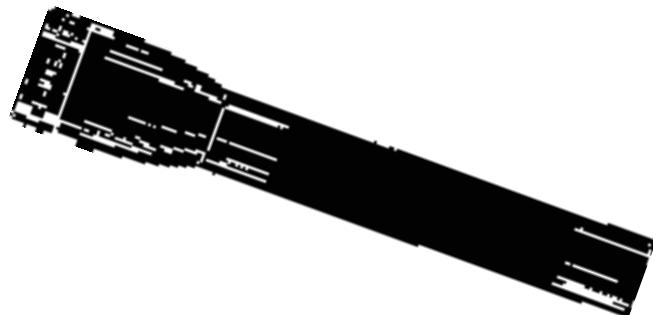
12-16 NSS Convention, Twin Falls County
Fairgrounds, Filer, Idaho. Contact: David
W. Kesner, PO Box 1334, Boise, ID 83701;
(208)939-0979; email drdave@micron.net

Fall, 1999

Fall VAR - hosted by Front Royal Grotto

Spring, 2000

Spring VAR - hosted by VPI Grotto



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**The RASS Website has moved!!! Now
we have a cool new URL, and much
cheaper space! You can find us at:**

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

**And, there's a new feature on the site: The
RASS Register Online edition! Saved as an
Adobe Acrobat .pdf file, it contains all the
material of the print version, plus, starting
in January, COLOR versions of the black
and white pictures in your monthly newslet-
ter.**

Requires Adobe Acrobat version 3.0 or greater to read.



Helmets OFF!



by: Rich Geisler

I would like to take the opportunity to thank you all that have volunteered to help with Bingo. Thanks a lot to the volunteers who helped when we really needed you! Folks, we have to have more volunteers, many nights are running short handed. If you can volunteer for either Sunday or Monday (especially) games, please call me at 261-1214. It only takes from 6:30 to 9:30 PM. I will have the sign up sheets at the General Meeting.

Here's a list of our volunteers for November, 1998

Rich Geisler
Ted Kayes
Cheryl Kayes
Mickey Bracey
Becky Bracey
Tray Murphy
Chris Hayes
Scott Klaus
Bill Steele
Larry Hart
Steve Wood
Jackie Heifetz
Bob Barns
Patti McDonald
Kim Hulce

Here's the list for December, 1998:

Maria Craft
Garrie Denson

Jackie Heifetz
Mike Williams
Laura Silva
Dave Holland
Bob Barns
Patti McDonald
Jane Biggers
Judi Worsham
Darrel Worsham
Chris Winder
Mickey Bracey
Becky Bracey
Geoffrey Long
Mike Friedenberg
Kim Hulce
Tad Kayes
Cheryl Kayes
Art Heifetz
Scott Klaus
Drew Harrison
Tray Murphy
Rich Geisler

THANK YOU!!!



**February:
Billy Pickett promises to
show us some of his exploits
in caves!**

**March:
It's Glen Todd's turn to
show us some slides...**

**April:
Bob Handley is coming to
present a program on the
caves of West Virginia.**



News Items

Volunteers Needed for Retreat Help

The 1999 Board of Directors' Retreat will be held over the weekend of February 26-28th. For the third year in a row, it will be held at the Jamestown 4-H Camp. We need a few folks to volunteer to help out with "housekeeping" things like setting up for the meals. We usually have a Saturday morning continental breakfast, a working lunch of deli sandwiches and chips, we'll go out for dinner, then another breakfast on Sunday. If you would be willing to help out the Board, so they do not have to lose time preparing these meals, please contact Becky as soon as possible, and she can fill you in on the details of exactly what needs to be done, since she's done it several times in the past! Also, if you intend to attend the weekend to provide input and insight of the Board as they chart the course for RASS' 1999 year, please let Becky know as soon as possible.

CORRECTION!!! AGAIN!!!

