

IKC UPDATE

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INDIANA KARST CONSERVANCY, INC

PO Box 2401, Indianapolis, IN 46206-2401

ikc.caves.org

Affiliated with the National Speleological Society



The Indiana Karst Conservancy is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation and preservation of caves and karst features in Indiana and other areas of the world. The Conservancy encourages research and promotes education related to karst and its proper, environmentally compatible use.

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IKC QUARTERLY BOARD MEETING REMINDER

Saturday, December 13th, 1 PM EST

Monroe County Public Library (Main Branch, Room 1C)

303 East Kirkwood Avenue, Bloomington, IN 47408

Our quarterly meetings are for the Executive Board to conduct business, and for our members and other interested persons to have an open forum to talk about cave and karst conservation, and related topics. Past, present, and future IKC projects are discussed to solicit comments and input from our members and the caving community as a whole. The meetings are informal, and everyone is encouraged to attend and participate. The IKC Board wants your input.

Preliminary Agenda Items: Financial reports; Recap of recent preserve work projects; Education/Outreach/Field Days updates; Quarry Life Awards re-cap; Electronic scheduling and waiver system update; Cave/land acquisition activities; Sullivan Cave Management Plan revision; DNR bat habitat contract update; Nominating Committee appointment and 2026 election planning; 2026 Indiana Cave Symposium planning; 40th anniversary planning; and more...

Meeting Details: The meeting will start promptly at 1 PM. If you have questions about the meeting or have an agenda item, please contact IKC President Matt Selig (see contact information on page 2).

Pre-Meeting Social: Come between 12:15 and the start of the meeting for refreshments and social time. Say hello to the IKC Board, fellow members, and supporters. Feel free to leave when the meeting starts, stay for a few minutes, or join us for the whole meeting. See page 24 for more details.

Parking: There is metered parking on the street at \$1 per hour, or the IU Poplars Garage is free on weekends and is just one block to the northeast of the library (415 E Sixth Street).

ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

Dec 13 – IKC Pre-meeting Social (see above and page 24)

Dec 13 – IKC Quarterly Meeting (see above)

March – IKC Annual Business Meeting (date and location TBD)

April 18 – 2026 Indiana Cave Symposium, Orange County Community Center

Spring – Orientation to Cave Rescue (date and location TBD)

For more information on the Indiana Karst Conservancy, visit our website at ikc.caves.org, our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/IndianaKarstConservancy, or write to our PO box. Membership to the IKC is open to anyone or any organization interested in supporting cave and karst conservation. Annual dues are \$20. Please see inside the back cover for a membership application form or to make a much-appreciated donation. Memberships and donations may also be made electronically by credit card or PayPal using our online services on our website (see the Join Us! tab in the menu) or ikc.caves.org/join-the-ikc.

The *IKC Update*, distributed for free, is published quarterly for members and other interested parties. The purpose of this newsletter is to keep the membership and caving community informed of IKC activities and other news related to cave/karst conservation. Submission of original or reprinted articles for publication is encouraged. Back issues can be found at ikc.caves.org/ikc-updates.

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RAMBLINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT...

I wanted to write my Ramblings last week. I was going to lead with Hoosier poet James Whitcomb Riley's "When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock!" and tell a story about the seasons of life, connecting it with what the IKC accomplished in 2025 as we prepare to settle into winter. This shift in seasons reminded me of my own journey having recently left a familiar job to strike out on my own.

But I procrastinated and Mother Nature beat me to the punch. As I write these words, there is a thin blanket of snow on the ground.

Winter approaches. Perhaps a hard winter? Time will tell. The bats in Indiana that don't have the good sense to migrate somewhere warm have returned to their underground hibernacula. Other animals that use caves for protection in winter have sensibly done likewise. The earth rests and readies itself for the inevitable return of spring.

Riley wrote a poem called "Winter Fancies", but it was mostly about how enjoyable winter is to watch from behind a warm window seated before a cozy fireplace. Perhaps with a warm quilt on your lap and a good book to read. That sounds nice enough, but I would rather be out ridgewalking.

Winter is great for ridgewalking. The leaves are off the trees. There aren't any insects to bother a person on a quiet walk through a forest. As the cold lies down upon the landscape, airflow in Indiana's caves reverses direction from entering at higher elevations and exiting at lower elevations in the hot months, to drawing in air at lower elevations, warming it, and expelling it through cracks and holes at higher elevations. The cold air frames plumes of steam that betray the underground voids where they were held and warmed.

There's something about winter that makes the hidden visible.

I learned recently that John Muir got his start as a renowned naturalist here in the Hoosier state. Indianapolis to be precise. This "Father of the National Park System" found himself working in a wagon wheel factory near what is

now just east of Lucas Oil Stadium. Through his diligent work at Osgood & Smith he rose from sawyer to supervisor, then engineer, proving his talent by inventing machinery that could automatically produce carriage wheels.

Even then he was a naturalist, though, taking early morning hikes in the fields and woodlands that then surrounded downtown Indianapolis. He brought his Sunday school class to the forests to teach them about nature. He wrote his sister that "the beautiful flowers and trees of God's own garden, so pure and chaste and lovely," brought tears to his eyes.

In March of 1867, a workplace injury at the carriage factory temporarily blinded him.

When he was healed, he made a choice. He chose to study and advocate for nature instead of continuing his work in factories. Like my own job change, he left what was safe and familiar behind to follow what called him more urgently.

He began a "thousand-mile walk" in Jeffersonville, Indiana and continued to Cedar Keys, Florida. During that journey he stopped at Horse Cave and Mammoth Cave in Kentucky and described them as a "noble gateway to the

birthplace of springs and fountains and the dark treasures of the mineral kingdom." He also began to notice that many of the good citizens he met on his journey were indifferent to the natural beauty around them. This observation would shape everything that followed.

Muir would go on to found the Sierra Club. His writings inspired others to take note of the beauty in the natural landscape around them, highlighting the need to protect and conserve the nation's natural crown jewels and influencing the creation of National Parks such as Yosemite, Petrified Forest, and Grand Canyon.

Regarding caves, Muir wrote, "It is a good thing, therefore, to make short excursions now and then, even to creep like worms into dark holes and caverns underground, not only to learn something of what was going on in those out-of-the-way places, but to see better what the sun sees on our



Traci Selig

return to common everyday beauty.”

As President of the IKC, I endorse this message. We have come so far in protecting some of the crown jewels of Indiana’s caves and karst and highlighting for a sometimes indifferent public how special and beautiful these out of sight, out of mind places are. As cavers we know that when we return from darkness to light, we see better the beauty of the world we inhabit. Going into hidden darkness changes how we see the surface. It illuminates the world in ways we might not otherwise have noticed.

This is what the IKC has done this past year. We’ve worked to make the invisible visible, the forgotten remembered, the overlooked treasured. We’ve used the *IKC Update* to tell the story of our 2025 activities, and it is obvious in retrospect that we moved mountains in the name

of conservation this year.

As always in my final Ramblings of the year, I want to take a moment to thank the IKC’s Executive Board, Cave Patrons, Property Managers, volunteers, members, donors, cavers, and our numerous well-wishers. We couldn’t have done it without the help of people such as yourself.

The new year will bring new challenges. When we meet again, we will have emerged from the winter that now stands before us and feel the warm sun again. I hope we all have an opportunity to discover, like Muir, our true calling and that we are blessed with the strength to do that work in the world.

Until that new work is revealed, happy holidays and safe caving!

Matt Selig

NEWS BRIEFS...

- ❑ At the September IKC Board meeting, Goni Iskali was officially appointed the Cave Patron for Sullivan Cave, the IKC’s most visited cave. Goni lives in the area and Sullivan Cave is one of her favorite caves. More importantly, she has the patience to handle the many questions related to the cave and requests to visit. Goni will be assisted by her husband, Brad Barcom, who is also very familiar with the cave. Joe Kinder remains the Property Manager for the 30-acre preserve. Joe’s many responsibilities include maintaining the camping area and the property as a whole.
- ❑ The other big news related to Sullivan Cave is that as of November 1, all caving or camping requests should now be made through the *Save Your Caves* online permit system. We have been evaluating this online system for over a year (thank you Paul Uglum and Tim Harris) and piloting the system since July with success. There is a bit of a learning curve for first-time users, but the feedback has been mostly positive. The September 2025 *IKC Update* article *Electronic Permit System at Sullivan Cave* (page 10) describes this new system and how to use it. Permit requests are reviewed and approved by the Cave Patron once all the participant waivers for the trip are submitted. As before, we kindly ask that requests be submitted at least a week in advance and that all executed waivers are submitted at least 48 hours before the trip. Other changes being implemented to better protect the cave include generally only one cave trip per day and a maximum of 15 participants per trip. Please see our Sullivan Cave Preserve webpage (ikc.caves.org/sullivan-cave) for links to the permit system, a document on using the permit system, the property’s Management Plan, and contact information for Cave Patron Goni Iskali.
- ❑ The Hoosier National Forest has announced per order 09-12-25-04 that they are adjusting their cave closure to now be from August 16 to May 14, increasing the closure period by a month (previously the closure period was from September 1 to April 30). The change is intended to better protect endangered, threatened, and sensitive bat species while they are in the caves in their hibernation stage and are the most vulnerable. It was also stated the new dates better align with the National Forest’s Bat Conservation Strategy. To see the full details, see www.fs.usda.gov/r09/hoosier/alerts/seasonal-cave-closure-effect.
- ❑ We are excited to announce the IKC has received funding to enhance our preserves for bat habitat. Brad Westrich, Indiana’s non-game mammal biologist, knows the hard work and passion the IKC puts in to our seven preserves, totaling 295 acres, using all-volunteer labor, and mostly using our volunteers’ own tools. One of the Division of Fish and Wildlife’s White-nose Syndrome grants allowed for assistance to help restore, maintain, or manage habitat near bat hibernacula or in areas critical for fall/spring



swarming of WNS-impacted bats. Brad reached out and said, “I’d like to use these funds to help the IKC achieve their goals because the karst and surface habitat you all protect are very important for WNS-impacted bats in Indiana.” So with that invitation, we submitted a proposal and it was approved. We are absolutely thrilled about this and are in the process of now spending those funds. We will be sharing on Facebook and in the March *IKC Update* what we are doing to help improve our preserves for bat habitat using these funds to purchase supplies and equipment!

- ❑ This fall the IKC participated in a number of bat-inspired events. Board member Goni Iskali represented the IKC at Indiana State University’s 20th annual Bat Festival on September 27. This is one of the largest bat events in the state that draws booths/displays from researchers, conservancies, and student organizations. The event is mostly attended by ISU students and local families with children in lower grades such as middle and elementary school. A lot of the attendees are very familiar with bat ecology, but it is always surprising how many of the participants are still very unfamiliar with caves in Indiana. The IKC’s main goal in participating was to spread information about our wonderful karst and cave features that we have in Indiana as both recreational and conservation resources. We also hosted a prize drawing at our booth and gave away a bat house for whoever guessed most accurately the number of caves that have been documented in Indiana. This information was based on the number of caves in the Indiana Cave Survey database. The guesses ranged from 5 (the show caves that people generally know of in Indiana) to 1,000,000 (from a future optimistic little caver and let’s hope they are right eventually). The winner ended up being a student at ISU who guessed most closely to the “approximately 2,500 caves” answer that we were looking for. The Festival also had an inflatable cave set up (the one we donated to them many years ago) for young spelunkers to explore. Overall, this event was great fun and hopefully educated more people about why it’s important to protect our caves.
- ❑ The IKC also had a presence at Indiana Caverns’ Bat Day Celebration on October 25th. Thanks to IKC member Bambi Dunlap for setting up the booth and IKC display, and spending the day answering questions about the IKC and bats.
- ❑ In November, Cassie Hauswald was named the new state director of The Nature Conservancy in Indiana, the largest conservation/land trust in the state. Cassie grew up in the Corydon area and joined TNC in 2000 as the Blue River conservation coordinator, working on projects such as enhancing habitat for the hellbender and initiating the removal of several low-head dams in southern Indiana streams. Cassie also spent two years as the director of freshwater programs at the Sam Shine Foundation before returning to TNC last year. Many IKC members know Cassie, she is very knowledgeable about caves, and has assisted the IKC on several past acquisition projects. She is also a cave owner.
- ❑ Planning for the 2026 Field Events is in the works! If you have an idea or suggestion for a good field tour, please contact Carla Striegel-Winner (IndianaKarstConservancy.info@gmail.com). Also remember that upcoming events and applicable links can generally be found on the IKC’s homepage (ikc.caves.org).
- ❑ Has it really been 40 years! Watch for more details on how we will celebrate the IKC’s 40th Anniversary in 2026. Expect some special articles and photos, maybe some 40th anniversary swag or who knows, perhaps we will even have cake! If you have ideas, vintage photos, or perhaps a vintage shirt, etc, email IndianaKarstConservancy.info@gmail.com or reach out to your favorite IKC Board member!

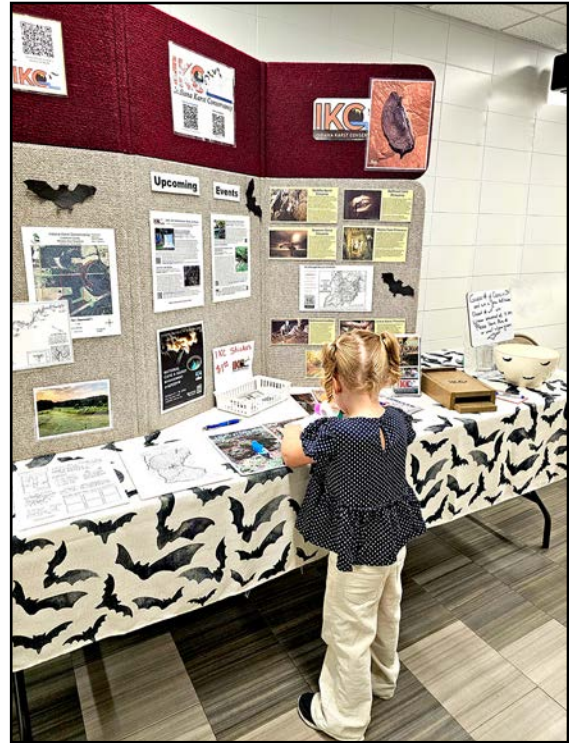


photo courtesy Goni Iskali

Continued at the bottom of page 13...

QUARRY LIFE AWARD: HOOSIER CAVEFISH GOES INTERNATIONAL

by Carla Striegel-Winner

We have been busy for the past year with our project, *Population Status of the Hoosier Cavefish (Amblyopsis hoosieri) in Hamer Cave, Lawrence County, Indiana*, that was selected to be part of the international 2025 Quarry Life Award initiative sponsored by the global natural resource company, Heidelberg Materials. Heidelberg purchased the Lehigh Cement Company in Mitchell a number of years ago, so they now own the entrance to Hamer Cave (located in a small inholding within Spring Mill State Park) and the water rights from the cave.

We were approached by Heidelberg's North American staff mid-November of last year to inquire if we might have an idea for a project to submit. Why, yes we did! IKC Board member Tom Sollman has been censusing the Hoosier Cavefish within the six counties in Indiana where the state-endangered species occurs, and this was the perfect opportunity to establish a good baseline population count for Hamer Cave. The project proposal was submitted, accepted, and we were off and running! The study is now complete, with Tom having made nine census trips within a nine month time period. The final project report was submitted on October 4.

In addition to doing the census work, team members Tom Sollman, Keith Dunlap, and I have met with various Heidelberg North America staff in monthly virtual Teams meetings. We also presented a PowerPoint of the project to Senior Manager

of Biodiversity and Water Sustainability, Dr. Shane Sparg of Belgium; helped lead a tour at Spring Mill State Park focused on the cavefish for Heidelberg's Midwest undergraduate interns; led a day-long surface tour and cave trip into Hamer Cave for Heidelberg international, national, and local staff; and led another surface tour for Dr. Katharina Beumelburg, Board Member and Chief Sustainability Officer for

Heidelberg Global. Each of these events focused on the important fauna and ecosystem of the caves and karst of Spring Mill State Park and the surrounding privately owned property, including that owned by Heidelberg Materials.

We have enjoyed and appreciated cultivating a relationship with this important Lawrence County landowner and exploring opportunities for protecting the habitat of the Hoosier cavefish. We will share more details about the study and the project in the March *IKC Update*.

While our participation in the project was primarily to expand scientific knowledge and protection of the cavefish, our project report has now been entered in the Quarry Life Award international competition, along with 54 other projects from more than a dozen countries where Heidelberg Materials is active. There are cash prizes for six categories, plus an overall award with the winners announced at an award ceremony in Heidelberg, Germany on November 27. By the time you read this article, the results will have been announced, so check the IKC's Facebook page. 🦋



Scott Frosch



photo courtesy Keith Dunlap



photo courtesy Dave Everton

Heidelberg staff along with IKC members Tom Sollman and Dave Everton on the September trip into Hamer Cave.

IKC PRESERVES SUMMER BAT SURVEY - YEAR 3

by Goni Iskali

The IKC continued conducting bat surveys at selected preserves for a third year. The purpose of these surveys is to provide the IKC with baseline information on how various bat species are using the above ground areas of our preserves during the summer maternity season, which will help the IKC and the respective Property Managers make appropriate management decisions. For 2025, the Wayne, Lowry, and Robinson Ladder preserves were surveyed (in 2024 the surveys included the Shawnee, Buddha, and Sullivan preserves). The Wayne and Lowry preserves were surveyed on July 25 and August 2, respectively, using the Echo Meter Touch 2 audio bat detector. These two surveys were completed by walking the trails within the preserves starting roughly 15 minutes before sunset and sampling for at least 30 minutes after sunset. No bats were detected at the Lowry preserve (similar to the previous survey in 2023). However, four species of bats were identified at the Wayne preserve. The majority of the bat activity at the Wayne preserve occurred near the pond and adjacent areas, which was similar to the bat survey results from 2023. The four species detected at Wayne included the big brown bat, evening bat, eastern red bat, and a myotis species (e.g., little brown or Indiana bat).

At the Robinson Ladder Cave Preserve, we completed stationary acoustic surveys from August 16 to 21, 2025 using two more advanced detectors (Wildlife Acoustics Song Meter SM4 acoustic recorder). The reason why we chose to sample the Robinson Ladder preserve more inten-



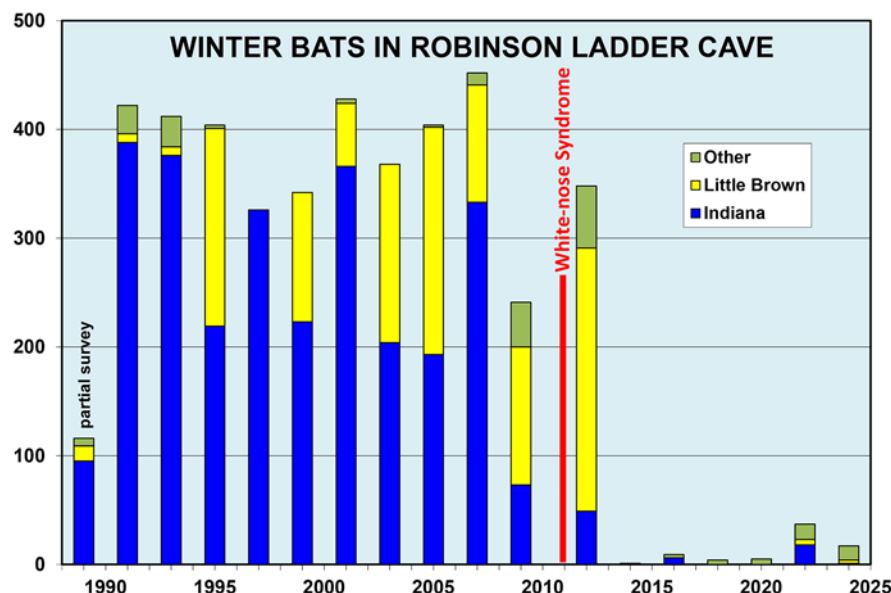
photos courtesy Carla Sirriegel-Winner

Monitoring bat calls on an Echo Meter Touch 2

sively is because Robinson Ladder Cave is a Priority 3 hibernaculum for the federally endangered Indiana bat. A Priority 3 hibernaculum means that 50-999 Indiana bats have been documented in the cave historically. This is the reason why Robinson Ladder Cave is closed for visitation during the winter (September 1 to April 30). The cave is also used by other sensitive species during hibernation, such as the little brown and tricolored bats. However, the use of the cave by Indiana and little brown bats has decreased dramatically since the introduction of the White-nose Syndrome (WNS) fungus in Indiana caves, circa 2011/2012 (see chart below). For these reasons, we were curious to see which bat species were using the area near the cave and other parts of the preserve as they prepared to enter hibernation. The period before hibernation is

called “swarming” when bats fly near cave entrances to mate. We were also curious if gray bats, whose range has expanded significantly from the south into Indiana over the last few years, were using this preserve. Gray bats have been documented to hibernate in nearby Wyandotte Cave (about 12 miles to the south), but have not yet been documented in Robinson Ladder Cave.

The bat detectors at the Robinson Ladder preserve were set up during the IKC's



summer field day (Hike with a Bat Biologist) to show the participants how bats can be sampled. These surveys were made possible once again with the help of bat biologist Aaron McAlexander from Western Ecosystems Technology, Inc. (WEST), who provided and set up the detectors, and subsequently analyzed the collected data. One detector was placed near the cave entrance and the other detector was placed in the open ridge-top field near the chestnut tree plantings. Both detectors were programmed to record 30 minutes before sunset until 30 minutes after sunrise. The recorded data was processed by first running it through an automated identification program (Kaleidoscope) and then species presence was qualitatively confirmed by a US Fish and Wildlife Service permitted bat biologist from WEST. The results of the acoustic surveys at Robinson Ladder preserve are reported in the table below. Sensitive species such as the Indiana, little brown, gray, and tricolored bat were all confirmed at the Robinson Ladder preserve, in addition to more common species like the big brown and eastern red bat. The echolocation calls produced by the Indiana and little brown bat can be very difficult to tell apart given that these species are very closely related, but it's likely that both species were detected given that we know that both species use the cave for hibernation. It is also not surprising to see species such as the Indiana, little brown, and gray bats detected more frequently at the detector station near the cave

given that these are cave dependent species. On the other hand, the station set up in the open field was more often used by "tree roosting" species and species that prefer more open areas such as eastern red bat and big brown bat.

The results of these surveys confirm that the area surrounding Robinson Ladder Cave is used by a variety of bat species during the late maternity/swarming season, including sensitive species that have been documented to hibernate there. These bats will likely not hibernate until late-October/November when temperatures drop and insect food resources are unavailable, but they are likely using the area near Robinson Ladder for months as they either prepare for migration or mate/swarm before they hibernate. Therefore, it is very important that areas surrounding hibernacula are also protected because they represent an important resource for the life cycle of bat species in Indiana.