*HEY ALL YOU BINGO VOLUNTEERS:
PLEASE NOTE RICH'S WORK NUMBER
HAS CHANGED TO 935-2225. IF YOU
HAVE VOLUNTEERED AND CANNOT
WORK PLEASE LET HIM KNOW (HOPE-
FULLY IN TIME SO ANOTHER VOLUN-
TEER CAN BE ARRANGED).*

Board Elections Held

The Board held its annual election of officers at the January Board meeting. There were no surprises. Officers for the coming year are as follows:

Chairman of the Board: Mike Friedenberg*
President: Margot Geisler*
Vice-President: Bob Barns*
Secretary: Art Heifetz*
Treasurer: Ted Kayes*

A few committee chairs have changed hands:

Safety and Techniques: Steve Wood

Conservation: Glen Todd

Field Station: Darrel Worsham

Library/Research: Margot Geisler

Outings: Billy Pickett

Programs: Bob Barns

Education: Art Heifetz*

Grants: Alex Sproul*

Mapping and Survey - Porters Cave: Glen Todd*

Membership: Jeanie London*

Publications: Tray Murphy*

Quartermaster: Art Heifetz*

Rescue: Jeanie London*

Novice Trip Coordinator: Billy Pickett*

Historian: Margot Geisler*

Parliamentarian: Bob Barns*

Partnership Representative: Ted Kayes*

* indicates incumbents



More Volunteers NEEDED!

A volunteer or two or more is/are needed to put the Spring Cave Conference together. This involves preparing the Saturday night meal for the members in attendance, and supplying libations for that night's gathering (all at grotto expense, of course). Please contact Billy Pickett, the outings coordinator to express your interest in making the SCC a memorable event for everyone!

Trip Reports

Rockbridge County Survey



Patti McDonald, left, and Ted Andrus make their way down the slope leading to Bather's Cave in Rockbridge County. Photos by Bob Barns.



Left: The surveyors gather at the entrance to Bather's Cave. Photo by Bob Barns.

Below: Ted Andrus in a rather snug passage in Bather's Cave. Photo by Bob Barns.