Lastly, I can't thank the volunteers who helped me with these surveys enough. WEST has continued to partner with us and support us for the third year in a row, and we could not do these surveys without their expertise and professional equipment. I also especially want to mention and thank Danielle Brady, who tragically passed away earlier this year. She was the original volunteer, go-getter, and inspiration for starting these surveys in 2023. Her passion for bats was infectious, and she will be missed dearly. 🦇

BAT ECHOLOCATION CALLS AT THE ROBINSON LADDER CAVE PRESERVE				
Bat Species	Type	Cave Station	Field Station	Total
Myotis - Gray*	Cave	153	64	217
Myotis - Indiana*	Cave	401	118	519
Myotis - Little brown*	Cave	194	125	319
Myotis - Northern long-eared	Cave	113	8	121
Big brown*	Cave	30	202	232
Tricolored*	Cave	705	165	870
Eastern red*	Migratory tree	372	244	616
Evening	Migratory tree	19	133	152
Hoary	Migratory tree	1	2	3
Silver-haired	Migratory tree	4	9	13
Total		1,992	1,070	3,062

Summary of call data collected on the Indiana Karst Conservancy's Robinson Ladder Cave Preserve, Crawford County, Indiana between August 16 – 21, 2025. Kaleidoscope Pro 5.4.0 was used to classify bat species echolocation calls. Note the number of calls shown for each station does not equate to the number of bats detected, as one bat can generate multiple calls per night and over multiple nights. * = species confirmed by a permitted bat biologist.

SULLIVAN CAVE RESTORATION PROJECT – HOW IT STARTED, AND WHERE IT'S GOING

article and photos by Nate Vignes

Graffiti in Sullivan Cave. We've all seen it, but have you ever stopped to really look at it? In 2024 the Central Indiana Grotto was camping and caving at the Sullivan Cave Preserve. We woke up, ready to make a trip to the Spiral Room. There was nothing unusual about the trip, up until we made our way to the first dome in the Back-breaker. There we found someone had recently scratched their name into the wall, along with the date they were there. We found similar markings in the second dome. The conversation quickly shifted towards the amount of graffiti still in the cave. While a lot of graffiti-removal work was done in the 1980s and 90s, there is much more to be done, and a new generation of cavers to do it.

Back to the new graffiti. After the trip, I reached out to the Sullivan Cave Patron, Paul Uglum, and he was easily able to identify those who had left their markings in the cave. After he discussed the issue with the trip leader, and then the IKC officers, Paul decided the best remedy was to allow *them* to right their wrong. I then volunteered to accompany the offenders into the cave to remove their vandalism. With that said, obviously there was a failure of communicating the IKC's expectations for those entering our caves, and a greater failure of the trip leader for not communicating appropriate behavior and supervising his group. Lessons learned all around to hopefully prevent this from happening again.

The problem is seeing graffiti on the walls in a cave can lead to more graffiti to the uninformed. Once someone has left their mark, others are "inspired" to follow. People do no good to caves. We only cause harm. Every footprint, every piece of trash, every mark damages the cave in an irreversible way. The knee-jerk solution seems easy, allow no one to go caving. But obviously that would be against the entire purpose of the IKC. Further, caves are oftentimes unable to heal from human caused damage without additional intervention. Conservation should be the first thing

we think about when we go caving, not the last. While we are unable to visit these places without causing harm, we can and should take steps to reduce any impact to the extent possible.

Part of reducing the impact is helping repair damage that has already been done. The task of removing the graffiti in Sullivan is not an easy one. Thousands of restoration hours have been spent in the past in this cave, but thousands more are needed. Water is not readily accessible in the upper-level passages. Mud for painting is difficult to come by. The long stretches of stoop-walking make it unenjoyable to move supplies through the cave. If not for seeing the success in Buckner, I'd almost think it wasn't possible to clean up Sullivan.



Early in 2025 I began the first step of this project, getting permission to start it. In the past there were questions and concerns about destroying historic (pre-1960) signatures and unsupervised groups doing more harm than good in the efforts to clean up the cave. The best way to locate anything historic was to doc-

ument every single marking on the cave walls from the entrance to the Mountain Room. I led a group into the cave and documented the graffiti, taking nearly 400 photos of every signature, drawing, and marking in those sections. The goal was to locate historic signatures so they could be preserved. The most surprising outcome of that documentation trip was the lack of historic signatures. And what few historic signatures were found were unfortunately already damaged by more modern graffiti on top. But we took special note of what was there, with hopes of preserving it for future historians.

After documentation and some discussion with the IKC Executive Board, I was given the go-ahead to re-start the restoration project.

Chasteen Land & Title and the IKC graciously funded the purchase of supplies needed to start this project. IKC members Brad Barcom, Keith Dunlap, Joe Kinder, Sarah Smith, and I went into the cave to test out some new and old

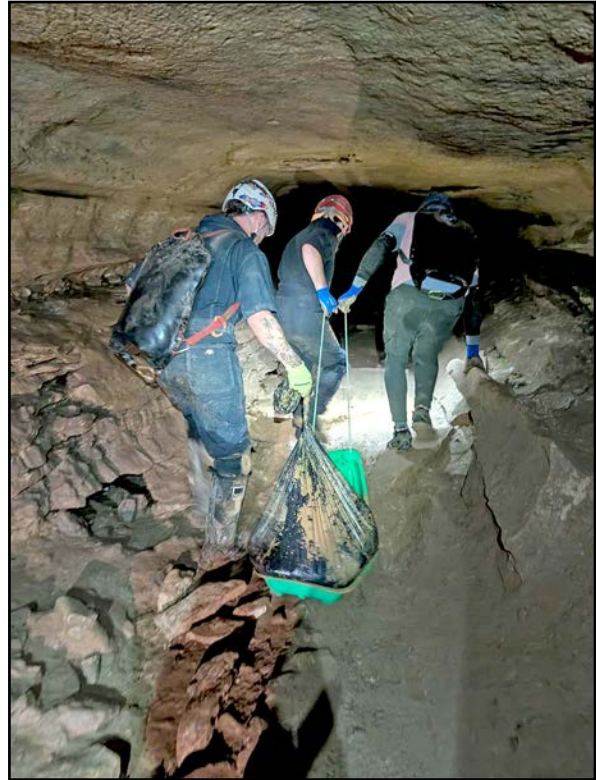


methods of graffiti removal and cart supplies into the cave. We hauled over ten gallons of water in with us. Along with contractor bags, wire brushes, battery-powered tools with wire implements, and face masks. After a quick break we began working. In a rather short period of time we were able to remove a huge amount of graffiti in the second dome. We tried multiple methods, and found removing the graffiti with wire brushes and painting over/camouflaging the brushed area with a locally-sourced mud slurry was a winning combination. Significant portions of the cave have already been worked/mud painted, but sometimes not continuously or systematically, so revisiting those areas will help blend the old effort together with the new, to make it look more natural. On this first exploration trip we also tried some biodegradable spray paint remover (brand name Elephant Snot) recommended by others within the NSS doing restoration work. We noted that it does remove spray paint, but not carbide/candle markings, so this will be a useful tool in helping restore areas around the historic signatures that we found.

In October we took another trip into Sullivan. Ten people joined for two hours and assisted in removing graffiti in the first dome in the Backbreaker and helped move supplies into the second dome. Then they worked for several hours in the second dome. We blended two layers of mud over



the top of the scrubbed graffiti. Attempting to make it look as natural as possible. The mud was sourced locally, sifted, and then mixed with water to create a thin slurry. While this proved effective, it was time consuming and at times did not blend well with the previous mud that was used on the wall. My mind wondered if previously they had sourced mud from another area. On the way out we headed towards the Lost Domes. Along the



way we found large piles of mud that seemed to mix better than what we were using before. We all agreed that on the next trip we should make an effort to use mud sourced from that area.

In early November a third trip was made into Sullivan with members of the Central Indiana Grotto and Windy City Grotto. The focus was to finish up the second dome in the Backbreaker. What we didn't realize was how much effort was going to be spent in moving mud from near the Lost Domes to the second dome. It took over an hour worth of difficult work to package the mud into contractor trash bags and move it to the second dome. To help with this I had purchased and brought in a small plastic sled. It seemed to work well, although we still had issues with the contractor bags tearing. Eventually we started working on the second dome. After just over an hour, everyone was feeling taxed so we began to pack up. The second dome is nearly complete. Looking nearly unrecognizable from how it looked previously. Some minor work still needs to be done, but the bulk of the graffiti was removed and then covered up.

With 2026 fast approaching, we are well prepared to have a successful year in cleaning up Sullivan Cave. I'd like to keep the trip sizes small and manageable, but please reach out to me (natevi@yahoo.com) if you are interested in joining on a future trip. Trips may also be posted to various social media pages. 🐦

FINDERS, NOT KEEPERS!

by Matt Selig

You're threading your way through your favorite IKC-owned cave. Crawl, walk, duck, splash, climb. Your headlamp flickers from the crawlway to a room to breakdown to a bathtub. Something catches your attention in the corner of your eye. You stop.

It looks just like a rock. You look again. Maybe a bone. Not from a raccoon. Different. Older. Your pulse kicks up. Could it be an artifact from a peccary, a dire wolf, or some other extinct animal? A cave bear?? For a moment you imagine the photo on your social media account, a golden post, all the comments and likes this weird bone find is going to get, wow! Then another thought lands. What if this discovery is important? What if it matters to science and should be studied instead?

What would you do? Here's the short answer. In IKC caves, don't just toss it in your cave pack and take it out of the cave. Period! Our waivers you sign to visit our caves state it plainly, "I will not bring anything extra out of the cave except the normal mud on my clothing and trash left by other cavers." That's the rule and your promise. If it isn't trash, leave it where it lies.

Caves controlled by the State of Indiana or on federal property have their own permitting/collection requirements.

Now the legal part (PS – I'm not a lawyer and I'm not giving legal advice). [Indiana Code § 35-43-1-3](#) makes it a crime to remove or damage speleothems, archaeological artifacts, paleontological materials, or cave fauna without the cave owner's express consent. It also covers other bad things like breaking cave gates and locks designed to control cave access and dumping trash in karst features.

Breaking Indiana's cave protection law could result in a conviction for a Class A Misdemeanor.

The IKC leans toward education and fixing honest mistakes. However, we will also report vandalism, theft, or trespass in our caves to law enforcement when the situation calls for it.

Let's also discuss the ethics of removing "cool stuff" from caves. The National Speleological Society, of which the IKC is a member

conservancy, is clear. Collecting specimens from caves, even if it seems harmless or already broken, is not justified. It's even in the NSS's motto: "Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time."

The Society for American Archaeology adds another lens. Context carries meaning. An object in place (*in situ*) tells a story through its position, the sediments around it, and its relationship to other things. Remove an artifact from that context, and that data is lost. Their recommendation: Don't do it.

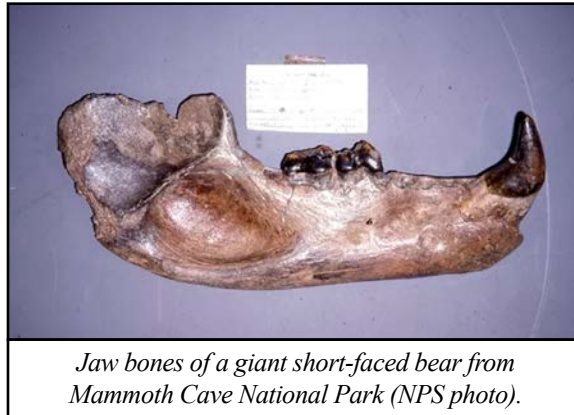
If you find yourself underground weighing the question, "Should I take this out of the cave

to show someone?", the clear answer is no, absolutely not. This is a basic cave conservation ethic.

So back to the moment in the passage and that very cool thing you just found. This is what we prefer you do:

- 1) Do not disturb the find. That includes the rocks and sediments around it.
- 2) Take photos, with something for scale, from where you see the item in question. Wide shots first. Show where it sits in the passage. No brushing. No rinsing. No staging the item for a better picture.
- 3) Take photos of the surroundings and make notes of how to find the object again.
- 4) Tell the right person. In IKC caves, that means the Cave Patron and/or Property Manager. Share your photos with them privately. Keep photos and the location off of social media.
- 5) If it looks promising, we will ask a researcher to submit a research permit application to study your find. Without an approved IKC research permit, no one is authorized to remove anything except trash from IKC caves.

Why this careful (some might say tedious) process? Because the IKC encourages scientific research. If we have something in our caves that merits study, we want qualified people to look at it, preferably in place, with care for the cave. We ask research



Jaw bones of a giant short-faced bear from Mammoth Cave National Park (NPS photo).

permit holders to publish their findings in our *IKC Update* and appropriate scientific journals, so we can share the information. We also keep an eye on research methods, so the work leaves a light footprint.

Helping a scientist collect data for scientific research is also a great reason to go caving. It's fun to help and you will learn a lot. This is satisfying work, and your discovery will mean so much more to you after you help to study it.

You will feel the moment when a lucky find turns into real knowledge. You get to be part of it without stripping the cave for souvenirs and social media "likes".

Remember, we are cavers first. We protect the caves we love. We do not chase trophies. We do not run to social media with coordinates and close-ups that invite the wrong kind of attention. We choose stewardship and study, and we do it together.

If you remember only one line, make it this: "Find it, don't touch it, document it, exit the cave, and report your find". That keeps the cave intact. It gives scientists something important to work with. In time, the story of what you found will be told the right way, and you set an example that we should leave caves in their natural state for the cavers after us to explore in all their beauty and wonder. 🦋

HOLIDAY NOGGIN WARMER

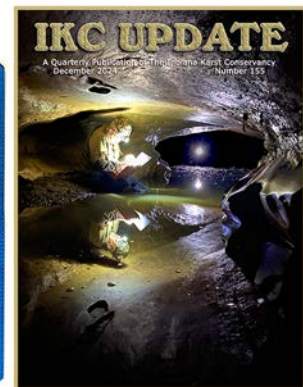
It's that time of year again! Get your favorite caver a winter beanie for ridgewalking season... er, um the Holidays! The beanies are in stock in blue and black. And of course, we have our ball caps as well. Each \$20. Ways to buy:

- Pick one up at the December 13 Social before the IKC meeting and save on shipping (see page 24).
- Give your favorite Board member a \$20 and have them pick one up at the meeting for you.
- Purchase online and have it shipped (ikc.caves.org/ikc-promotional-items or scan the QR code).



...News Briefs, continued from page 6

- ❑ Each year the IKC enters its newsletter covers in the NSS Graphic Arts Salon with the covers displayed and judged at the national convention. **All four of our 2024 covers received ribbons.** *IKC Update* covers #152 (photo by Charlie Blanton) and #154 (photo by Jasper Beavers) each received Honorable Mention ribbons, while covers #153 (photo by Richard Vernier) and #155 (photo by Scott Frosch) were each awarded Merit Award ribbons. You can see all of the winners here: www.caves.org/salon/2025-graphic-art-salon.



- ❑ The IKC has gained four new members in the last quarter. Welcome Noah Durham, Christopher Emig, Andrew Mayer, and Amber Obert. The IKC membership currently stands at 332. 🦋

STEWARDSHIP ON OUR PROPERTIES NEVER STOPS

compiled by Keith Dunlap

When we acquire caves and karst properties, we are also promising to take care of them in perpetuity. Thus the IKC spends a lot of effort through continuous, competent stewardship to really conserve and enhance our properties. And we do it with passionate volunteers. Here's a sampling of what was accomplished since our last newsletter:

- ☑ Several days prior to the September 28 IKC Quarterly Board meeting at the Shawnee Karst Preserve, Keith Dunlap mowed the loop trails on the north half of the property as well as the area along the concrete driveway.
- ☑ There was a pre-meeting two-hour stewardship session on September 28 at the Shawnee Karst Preserve with ten IKC members helping out. Two teams of two (Keith Dunlap/Cris Seuell and Tim Harris/Jeff Cody) worked on autumn olive eradication. Joe Kinder cut up a tree that had fallen on a trail. Goni Iskali assisted Joe and did some additional trail trimming. Bambi Dunlap picked up trash along SR 60 and trimmed branches out by the highway. Bill Baus and John Benton trimmed branches and removed old heavy trash from another trail. Carla Striegel-Winner managed volunteer coordination and helped Bill and John.
- ☑ Carla and her Uncle Chris were at Orangeville Rise Nature Preserve in both September and October, doing weed-eating and trash pick up. Hopefully that is the last weed-eating of the season.
- ☑ On September 20, Keith and Carla met at the Orangeville Rise with the goal of using Keith's electric pole saw to remove the "rope swing" which appeared there earlier this spring. Luckily it worked! They were able to retrieve the rope, not damage the tree, and Keith, strapped to the tree, did not fall off the edge of the bluff into the blue depths of the Rise. While there, they also cut and painted a couple of invasive shrubs on the bluff side. The lid of the dauber may or may not be hiding on the ground there, as it certainly did not end up back on the dauber bottle.
- ☑ On October 10, Jamie Winner mowed the access lane and camping area at the Robinson Ladder Cave Preserve for the third and final time this year.
- ☑ On November 9, the newly reformed Harrison-Crawford Grotto sponsored a three-hour work

day at the Robinson Ladder Cave Preserve with nine HCG volunteers (Elijah and Tianna Gresham, Dave Grieser, Chris Schotter, Dave Black, Beth Singleton, Noah Singleton, Hunter Dobbins and Gabe Hammond), along with three additional IKC members (Property Manager John Benton, Carla Striegel-Winner, and Keith Dunlap). The two main tasks completed were the trimming back of overhanging trees along the entire access lane with pole saws and loppers, and the replacement of the lane gate post that had been leaning and was rotting off. We were very excited to have their help!



photo courtesy Carla Striegel-Winner

- ☑ Cris Seuell and Chris Donohue cleared woody vegetation on September 21 at the Wayne Cave Preserve "Connection" tract and pin flagged towards Jim's Hole for the new trail to be benched.
- ☑ Cris Seuell and Chris Donohue fine tuned and pin flagged the trail placement all the way down to Jim's Hole on the Wayne property on November 11. They also did some more clearing to prepare for the bed of the trail to be installed. Multiflora rose and honeysuckle were also removed along the way.
- ☑ In preparation of the October 11 Big Day at the Buddha Karst Nature Preserve, Keith Dunlap and Carla Striegel-Winner removed the trail bridge at the back of the property as it was becoming problematic. A replacement bridge is being planned.
- ☑ On September 10, BIG caver and local teacher Grace Bohnencamp and seven of her students spent an hour picking up sticks and general cleanup work at Sullivan, as part of a field trip led by IKC President Matt Selig into the cave for her Indiana Studies class.

- ☑ On October 24, Keith Dunlap mowed the camping area at the Sullivan Cave Property.
- ☑ On October 31, Joe Kinder rented a wood splitter and split more firewood from the tulip poplar tree that was felled last year. He also was able to cut down a problematic dead tree near the camping area and split it for firewood too. He also did some other light maintenance

around the camping area and enhanced the campground fire ring. He also supervised the porta-john being serviced on that day.

- ☑ Also on October 31, the CIG, Windy City Grotto, and the Northern Indiana Grotto helped stack firewood split earlier that day. The Windy City Grotto mentioned they would be happy to volunteer for upcoming projects. 🦋

BIG DAY AT BUDDHA KARST PRESERVE

article by Sue Vernier, photos by Richard Vernier

On October 11 the Indiana Audubon Society and Indiana Land Protection Alliance (ILPA) partnered at 17 participating land trust properties to hold the fourth annual birding October Big Day hikes. This was also the third of four IKC quarterly field tours, with this year's focus on fauna. The hike at the IKC's Buddha Karst Preserve was led by expert birder Cathy Meyer and it was for all levels of birders and non-birders alike. We had a beautiful morning with 18 attendees ranging from college students to retirees, from biologists to geologists, and more!

After partaking of the breakfast snacks, com-



Participants checking out a Downy Woodpecker.



Checking out the entrance to Buddha Cave.

pliments of ILPA, and hearing a brief overview of the IKC and Buddha Property by IKC's Outreach Coordinator, Carla Striegel-Winner, we began our birding hike on the loop trail through the forest of trees. A total of 18 species were observed. October 11 was a bit late for finding many of the neotropical warblers, but we were entertained by the abundant, late-arriving Yellow-rumped Warblers. A nice view of an accommodating Ruby-crowned Kinglet was a highlight. Also, a few of us were able to hear the Golden-crowned Kinglet and Cedar Waxwings. A side trip to the Buddha Cave entrance to look for the Eastern Phoebe did not produce the bird (again, probably too late as it migrates south), but Property Manager Keith Dunlap located the nest so that photos could be taken. To check out the full list of birds observed go to ebird.org/checklist/S278587950.

A special non-bird treat was Cathy's discovery of the Leopard moth caterpillar. When threatened they curl into a circle, better showing off the red bands on their all-black bodies.

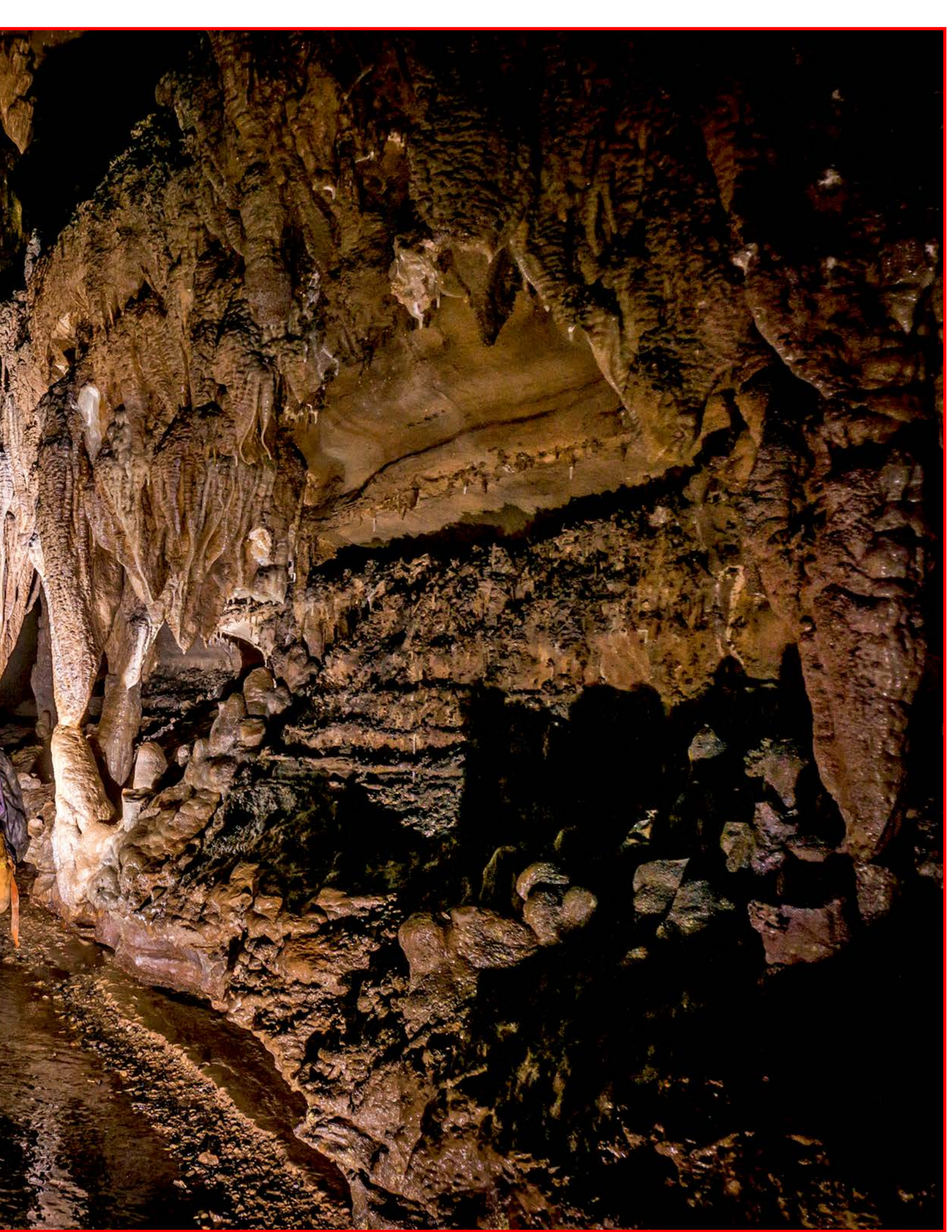
Thanks go to Property Manager Keith Dunlap, Carla, and Cathy for providing a terrific opportunity to get outside in nature at an IKC preserve. 🦋

Center spread: Sue Vernier in the main passage of Shiloh Cave, Lawrence County. The IKC manages access to this privately-owned cave.