February Learn-A-Cave Trip Organ Cave System

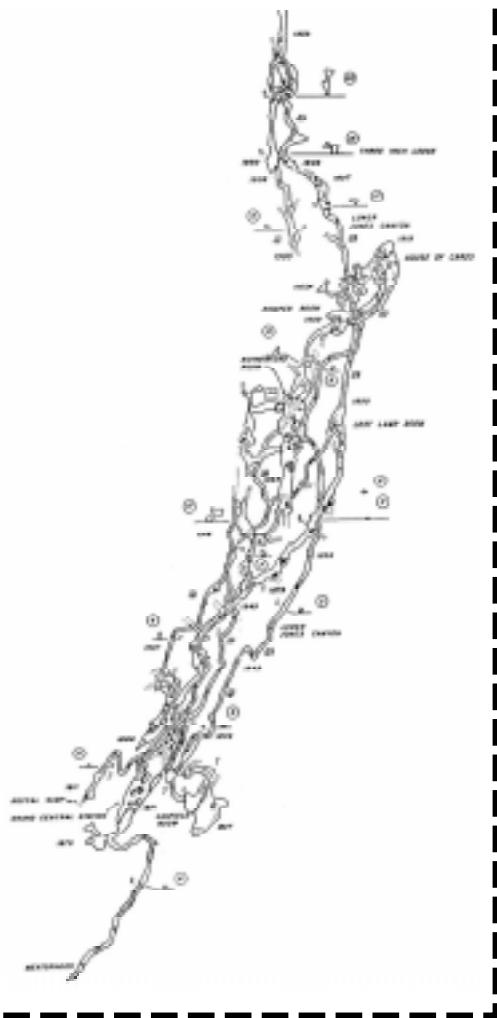
by Glen Todd

Study Area: Lower Jone's Canyon Maze

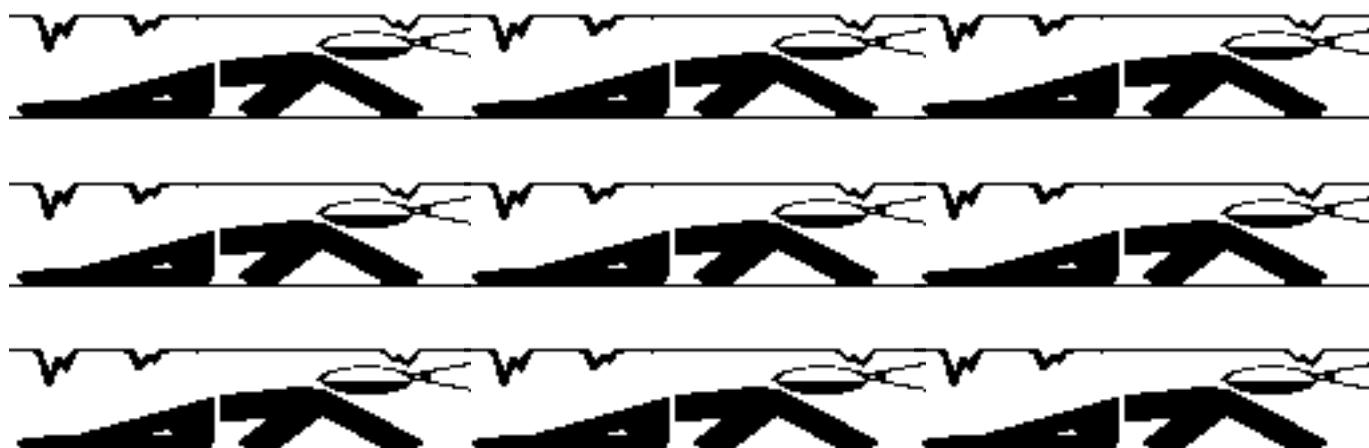
February's Learn-A-Cave Trip will be held March 6th, and Glen Todd is leading it!

Jones Canyon begins after several hours of caving through the Lipps Maze from the Lipps Entrance. The Lipps area has been "learned" enough on previous trips and we plan to breeze right through all that—thanks to the new and improved Friedenberg Express. Jones Canyon is big 20' x 20' trunk passage full of breakdown and I have only been as far as the first waterfall. Beyond there, the learning process truly begins, since no one on the trip will likely have ever been there before. An Organ Cave Plateau Bulletin has a detailed description of the area, but basically one simply ascends through breakdown to the Belfry, hangs a left over the Three Inch Ledge, a right through a fifteen foot crack/squeeze, then proceeds to a belly crawl. Cross the top of the precarious dome at 20 foot waterfall number 2, ascend through a hole, lunch break in Grand Central Station, explore upper levels to Rutherford Room and Big Mother Pit, explore downstream past second and third waterfalls to Rectal Sump for pictures, and finally, if time allows, belly crawl to the Romper Room and beyond to kick and poke around in the House of Cards for virgin passage. Or, for a fun side trip, we could blast the 1200 foot Meatgrinder crawl just to make sure we can fit.

Any way you look at it, there's much to "learn" in that portion of the system and I encourage everyone to sign up for the study, but be prepared to suffer immensely!



Clip this Organ Cave map and bring it with you on the February Learn-A-Cave Trip



Porters Survey Update

by Glen Todd

Trip # 21 12/12/98

*Glen Todd, John Sullivan, Chris Winder,
Chris Hayes
17 Stations, 449 feet*

Less than 200 feet from the entrance, in the main passage going toward the "Keyhole", several tiny surface streams enter from small cracks in the left wall, and flow across the floor into several holes along the right wall. These holes open in to the lowest level stream passage. None of these streams actually have water except during heavy rains when the cave's inaccessible drainage backs up and overflows.

The main stream floods and sumps during these times as evidenced by the flood debris stuck to the ceiling and a fresh coat of mud everywhere. This low passage is typically two to four feet high and ten to fifteen feet wide, and has long been avoided for all the above reasons. After a long summer drought, and running out of larger leads, today was the day to finally survey this passage.

The survey began as a belly crawl heading upstream and a terrible looking belly crawl heading downstream. We headed upstream (refer to the map, beginning on the far right of the page). I noticed ours were the only footprints in this smooth coat of mud, but this ain't virgin passage...we're just the only fools to crawl up here since the last flood.

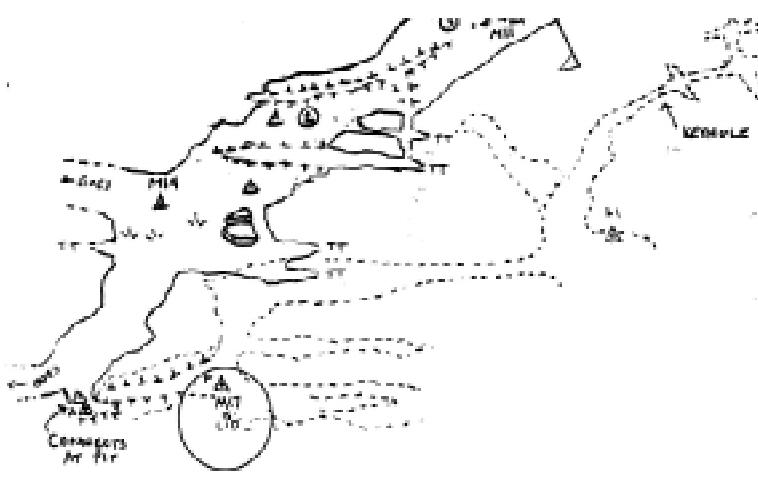
The first several stations were actually some of the tightest. The passage quickly opened up to hands and knees crawl. What a relief! The floor was smooth, and the mud was only slightly damp from the many months of dry weather. Not bad at all! A joint along the ceiling even threw in some formations for us to admire as we crawled along. For such a low passage, I was surprised at the long shots we were getting. We were able to use nearly all of the fifty foot tape on several occasions.

About half way through, the ceiling and walls opened up enough that you could stand up and call it

a room (See Station M9). It was here, in a small side passage, that we came upon a live chillin' frog. How he got there, and why he was still alive is quite a mystery. As to whether we should have "saved" the frog has been the subject of much debate since then.

Proceeding upstream from this room the ceiling dropped to one foot again, but only briefly (long enough for Kibby to balk). Surveying continued for several hundred more feet of hands and knees action. We were really starting to dread crawling all the way back out. Soon the ceiling opened into several parallel fissures joining interconnected passageways. Branching off to the left through a low, wide room gave access to a climb up through some boulders, and into known passage beyond the Keyhole! Hallelujah!

This passage now becomes the third bypass around the Keyhole (the second one being a hairy climb to an upper level) and I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to avoid the Keyhole crawl but still wants to see the back of the cave. After plotting the stations, I'm proud to say we only missed the old station in the known passage by four feet! (See Station M17 on the map.) That's pretty good after spending the majority of the survey trip on our sides. Hats off to the instrument reader!



The circle is around the M17/L10 survey station. The loop closure error at this point was less than four feet!

Speleofied Ads



Great for pond fishing! No, not Maria. But instead a beautiful blue V-bottom jon boat for sale. 12', trailer/trolling motor. Ready to go. Asking \$600. Call Wayne and Maria.

Found, Kodak Camera in Steve Wood's blue station wagon, probably on a fall cave trip. Identify and claim by calling Steve at 230-9356

Lost, orange bag containing blue rainsuit, call Steve Wood at 230-9356



Chris Hayes (rear view), Jason Hart (middle, on rope), and Steven Biggers (below, on rope) practice vertical skills at the Ravens Roost Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Photo by Mike Williams.

Membership Info

WELCOME BACK:

David Cooper
P.O. Box 207
Sandston, Virginia 23150-0207
(804)737-1698 (h)
(804)236-6855 (w)
Fax: 737-9360
drcoop@usa.net
NSS #32062

Ray Tharp
1207 Santa Anna Road
Richmond, VA 23229-5731
NSS #33400
(804)282-5293 (h & w)

CHANGES OF ADDRESS:

Scott Klaus
1301 Nottoway Avenue
Richmond, Virginia 23227-4016

John Adams
3510 Clark Drive
Sarasota, FL 34234

Marvin Ashby
Megan Ashby
2912 Hilliard Road
Richmond, VA 23228-4218

Debbie Jacobs
13419 Carters Valley Road
Chesterfield, VA 23838-3051

Tracey Gillespie
P. O. Box 729
Louisa, Virginia 23093-0729

Phil and Janet Newton
1811 LeSuer Road
Richmond, VA 23229-4220

Mother Goose and Grimm



WEST VIRGINIA NATURE NOTES**RARE SPECIES FACT SHEET****Allegheny Woodrat**

Scientific Name: *Neotoma magister* (NEE-ah-TOH-mah
MAA-jih-stir)

Status: The US Fish and Wildlife Service considers the Allegheny woodrat a "Species of Concern."

West Virginia Status: The Allegheny woodrat is more abundant in W.V. than the states to the northeast although it may be declining in the easternmost counties (Berkeley and Jefferson) of the state.