Photograph by Richard Vernier (2024).







NOT JUST A WALK IN THE PARK!

article by Chris Schotter, photos by Richard Vernier

The final IKC field tour of the year was a *Fauna and History of Lawrence County Caves and Karst* hike at Spring Mill State Park. Wait a minute? Why did we do this outing to a state park and not highlight one of the IKC's beautiful preserves? Tom Sollman, one of the co-leaders of the hike said it best, "Spring Mill State Park is the center of the universe for the Hoosier cavefish." If you want to talk about *Amblyopsis hoosieri*, there is no better place than this park. The IKC is also closely tied with the park. The water that flows through Upper Twin Cave in the nearby IKC Shawnee Karst Preserve continues downstream into Lower Twin and through the Shawnee caves in Spring Mill State Park, exiting at the Donaldson entrance. It is one of several distinct subterranean stream systems that flow through the park.

There is a lot of fascinating history around this park and our group of 20 started our two-mile hike from the Oak Ridge picnic shelter above the historic village on the Stagecoach Trail. The road that now circles the park was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. Prior to that, early residents of the village and even early park visitors entered the valley down the steep wagon

road that enters the village from the south near the distillery. The village was founded here in 1814 because the water from Hamer Cave was the ideal power source for a grist mill, but you have to think they also chose this little valley because it is just a pretty place to call home. Nestled in a protected, wooded valley with multiple spring fed streams, it is hard to imagine a more ideal setting. The downside and demise of the village was that it was isolated at the bottom of a steep valley. When the railroad was developed in this area, it wasn't feasible to have it pass down through the valley. Instead, it was built a few miles away on higher ground. Prosperity followed the railroad and steam powered mills replaced the water

powered ones, leaving the village and its water-powered mill behind. The hamlet was eventually abandoned by 1892. Soon after, the Lehigh Portland Cement company in nearby Mitchell bought the property, primarily for the water supply. They installed a larger dam and pump station outside the cave to support their cement manufacturing operation. In 1928, Lehigh deeded 258 acres of land to the State of Indiana's Conservation Department for \$1, with the condition that Lehigh would retain the water rights from the cave and a small inholding around the cave for its pumping equipment. This donated land, which included the old grist mill and existing structures, became the core of Spring Mill State Park which was officially established in September 1927. Since then,



Carla Striegel-Winner gave the opening remarks at the Oak Ridge Shelter.

the mill and village have been restored and the park is a local treasure and one of our most visited state parks. We would learn more about the connection to the cement industry later in the hike.

From the Stagecoach trail, our group made a couple of stops in the village and along the largest of several spring runs in the park. Keith Dunlap, the other co-leader of the hike, brought along some charts and maps so he could explain the various watersheds and hydrology of the area. The stream from Hamer Cave is the largest in the valley, but it is not alone. Just in the small area around the village there are five springs that flow from various cave systems and drain a surprising large area of the surrounding



lands from the south, west, and north.

Our longest tour stop was at Hamer Cave. At the overlook above the current mill's ponded dams, Tom and Keith talked about the various dams that had been built over time and shared some old photos that show the remains of the original flume constructed in 1816 (now gone). The original dam was actually located at the cave's dripline and pooled water back into the cave for several hundred feet. We made our way down to the cave

entrance to see the hand-carved slots in the cave walls where they slid ten-inch thick timbers in to form the dam, and some of the metal supports for the flume are still attached to the nearby rock. Those brave enough to hop across the slick rocks, could do a thru-trip of the Hamer Cave Annex. Technically, this short walk-through cave is just outside the dripline of the main Hamer Cave entrance and is barely long enough to qualify as a separate cave. Most cavers agree that anyone can look at this short segment of passage and see that it is just part of Hamer Cave entrance and not really a separate cave. Hamer Cave is an Indiana classic with big walking passage, historic signatures back in the 1830s, and a dry upper level leading to a separate stream. The main stream passage starts as a joint controlled narrow walking passage with water depths that slowly increase from ankle deep to over six feet with a short swim before it pops out into a very photogenic, large walking trunk passage that continues for over a thousand feet. At the end of the big passage, the entire stream wells up from an intriguing rise pool and races down a narrow cascading canyon that is sporty in low-water conditions, and impossible to traverse in higher flows. What is beyond the rise pool, no one knows. Explorers in the 1950s made a failed attempt to push this sump using a dive mask while breathing through a hose, but it has never been explored by a serious cave diver, perhaps in the future...

While at the cave entrance, Keith and Tom elab-



Tom Sollman at the entrance to Hamer Cave explaining to the group how the 1816 timber dam was installed in slots cut into the cave walls.

orated on the strange connection between a cement manufacturer and a karst conservation organization, two groups that you wouldn't expect to collaborate on a project. The Lehigh Cement Company was purchased several years ago by a large international firm, Heidelberg Materials. One of the company's global environmental initiatives is the Quarry Life Award (see related story on page 7). This contest is a public competition showcasing innovative projects that promote biodiversity at Heidelberg's many properties. Carla Striegel-Winner was notified of the competition and instantly thought of Tom Sollman's cavefish census in Hamer Cave, which is now owned by Heidelberg. Long story short, the IKC submitted a project proposal, it was accepted, and Tom has been visiting the cave monthly since January counting the fauna in the cave. The IKC submitted its final report on October 4th with results of the contest to be announced shortly. Watch for a more detailed article on this project in a future *IKC Update*. Tom had done some quasi-approved fish counts in the cave since 2020, but now he had a defined, approved project to do multiple counts in the cave over a nearly year-long study. Counting cavefish takes multiple trips to get a good sample-size of the population and enough data to track deviations in various water-depth/visibility conditions. Tom dreams of low water levels with swimming pool clarity, but this usually isn't the case. For many trips, the water just isn't that clear. The cavefish are undoubtedly down there somewhere; you just can't see them through the murky water. They

also tend to avoid fast moving water, and if water levels are up, they are likely hiding behind rocks or back under ledges to avoid the higher flows. Tom gathers useful information with each trip, but to get a good estimation of the population, it takes many trips, walking slowly to avoid ripples, often by himself, slowly scanning with his light to spot the small pale fish. You really have to love cavefish to wade or swim in cold water for hours at a time, over and over, trip after trip. Tom is dedicated to his fish census in Indiana and has been doing these trips for over 30 years in caves throughout the state.

Compared to other caves in the park (Whistling Cave and the Shawnee Cave System), the Hamer population isn't huge, usually counts are only in the 10-15 range. But when you are looking at State endangered animals, even this is a significant number!

From Hamer Cave, we wandered back down to the village, with a quick walk through of the massive operating grist mill and then on to stops at a couple of the other springs. Wind Cave is a small cave that is separated from the back of the upper level in Hamer cave by less than 100 feet, but it is the downstream segment and spring resurgence of the second stream in Hamer Cave. Its spring also feeds the old spring house and summer kitchen in the village.

Just a little further down the valley tucked in behind the old blacksmith shop is the trail to the Whistling Cave entrance. Whistling Cave is the longest cave in the park with over 7.8 miles of mapped passage. It also has two separate/independent streams; one that exits at the Whistling entrance and the other that feeds the CCC spring along the park road near the lake. The main stream of this cave has a large population of cavefish with typical counts of over 80 fish in the census area, but for some unknown reason, no one has ever seen a cavefish in the parallel stream that feeds the CCC spring. While standing at the Whistling entrance, Keith talked about the similar tour of the park that Tom and he had with the Heidelberg leadership

team the previous month. The eye-opening part of that visit for them was when Keith explained the drainage watershed for this long cave, which extends far outside of the park's boundaries and under land owned by Heidelberg. In the peaceful world of a slow-moving cave stream, the small blind cavefish is the apex predator and they have quietly survived in these underground streams at the top of their food chain for millennia. They are now a State endangered species and all of their current threats for survival are man-made. These cave streams they call home are underground, but our karst topography means these streams are mostly surface water that just happens to sink and



This grist mill was completed in 1817 and was the economic engine for the village until being abandoned in 1892. It was reconstructed in the 1930s.

flow underground for a distance before emerging as a spring. The water is virtually unfiltered from sink to spring. Agricultural run-off, sewage, leaking fuel tanks, industrial waste/spills, and mining activities in a karst region can rapidly enter and flow through a cave with devastating results on the cave stream and the creatures that depend on them for survival. This highlights the need for conservation and public education about watersheds and karst. Wastes leaked or dumped in a sinkhole can affect cave life miles away. All this discussion was not lost on the Heidelberg visitors and hopefully will lead to future conversation on protecting the Whistling watershed.

After Whistling Cave, we completed our loop back through the village and up Trail #4 that overlooks Hamer Cave, and then back to our parking area. But before wrapping up, you can't have

Continued at the bottom of page 24...

THE 2ND ANNUAL DISCOVERY DAY AT HENDERSON PARK

by Scott Frosch

Henderson Park in Washington County is owned by the City of Salem and managed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). This park is an outstanding remnant of a larger forest that covered most of the area and features caves, springs, limestone glades and barrens. These special areas provide unique habitats for different plant communities. Public access to the property is encouraged. Admission and parking are free. There are, however, no rest room facilities, nor is camping allowed. There is a 2.5-mile walking loop trail around the 400-acre property, passing by Mill, Middle, and Waterfall caves. Access to the caves on the property is made possible by an agreement with the Indiana Karst Conservancy, and requires a permit (see ikc.caves.org/henderson-park-cave-access for more information).

To increase awareness of this wonderful property, TNC and the IKC conduct an annual outreach event called Discovery Day. Attendees discover the park, learn about nature, and meet like-minded outdoorsy people. Some folks even manage to find a little adventure.