Description: The Allegheny woodrat is a medium-sized rodent with a long, hairy tail. It can be distinguished from the comparably-sized Norway and black rats by its soft, silky fur, large ears and eyes, blunt nose, and hairy, bicolored (dark on top, light underneath) tail. The adult woodrat ranges from 38 to 47 cm. (15 to 19 in.) from the end of its nose to the tip of its tail, and weighs up to 480 grams, (approximately 1 pound). Its fur is brownish gray above and whitish gray beneath. The tidy, meticulous habits of this rodent (also known as packrat) further distinguish the woodrat from its urban cousins.

Range: Historically, the Allegheny woodrat occupied a range extending from southwestern New England along the Appalachian Highlands to northern Alabama and across eastern Tennessee and Kentucky into southern Ohio and Indiana. The woodrat has declined swiftly and severely in the northern part of its range—Pennsylvania, Maryland and New Jersey—and is now considered to be absent from Connecticut and New York.

Habitat: Allegheny woodrats live almost exclusively in rocky areas such as caves, deep crevices, and large boulder fields. Most woodrat dwellings are located in or around hardwood forests that have an abundance of oaks and other mast-bearing trees. The woodrat is also known to occur in northern hardwood (beech, birch, maple) and oak-pine forests. Woodrats are seldom found in agricultural or residential areas.

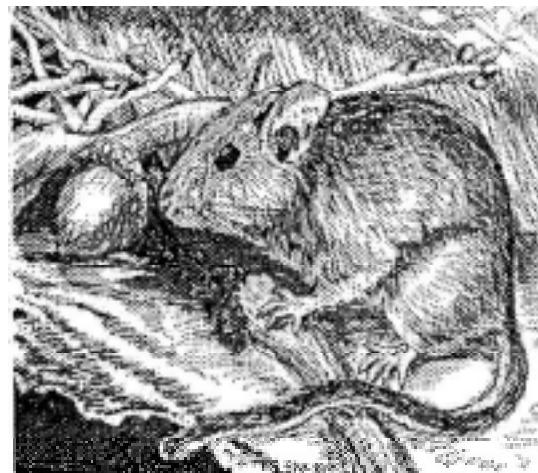
Diet: Woodrats are herbivores: they rely almost exclusively on plant materials for their food. Among their favorite foods are acorns and other nuts, berries, twigs, leaves and fungi. Occasionally they may feed on snails, insects or other invertebrates. In Autumn woodrats habitually cache (store) large quantities of acorns, twigs, leaves, and other edible vegetation to ensure a constant food supply throughout the winter months.

Life History: Woodrats are active throughout the winter. Around March they mate, and after approximately thirty-five days the female gives birth to between two and four young. During their early days the young, eyes closed and naked, cling firmly to their mother. Their eyes open within 20 days and they are weaned within four weeks of birth. Females typically have two to three litters per year. Most woodrats do not reach sexual maturity until their second year.

Except for periods of breeding and young rearing, woodrats are solitary animals and often defend their territories against intruders. They construct "houses" that consist of one or two nests, caches of acorns and other food items, and piles of debris found in the area. It is thought that these piles of leaves, twigs, and litter help to alert the woodrats when predators or other woodrats come around. Woodrats have glands on their ventral (stomach) sides that secrete an odor allowing them to mark their territories.

Woodrats are primarily nocturnal, meaning that they are most active at night. They exit their quarters after dark to forage and gather nest materials. Their acute senses of smell and hearing, large eyes, and long whiskers allow these animals to effectively navigate through their dark, underground caverns. It has been suggested that woodrats mark their trails with urine and use the odor to retrace their way to and from their quarters. Predators of the woodrat include owls, foxes, raccoons, opossums, and large snakes.

Threats and Prospects: Scientists have identified several factors that may be contributing to the decline of the Allegheny woodrat. Some cite the gypsy moth, which has been spreading south into the oak forests where woodrats live, as the culprit. Defoliation by gypsy moth larvae can severely weaken oak trees, reducing the acorn crops on which woodrats rely for food in the winter. A second threat to the woodrat is a parasite, the raccoon roundworm (*Baylisascaris procyonis*), that is carried by raccoons. The raccoon roundworm, which does not severely harm raccoons, causes death in woodrats by attacking their central nervous systems. With their tendency to collect debris, including the scats of other animals, woodrats are especially susceptible to contracting this disease from raccoon feces. Habitat degradation and fragmentation may also be playing a role in the woodrat's decline throughout much of its range. Because of their tendency to inhabit remote places, woodrats generally have not been severely impacted by human activities.