The Second Annual Discovery Day was held on October 25 and its theme was “Rocks and Bats”. IKC President Matt Selig provided insight into the karst geology present in the park. With all the caves, springs and exposed limestone, Matt had lots to talk about. IKC Directors Danyele Green and Goni Iskali also led learning stations along the trail. Danyele used hydrochloric acid to discriminate between limestone and sandstone. She’s got the fizz, that’s for sure. Goni donned a bat costume (it was almost Halloween) and provided information about how bats use natural ar-



photo courtesy Danyele Green

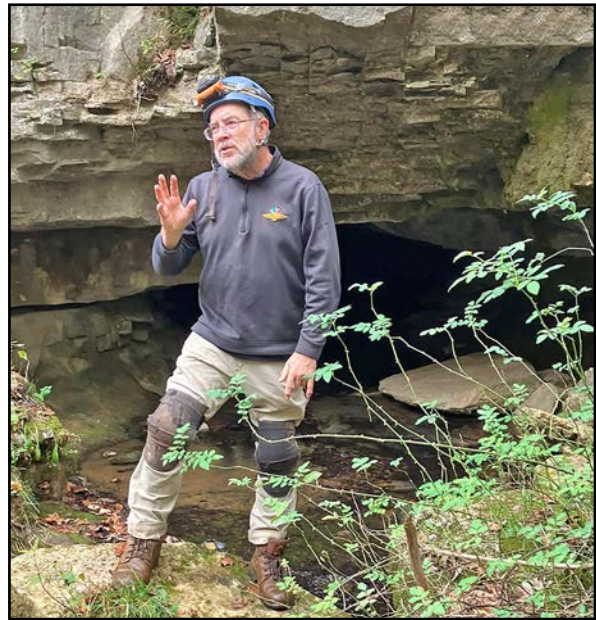


photo courtesy Mike Everidge

eas like Henderson Park. Kudos to both! I did a show-and-tell about recreational caving and caving gear, and described how to submit the required liability waivers and properly register for Henderson Park cave trips. TNC Land Stewards Mike Everidge, Ryan Goetz, and Lydia Radcliffe shared information about plants along the trail, featuring native species and discussing control methods for invasives. Another topic of conversation was re-introducing prescribed fire to the landscape, a powerful tool used by TNC to manage and enhance the forest at this property.

After the event concluded, a small group of adventurers (Scott Frosch, Cris Suell, and Jon Annonson) set off on a tip provided by Mike Everidge. After a short off-trail excursion, the group located a super cool waterfall with a small bonus cave nearby. Surprise!! We found a slimy salamander and several zig-zag salamanders near the cave entrance. The cave was small and miserable, but the waterfall was nice.

Thanks to the executive team at The Nature Conservancy and the Executive Board of the Indiana Karst Conservancy for their continued support of this event. Many thanks to the TNC Land Stewards and IKC Directors for sharing their knowledge and love of nature. We took a deep dive into some of the rocks and animals that cavers hold near to their hearts. We explored some unique places in the park. And we made new friends. All in all, it was a great day of discovery. See you next year! 🦇

A LOOK BACK AT INDIANA KARST

by John M. Benton

Are You a Democrat or Republican Electrician? And Other Tales from Wyandotte Cave

The State of Indiana purchased the Wyandotte Cave estate from the Rothrock family in 1966. Roger Branigin, a Democrat, was the governor. At that time, political patronage was still widely used for many state jobs including the BMV, the state highway department, state parks, and state forests. So when a governor of one party replaced the outgoing governor of the other party, many state department heads and the people under them would lose their jobs, and the newly appointed department heads would hire “loyalists” of their party. Such was the case at Wyandotte Cave. The cave manager (since the State had purchased the cave in 1966) was a Democrat, Carl Breeden. Under Breeden the wiring of Big Wyandotte Cave had begun in 1967, and local businessman/electrician John “Leo” Schotter of Milltown, who was also a strong Democrat, was hired to light the entire two-hour (Monument Mountain) route in Wyandotte. Schotter, who also was a prominent caver of the time, jumped at the chance to electrically light Wyandotte. Prior to 1967, all tours in Big Wyandotte Cave were conducted with Coleman gas lanterns.

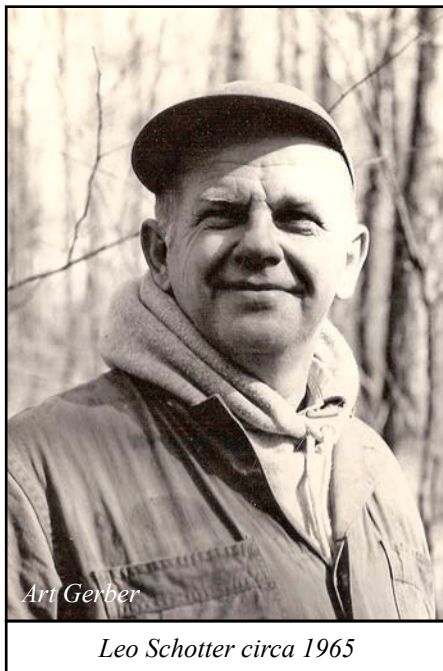
Schotter began the wiring project, starting at the cave entrance, following the route the tours would take in the cave, down into Washington Avenue and towards the Flint Quarries. The wiring crew ran the main electric line into and through the Wolf’s Lair, exiting into Monument Hall, thus providing a shorter run for the main electric line into a deeper sections of the cave. At that time, the cave operated 12 months of the year, so Schotter could continue his work in the winter months when tours were lower in numbers and seldom interfered with the wiring project. Schotter employed some of his regular work crew and also utilized some of the cave guides, such as Neil and Doug Proctor, who also were caving cohorts with Schotter.

Schotter continued the project, wiring the cave/lights all the way into and through the New Discovery of 1941, into Monument Mountain and Rothrocks Cathedral, down the back side of the Mountain to the start of the Sandy Plains. Then in the November 1968 election, Republican Ed Whitcomb was elected and took office in January 1969, so Carl Breeden was out and Herdis Conder, a local Republican from Leavenworth, was appointed as the new cave manager. Under Conder, the wiring project was to continue, but from the

start, Conder and Leo Schotter clashed and could not work together. Chris Schotter (Leo’s grandson, active caver, and IKC member) recalls Leo saying that he could not stand Conder and walked off the job. Chris’s father Gary, who also worked on the wiring crew, hated to lose the job, especially since it gave them something to do during the slow winter months (plus it was much nicer working in the cave than out in the cold). But in the end, good ole Indiana political patronage won out again and Herdis Conder went looking for another electrician, this time a Republican electrician! A replacement was not found

for several months, but finally Conder selected Ralph Wright, an electrician from Corydon. He took over the wiring project in late fall-early winter of 1969. Wright had no experience with wiring in caves, but he was a qualified, dependable local electrician (and a Republican).

In 1969, I was in my senior year of high school in Corydon, less than ten miles from Wyandotte Cave I had just joined the NSS, my sponsor (at that time, to join the NSS, one had to be sponsored by a current member) was Lewie Lamon of Corydon who ran the local hardware store and was a well-known caver. Lewie, being several years older than Leo Schotter, was probably past his prime, but he still did a lot of caving then and was full of stories. As a young caver enrolled to go to IU in the fall, I wanted to be a summer cave guide at Wyandotte Cave. Roaming the cave on after-hours trips and doing something I love, just



Leo Schotter circa 1965

seemed the thing to do. Not to mention giving tours: Monument Mountain, the five- and eight-hour wild cave trips, and also in Little Wyandotte Cave. Sometimes the stars just line up. My dad was an insurance agent and his territory was the Corydon and Leavenworth areas. I had discussed possibly working at the cave and dad volunteered to stop by and talk to Herdis Conder, who my dad already knew and had sold him a life insurance policy. And most importantly, dad was a registered Republican! He never ran for any office himself, and always said he voted for the person, not the party, but he was “qualified”. So in the winter of 1969-70, dad stopped by the cave to pitch hiring me. Initially, Conder was apprehensive on hiring me. He said his cave guides all had some college experience, but I was still in high school. Dad reminded him that I would be going to college and that I really loved caves (although with Conder, I don’t think that really mattered). Finally, Conder told my dad to have me stop by in the next few days and we could talk.

And that is what I eagerly did. I went to see Conder one day after school; he was helping on the project of pouring concrete steps with handrails, down into the entrance room slope. These are the same steps that are still in place at the cave. Prior to this, there was only an asphalt path leading down into the entrance. I vividly recall the State had a small bulldozer down in Faneuil Hall (the large entrance room) moving breakdown out of the way and leveling the area. This is also the time when the “solid” stone gate was removed at the far end of the Hall, probably by the dozer. I remember they had installed a large exhaust fan on the ceiling to try to exhaust some of the dozer’s diesel fumes. This was probably December 1969, so with the cold weather, the cave was sucking in, not blowing, so I doubt if the exhaust fan helped much, but it was there. One prominent caver says he has an old slide depicting the dozer down inside the entrance, but the slide has apparently been ‘lost’. A side note on this, when this work was done in 1969, the state conducted no environmental assessment on this site. There is no telling how much archaeological damage or cov-

ering up of possible artifacts in the entrance room was done at that time!

Long story short, I was hired. I even started taking some tours in 1969 before the end of the year and many for spring-breakers before the summer of 1970. And I got out of some classes as a senior because the cave needed guides for student groups. Most of the other guides were away at college. As previously discussed the lighting was not finished in the cave when I started. The tours could use the electric lights/switches all the way to the Mountain Room, but upon entering the Sandy Plains, gasoline lanterns were stored there that had to be lit and utilized to navigate back to the Flint Quarries, where again the electric lights had been installed. On my first tour in Wyandotte, in the unlit Sandy Plains section, using the gas lanterns, I turned left, heading to Odd Fellows Din-



Electric lighting of Monument Mountain completely changed how visitors experienced Wyandotte Cave.

ing Hall, with the tourists following right behind, knowing no better. The trouble was, I should have taken the right hand fork which also led to the Dining Hall, but that passage remained walking height! The left hand passage I was in was plenty wide, but soon became a lowered ceiling, to perhaps four feet high. There should not be any stooping in that part of the tour!

Begging forgiveness to the group, I realized my mistake and did a quick U-turn returning to the correct walking height passage. With no electric lights to ‘guide me’ it was a somewhat comical and embarrassing error. A few months later and by the summer of 1970, Ralph Wright had finished the electric lights on the full tour route in Wyandotte Cave. Several years later, I found a Ralph Wright signature in an obscure place on the ceiling in Sandy Plains. Wright, for not having cave lighting background, did a good job of indirect lighting in the cave itself.

As mentioned, political patronage was in full swing around 1970 and before. All the guides, and State employees, had to “donate” a percentage of their paycheck (I’m thinking it was one or two percent) back to the political party in charge. The amount was actually deducted from our paycheck. Years later there was a class action lawsuit filed against the State on this, and I actually

got a refund for the full amount.

In closing, I'll relate how this hard working cave guide learned to play the card game, euchre. In sending me in with three or four other guides on a working trip to learn the cave routes and to assess where a primitive 'outhouse' should be placed for the five-hour tour route to the Pillar of Constitution, head guide Jim Pease sat us down in the large Odd Fellows Hall, and Jim pointed to a low spot in the room; declaring, "That looks like a good spot for

the privy, anybody disagree??" No one spoke up. Now that that was decided, we thought we would be heading out of the cave, but instead Jim pulls out a deck of cards from his shirt pocket and asked, "Anyone know how to play euchre?" A couple of the guides did, but for the next hour and a half, we sat in the cave with a couple of Coleman gasoline lanterns burning and Jim taught everyone how to play euchre, one of the few card games I still don't mind playing today. On the clock! 🦇

JOIN US FOR AN IKC PRE-MEETING SOCIAL

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13th – 12:15 to 1 PM EST

Monroe County Public Library (Main Branch, Room 1C)

303 E Kirkwood Avenue, Bloomington, IN 47408

Come for refreshments and give a pre-meeting hello to the IKC Board, fellow members, and supporters. We'd also love to hear your thoughts on the IKC and how we can make the organization better. And if you need a gift for the holidays, consider our logo winter beanie or ball cap for \$20. Feel free to stay for the meeting – for a few minutes, or if you are brave and caffeinated, for the whole meeting!

Questions? Contact Danyele Green (mudandogs@gmail.com).