Scientists in other states are experimenting with vaccines to reduce the occurrence of raccoon roundworm in their natural hosts. In West Virginia efforts have begun to control gypsy moths with insecticides. However, until more is known about the exact mechanisms that are suppressing woodrat populations, little more than monitoring can be done. Biologists with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources are monitoring several woodrat populations to obtain long-term data on population trends.

What you can do to help: If you see a rat-like mammal in what appears to be woodrat habitat, do not harm the animal; let it go about its business. Please report any woodrat sightings with a map to Woodrat Sighting, WVDNR, P.O. Box 67, Elkins, WV 26241 or call (304) 637-0245. This will help us better determine this animal's range in West Virginia.

Produced by the Division of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Section Nongame Wildlife and Natural Heritage Program.

April 25, 1997

ALLEGHENY WOODRAT REPORT

The Allegheny Woodrat population appears to be declining and this study is an attempt to obtain observation statistics from cavers and others who may encounter the rats or their nests. The most common nesting locations are in rock outcrops or near the entrances to caves. The rats are sometimes seen near the nests or further into the dark zone of the cave. When you encounter a nest, please do not disturb it or remove anything from it (including trash).

State: _____ County: _____ Date of Observation: _____

Observer(s): _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

CAVE Cave Name: _____

OTHER (Rock outcrop, boulder field) Describe: _____

Landowner: _____

Please provide a map for all locations if possible.

Did not see any rat sign.

Saw only old sign.

Fresh sign seen (Describe below).

Saw woodrat(s); Number seen: _____ Did any rats have ear tags? _____

Fresh scat

Nest

Food Midden (Describe the contents of the midden below)

Acorns Cedar (white) Mushrooms

Walnuts Cedar (red) Magnolia Pods

Hickory Nuts Ferns Other:

Hemlock Grapes

Comments: _____

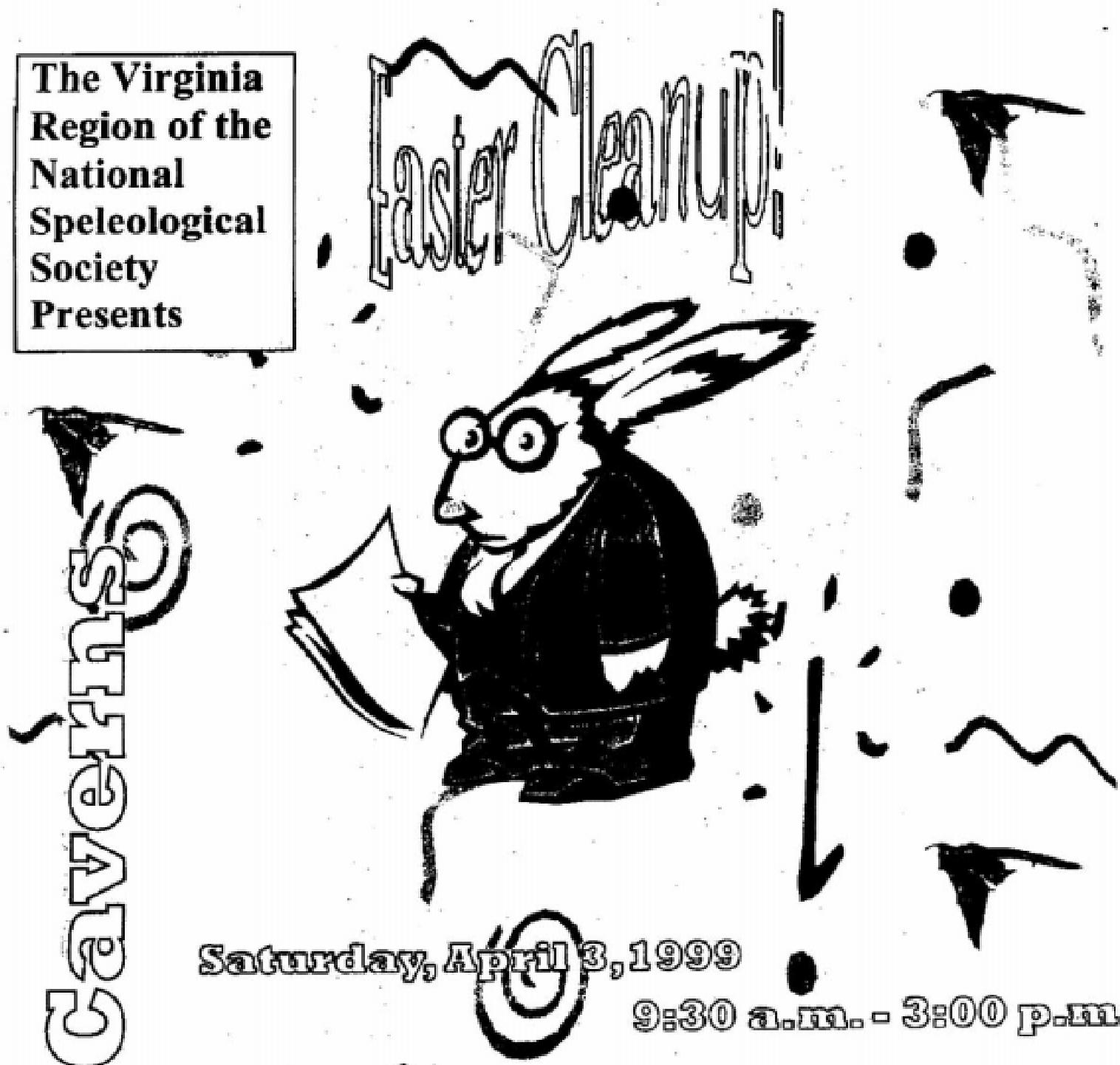
Return report to the following, depending on the state where the sighting was made:

West Virginia: Woodrat Report, Craig Stihler, WVDNR, P.O. Box 67, Elkins, WV 26241

Maryland: Woodrat Report, Dan Feller, 10775 Savage River Rd., Swanton, MD 21561

Virginia: Woodrat Report, Mike Mengak, Ferrum College, Box 2383, Ferrum, VA 24088

The Virginia
Region of the
National
Speleological
Society
Presents



- ◆ Hunting for Easter eggs is for GEEKS! Be COOL and help with the Dixie Caverns Easter Cleanup!
- ◆ Free Camping on Friday and Saturday night
- ◆ Big FEED on Saturday (Cook the RABBIT)!!
- ◆ CONTACT Andy Reeder for more information
(540) 297-3711 or ahrreeder@aol.com

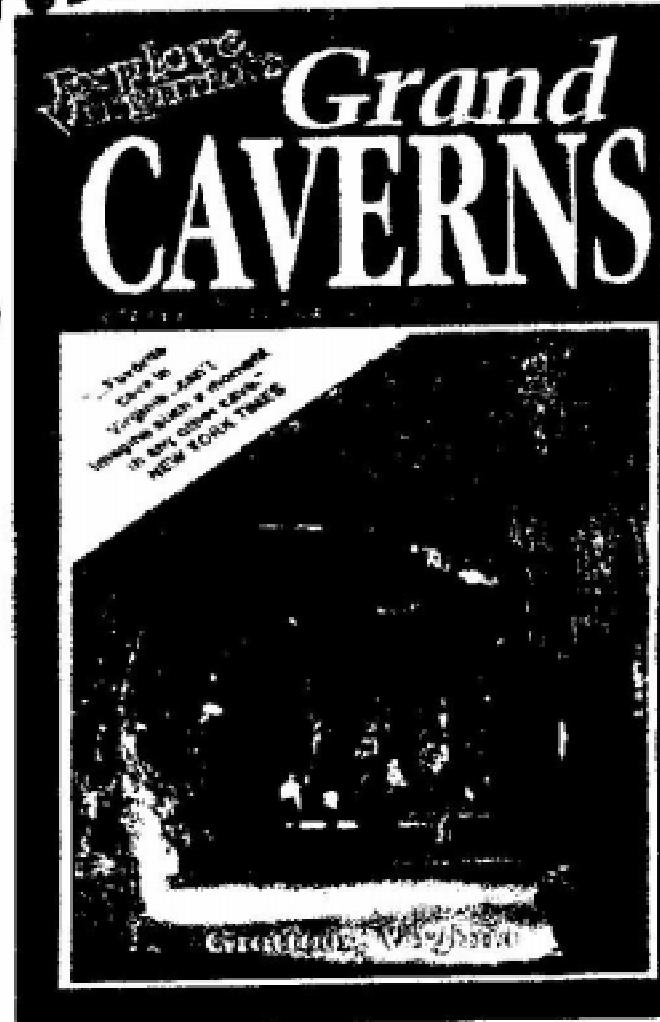
The Virginia Region
of the National Speleological Society



GRAND CAVERNS RESTORATION CAMP

9:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Saturday, May 1, 1999
SPRING VAR 1999

Join us for a day of fun and frolic as we work to restore a piece of Virginia's underground heritage. Our efforts will continue in the tourist sections of Grand Caverns and in nearby Fountain Cave. Bring a friend and get ready to have FUN!



For more information contact: Andrew Reeder, Conservation Chair
(540) 297-3711 ahreeder@aol.com

SPRING V.A.R.

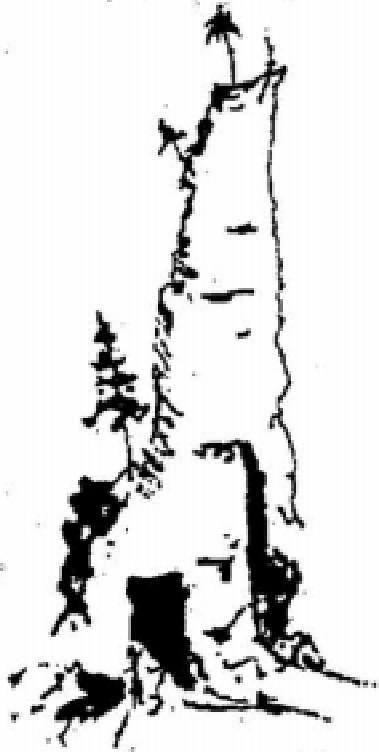
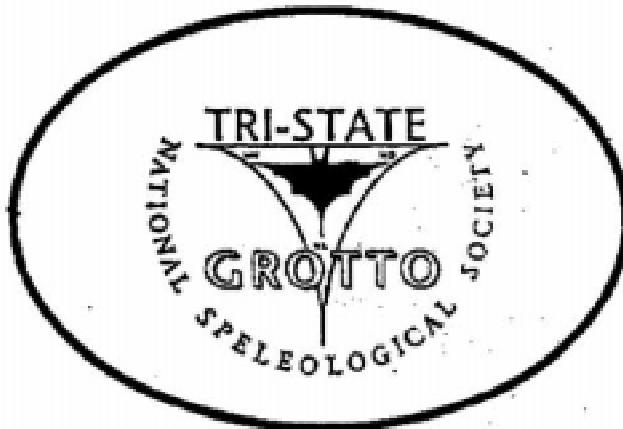
APRIL 30, MAY 1, 2, 1999

NATURAL CHIMNEYS
MT. SOLON, VA

PRE-REGISTRATION: \$ 20.00 BY MARCH 31, 1999

ON SITE: \$ 25.00

HOSTED BY TRI-STATE GROTTO



DIRECTIONS: EXIT 240, I-81, WEST TO BRIDGEWATER AND FOLLOW SIGNS

PRE-REGISTRATION BY MARCH 31, 1999

MAIL TO: JUDY L. FISHER, P. O. BOX 276, BERKELEY SPRINGS, WV 25411

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CAMPING, DINNER SATURDAY NIGHT, VAR DUES.....\$ 20.00 _____

YOUTH BASIC (UNDER 15 YEARS).....\$ 17.00 _____

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: TRI-STATE GROTTO

CONTACT PERSONS: J. C. OR JUDY FISHER - 304-258-4974 (EVENINGS)

Address Correction Requested
Forwarding and Return Postage Guaranteed

Vol. 27, No. 2
February, 1999

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Contributors to the Register:

Thanks to:

Bob Barns for teh Rockbridge County Survey pictures.

Elen Todd for the Learn-A-Cave article and map, and the Porters Cave Survey update and map!

Mike Williams for more pictures!

Becky Bracey submitted news and membership info, and

Rich Geisler brought us up-to-date on our important Bingo volunteers.

Visit the RASS Register Online! at http://www.caves.org/grotto/rass/rass_register_online.html