...Walk in the Park, continued from page 20

a cave fauna-themed hike without talking about bats. So Keith got his charts back out and gave us a brief overview of bat populations in Indiana, and the aftermath of White-nose Syndrome (WNS). His charts came in handy again to show how the populations have shifted in recent years as the surviving bats adapt to their new reality. Regarding the Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*), the population was negatively impacted somewhat by WNS, but has since stabilized and is now actually increasing. However, their hibernacula are shifting away from the smaller colonies in the northern caves and they are now consolidating in larger numbers in just a handful of southern Indiana caves (Wyandotte and Jug Hole, primarily). Bats are finicky about the location and temperature they prefer for hibernating. Even a degree or two difference in hibernating temperature may be the difference for survival with the fungus. Gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*) populations are also increasing in Indiana as this typically southern species moves further north with rising climate temperatures. Some of the Indiana bat species though, like the little brown (*Myotis lucifugus*) and tricolored (*Perimyotis subflavus*) suffered much higher mortality rates from WNS with over

90% of the population lost. It is now believed that the fungus was brought to our continent by infected bats that unfortunately roosted in shipping containers on cargo ships from Europe. Regardless of how the invasive fungus got here, it is now widespread across the United States and is here to stay. With little hope of a cure or feasible treatment, our bats' survival depends on their ability to adapt and evolve.

Everyone agreed it was the perfect fall day for a hike through this beautiful park! Many thanks to IKC Board Members Tom Sollman, Keith Dunlap, and Carla Striegel-Winner for organizing and leading this fantastic hike. It was the perfect balance of fun in the woods while learning about the world beneath our feet and the fascinating animals that live in our caves. A special kudos to Carla for using her cat-herding skills to keep the group together, on task, and moving from place to place. It is no small feat to take a group of cavers and outdoor enthusiasts on a hike through woods, cave entrances, and a historic village all on time without anyone wandering! 🦇

Editor's note: Hamer Cave is closed to visitation and requires a permit from Heidelberg Materials.

RARE PLANTS, FLYING SQUIRRELS, AND LIMESTONE TURTLES: ILPA STEWARDSHIP GATHERING

article and photo by Carla Striegel-Winner

Although one of my main roles in the IKC is outreach and education; this is because my heart lies in the stewardship we do, and I want the world to know and understand its importance. In the several years since the IKC became a member of Indiana Land Protection Alliance (ILPA), I had heard about these three-day Stewardship Gatherings events where the stewardship staff of member land trusts meet up to learn more, share skills, complete a service project for the host trust, *and they camp too*, no comfy hotels for these folks! It kind of sounded right up my alley, but of course, being a volunteer, I would have to take vacation time from my day job to be there and these events always seemed to be up in northern Indiana, a long drive from my home in Dubois County. I was just not willing to take vacation days to travel four hours north for a conference!

This year's late September gathering was different though... it was to take place in one of my favorite areas... we would be primitive camping at Indiana Dunes! And visiting and learning about some of my favorite habitat and ecosystems – mixed in with a good bit of indoor programming as well. And then for the topping on the cake, it was actually going to work out for me to be able to take vacation time those days... Yes! I could do this!

The three-day gathering did not disappoint. It was packed full, *perhaps too full*, of the most lovely things. The first afternoon started at a remnant prairie preserve in the middle of a subdivision (*and we got to see a very rare plant!*) where our service project was seed collection, followed by an amazing dinner (any time ILPA Executive Director Andrea Huntington is involved, the food will be *awesome*) and a terrific bat mist netting demonstration with staff from Orbis Environmental Consulting. And in addition to netting a wonderful big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*), they netted a flying squirrel! Chatting with Orbis bat biologist Jeremy Sheets during the program was a highlight for me.

The second day started at Indiana Dunes State Park Nature Center with once again a terrific break-

fast meal (did you know you can put loads of parmesan cheese in breakfast potatoes? Um, yes please!) followed by programs on bioinventory data, GIS data, and conducting environmental assessments. In the afternoon (eh, hem after a wonderful picnic lunch of Mexican food) we continued environmental assessments outdoors and then had two more site visits. Somehow we ended up very tired but happy, having a sunset dinner outside the historic 1930s pavilion at the Indiana Dunes beach. Oh, and before this, a hike through a dunes nature preserve,



Big brown bat netted on the first night of the Gathering

showing how prescribed fire has shaped it. Goodness gracious, is there really another day? Yup, Friday I slowly packed up my little tent in the out of the way place that loners set up, and worked my way to the main camp for some coffee. That morning we had another amazing hike at Ambler Flatwoods with the even more amazing Doug Botka of Shirley

Heinze Land Trust as our guide. Here we all could have stayed for hours listening to Doug. And there were so, so, so many fan club mosses and ground pines, and oh my.... but alas there was also indoor programming at the Indiana Dunes Tourism Office, so we needed to be on our way. We learned more about the new Indiana House Bill 1557 Prescribed Fire Law, and then about the dedicated folks who made the Indigenous Cultural Trail at the Visitor Center happen. Our day ended with an outdoor tour of this trail around the Visitor Center before we all headed home. Let me tell you it was great to end these three days by touching a giant carved limestone turtle and picking my own acorn squash to take home to give to my mom. What a journey.

This is only one of many programs the IKC Board may attend at no cost by being a paid member of ILPA. There is talk of bringing the Stewardship Gathering to southern Indiana, if we can get southern land trusts together to host it. I hope so, as I would love to help out and for my fellow IKC Board members to be able to attend at least a couple of sessions, if not the whole event, of this valuable gathering. 🦋

WHAT CAVE WALLS CAN TELL US

by Keith Dunlap

Today, cave graffiti is never acceptable (see article on page 10), but some older signatures left by early cave explorers can be interesting and add to the history of the cave. Such is the example to the right photographed by Rhonda Matteson in the IKC-owned Wayne Cave last September. Her group was looking for any evidence of Camp III and spotted this graffiti smoked on the wall "Camp #3 30 hrs" and the initials "NP", "MS", and "RS", and also "ECC" off to the side, which she correctly speculated stood for the short-lived Edinburg Caving Club from Edinburg(h), Indiana. She sent the photo to me and since the Indiana Cave Survey had previously scanned and catalogued hardcopies of all the issues of *The Guano News*, it was not too difficult to find two references to this graffiti. The first entry was published in Vol 1 #8 (dated October 23, 1958) and the second in Vol 1 #9 (undated, but sometime in November 1958). The initials were identified as NP = Norm Pace, MS = Mike Streeval, and RS = Ronald Streeval from an overnight trip made on Oct 23-24, 1958. Below are the trip report entries. 🐉

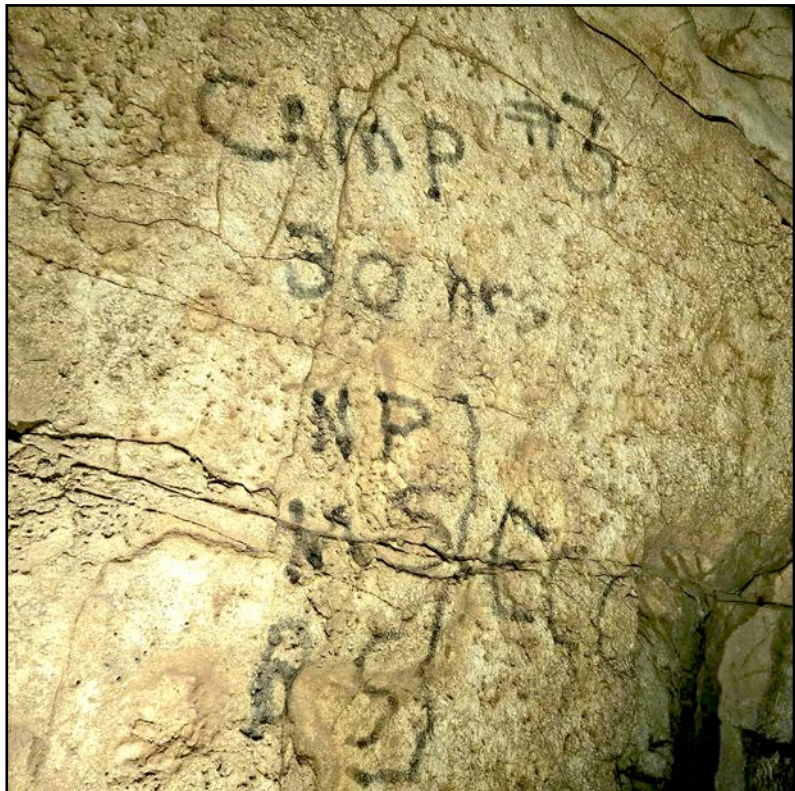


photo courtesy Rhonda Matteson

October 19 1958

Mike, and Ronald Streeval, Larry Fisher, Norman Pace, David Davis, and Charles Eaton entered Wayne Cave at 4:00 A.M.. The groups main purpose was to carry supplies back to camp three(3) for the group that has planed to spend Thursday and Friday October 23, 24 at camp three(3). On this trip Mike Streeval, and Norman Pace set a new record time for the distance from camp one(1) to the entrance. The time was twenty-two(22) minutes. The group established camp three(3) and emerged from the cave at 12:00 noon.

Lenard Baxter's name was left out of the above report.

October 23-24, 1958

Norman Pace, Mike and Ronald Streeval entered Wayne Cave at 8:50 October 23, 1958. The groups intensions was to gain experience in extended stays under-ground and, to explore the area contained around Depaepe Follies. After much labor due to an excessive amount of equipment and food the group arrived at Camp #3 at 4:00 P.M.. The group had a warm meal and hit the sack. Due to an unexpected temperature of 48°(average) the group of whom all ended up in one bed roll(crowed). Since none of this group had any experience on extended time under-ground slept a good twelve(12) hours. The group had little time to explore but did go back to keyhole river in Depaepe Follies. The average temperature of the stream was 45°. The crawl-ay at the end of the passage at camp #3 is really a short cut to keyhole river. The group established a food cash at camp #3. They emerged from the cave October 24, 1958 at 3:00 P.M..

INDIANA KARST CONSERVANCY TREASURY REPORT

Income/Expense Statement From July 1, 2025 to September 30, 2025

INCOME:

Dues Apportionment and Residuals	1,686.67	
Donations - General	569.69	
Donations - Land Acquisition Fund	1,510.00	
Wilderness First Aid class	50.00	
Promotional items	115.00	
General Investment Earnings	1,955.63	
		\$5,886.99

EXPENSES:

IKC Update (printing, production, mailing)	619.45	
Education / Outreach	423.66	
Stewardship / Conservation	426.30	
Business (Ballot mailing, PayPal fees, postage etc)	91.13	
Land Acquisition	400.00	
Wilderness First Aid class	2,303.87	
Property Taxes	0.00	
Transfers to/from restricted funds/other adjustments	1,110.00	
		(\$5,374.41)

NET OPERATING EXCESS (DEFICIT) THIS PERIOD: \$512.58

Balance Sheet September 30, 2025

ASSETS:

Checking / CD / Brokerage / Endowment accounts	924,278.41	
Wayne Cave Preserve (77.46 acres)	393,000.00	
Robinson Ladder Cave Preserve (73.48 acres)	162,000.00	
Shawnee Karst Preserve (67.78 acres)	175,000.00	
Buddha Karst Nature Preserve (36.84 acres)	29,000.00	
Sullivan Cave Preserve (30.00 acres)	88,000.00	
Lowry Karst Preserve (6.66 acres)	33,000.00	
Orangeville Rise Nature Preserve (3.01 acres)	7,000.00	
Indian Creek Conservation Easement (valued at \$1/acre)	13.16	
		<u>\$1,811,291.57</u>

FUNDS & OPERATING EXCESS:

Land Acquisition Restricted Fund	97,332.39	
Deferred Dues Restricted Fund (329 members)	12,630.00	
Stewardship Endowment Fund (+7.1% for Q3)	162,045.13	
Gale & Ray Beach Endowment Fund (+7.3% for Q3)	550,192.77	
Previous General Fund (total)	101,578.70	
Net Excess (Deficit) This Period	512.58	
Current General Fund (unrestricted)	102,091.28	
Current General Fund (committed)	4,402.05	
Real Estate Basis (excluding value of CE)	887,000.00	

Total Liabilities & Operating Excess \$1,811,291.57

IKC EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Sunday, September 28, 2025 – 1:00 PM EST

Shawnee Karst Preserve – 3918 SR 60 E, Mitchell, Indiana

Board Members Present:

Matt Selig, President
Goniela Iskali, Secretary
Keith Dunlap, Treasurer
Bill Baus
Brandon Chasteen
Jeff Cody
Laura Demarest*
Scott Frosch*
Danyeale Green*
Joe Kinder
Cris Seuell
Tom Sollman
Carla Striegel-Winner
Richard Vernier

* represented by proxy (see below)

Board Members Absent:

Bruce Bowman

Others Present: John Benton (proxy for Scott Frosch), Bambi Dunlap, Tim Harris (proxy for Danyeale Green), Kevin Romanak, Sarah Smith, Sue Vernier (proxy for Laura Demarest), Nate Vignes, and Kent Waltz.

Call to Order – IKC Exempt Purpose & Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Matt Selig, President, at 1:01 PM EDT.

Acceptance of Proxies

All proxies accepted (see above).

Approval of Previous Minutes

No edits were proposed to the last meeting minutes as published in the September 2025 *IKC Update*. *Joe made a motion to approve the minutes. Cris seconded. Unanimously approved.*

Email Motions Since Last Meeting

One email motion was presented on August 8, 2025 for providing funding for the appraisal of a potential acquisition. *Bill moved to authorize the expenditure of up to \$800 for one or more appraisals of approximately XX acres of land in XXX County on which XXX is located, currently owned by XXX. Keith seconded. Unanimously approved.*

Treasurer Report

Keith outlined the current financial status of the organization:

Assets:

Cash assets totaling	\$917,700.73
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Land assets totaling	\$887,000.00
Total Assets	\$1,804,700.73

Dedicated Funds:

Land Acquisition Fund	\$96,222.39
Stewardship Endowment	\$160,997.69
Gale & Ray Beach Endowment	\$546,373.40
Deferred Dues (as of 7/1/25)	\$13,940.00
General (unrestricted) Fund	\$100,167.25
Total Cash Funds	\$917,700.73

Current members: 328 with 30 members yet to renew.

Keith has reached out multiple times to members who have yet to renew, so eventually expired members will be dropped.

The annual growth rate of the Stewardship Endowment fund since invested is just over 12%. The annual growth rate of the Gale and Ray Beach Endowment fund since invested is just over 9% (the growth rate of this fund is lower due to the timing of when it was invested).

Additional information on the funds and investments was provided with the financial report to answer questions and provide more detail to Board members.

Sullivan Cave Patron Selection

Goni was nominated as the Cave Patron after serving as “interim” Cave Patron while the nominating committee considered the future stewardship of Sullivan. *Joe made a motion to approve Goni as the Sullivan Cave Patron. Cris seconded. The motion passed with 13 approvals and 1 abstention.*

To further note, Brad Barcom will continue to help Goni with Cave Patron responsibilities as the Patron has the option to recruit any assistance from IKC members. Kevin Romanak (as BIG chair) inquired on the role of the Grotto Liaisons going forward, and Keith noted that this will be considered in the near future and is not a topic of discussion on today’s agenda. However, the role of the Liaisons for Sullivan Cave will evolve as the online system and lockbox for key access are implemented to streamline the process and reduce the potential liability for the IKC.

Potential Acquisition

At the June Board meeting, an *ad hoc* committee consisting of Bill, Brandon, and Danyeale was appointed to formally meet with the landowner and continue the conversation of a potential acquisition of (this was a follow on to the initial informal meeting last year which consisted of introducing the landowner to the IKC, determining the owner’s interest in selling, and addressing some preliminary issues. The committee has since had



several meetings with the landowner and it was mutually agreed the best approach was to pursue the option to subdivide the property with the IKC acquiring up to XX acres (with the cave entrance) with an access easement for now, with the IKC being granted a First Right of Refusal on the remaining property (~XX acres) for future consideration. The Board approved the ordering of an appraisal on the proposed XX-acre tract and the committee also obtained four quotes for the required survey work. Tim asked if invasives were present and would need to be addressed on the acquired parcel and Keith responded yes, but this is the norm for all of our acquisitions. Carla asked if the IKC is proposing to pay for all the closing costs, and Brandon and Bill responded yes for two reasons: 1) as a goodwill gesture to the landowner and, 2) it's standard practice for the buyer to pay for the closing costs for this type of purchase. Keith noted if we are successful with this acquisition we should be careful how it is promoted for liability insurance consideration, and second, he recommended that we consider a winter closure because the cave was previously used by the federally endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) and winter non-use may encourage bat use again. *Bill made a motion for the IKC to make an offer for approximately XX acres with an access easement and the Right of First Refusal for the remaining XX acres, funding for the survey expenses, along with any closing costs and fees in the amount of \$XX. John seconded. The motion passed unanimously.*

Education/Outreach Committee

The education portion of the IKC website has now been updated by Carla and Bruce. Carla has been receiving more emails about educational events since the update was made. Carla is still working on updating the educational brochure.

Review Summer Outreach and Events – The bat presentation and survey (covered in the September *IKC Update*) that occurred on August 16 (led by Goni Iskali and fellow bat biologist Aaron McAlexander) and was the IKC's second educational event of the year and was well attended by members. The Wilderness First Aid training July event was well attended, included mix of cavers and non-cavers, and was another great success. Matt led a geology and IKC talk as part of a trip to Sullivan Cave for high school students. They also picked up trash and sticks around the camping area. The ISU Bat Festival occurred on September 25, 2025 in Terre Haute. Goni represented the IKC and relayed that the meeting was well attended by ISU students and families, but it's unlikely that the event would attract future members for the IKC due the distance of caves from ISU.

Update on Fall Outreach – The next presentation will be “Big Day for the Birds at Buddha Preserve” on October 11 with the Indiana Audubon Society (IAS). The IAS is now charging \$5 per person, but IKC members can waive this fee by obtaining a promo code on the

event page. October 25 will be our partnership presentation with The Nature Conservancy (TNC): “Bats and Rocks” at Henderson Park. Goni, Matt, Scott, and Danyeale will participate and/or help organize this event. Indiana Caverns is also looking for volunteers from the IKC to participate and have a booth for their “Bat Day Celebration” on October 25. Unfortunately, this event is the same day as the “Bats and Rocks” event so a lot of the IKC board members are preoccupied, but Carla asked if any others would like to volunteer and to reach out to her if interested. November 8 is the last field event of the year, the Lawrence County Caves and Karst hike and tour. The Indianapolis Public Library is looking for volunteers to help with presentations for home school programs in 2026, and Nate Vignes volunteered to help with this event. Also, the Indiana State Library summer reading theme for 2026 is “Unearth a Story” and they thought caves fit into this theme and libraries may be looking for cave-related programs.

ILPA Update

The Indiana Land Protection Alliance (ILPA) has been pursuing grants and has been successful even as federal grants have become more difficult to obtain. ILPA may start charging for programs in the future to support the organization, but for now these programs are free to members such as the IKC. There will be a three-day chainsaw class in 2026 for ILPA members similar to the one offered in 2025. Board members, please reach out to Carla to get dates. Carla also attended the three-day stewardship event and relayed that it was very educational and inspiring for conservation in Indiana.

IKC 40th Anniversary Planning

Carla is looking for ideas on how to celebrate the IKC 40th anniversary in 2026 that will also not put a huge burden on the Board. For example, the field events in 2026 can focus on the history of the IKC or include some relevant history in their intros, or one of the field events can be an open house or celebration of this anniversary. The IKC quarterly *Updates* can also highlight the history in their content or cover pages. Matt suggested that we make 40-year anniversary swag (hats, stickers, t-shirts) available so that we could also sell these items at events such as the Indiana Cave Symposium (ICS) on April 18, 2026. Lastly, it was discussed that one of the presentations at the Symposium could also be about the history of the IKC and the IKC could provide a 40th anniversary cake to celebrate.

Habitat Management Grant

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) has allocated funding (\$10,000) for the IKC to help us with property management and invasive plant control to enhance bat habitat to counter the impact from White-Nose Syndrome. The IKC has signed all the necessary paperwork/contract. Next steps are for the contract go through the multi-step approval process with the State.



The money needs to be spent by the end of 2025 so Carla has been maintaining a list of items to purchase when the funds are available.

Quarry Life Award Project Update

The Mitchell Quarry has allowed the IKC (Tom Sollman) to do a cavefish/biota inventory in Hamer Cave as part of the Quarry Life Award contest. The Hamer Cave entrance is owned by Heidelberg Materials and is located inside of Spring Mill State Park. The final report that includes the details of this research is due on October 4. Tom has provided a draft to Keith who will edit and submit. The IKC could potentially win some prize money (the top prize is €30,000) that is part of the international contest. There are 54 other participants. Tom and Keith also gave a tour to six representatives from Heidelberg Materials to Hamer Cave to discuss the research and the surrounding karst features.

2026 NSS Convention

Laura relayed via Sue that pre-registration and early bird rates for the convention is open until April 24, 2026. New items will be added to the registration soon, such as field trips and merchandise. On October 2 at 7 PM EDT, the leadership will be hosting a Zoom information meeting for volunteers that can be found in social media. Laura will also provide more info at the next IKC meeting about "CaveSim" and will request a donation from the IKC for this. Bill added that cave trip leaders will also be needed for the convention. Carla mentioned that she will ask about a booth/display table for IKC during convention.

The Online Access Registration System

Goni gave an update on the pilot online registration system for Sullivan Cave and said that the system has greatly streamlined the registration and waiver process and has helped reduce the liability for the IKC because waivers now get reviewed by both the trip leader and Cave Patron/system administrators prior to the key being provided. While gathering and reviewing waivers is still the primary responsibility of the trip leader, the Cave Patron or system administrators approving the permit serves as a secondary check. This is how the system is also used by other conservancies. The feedback from users has been great so far and the only criticism received to date is that trip leaders can't see or manage all the participants who have not signed waivers for their requested trip. Goni and Tim explained that trip leaders and system administrators should be able to see all the signed waivers for each trip, but need to work with their group to make sure that all waivers are submitted 48 hours before the trip. Tim also noted that trip leaders or system administrators can edit permit requests such as changing the number of participants (e.g., reduce the number of cavers in the permit request if a participant drops out). *Carla made a motion that the IKC make the online registration*

system the only method of scheduling cave trips and camping to Sullivan Cave effective October 30 or once the Grotto Liaisons and members have been notified. Others forms of registration (ex. paper waivers) may be used only if approved by the Cave Patron for any extenuating circumstance. Cris seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Recap of Preserves Work Projects & Upcoming Preserves Projects

Buddha Karst Nature Preserve – The mowing has been completed recently by Keith in the last month, and he may mow again before the next field day. There is a big tree down and Keith will send photos to Joe for his consideration to cut it. Keith will also need help with hauling some materials to replace a bridge at the back of the property.

Lowry Karst Preserve – No updates relayed by the property manager, but visits by others have reported no issues.

Orangeville Rise Nature Preserve – The rope swing is gone and no other updates.

Robinson Ladder Cave Preserve – A pre-event stewardship day occurred before the bat talk on August 16, 2025. The activities focused on invasive management and managing the drive leading to the property. Jamie Winner also mowed at the property twice this year. Keith has sprayed for invasives, and sprayed fungicide on the chestnut trees, but survival rate remains low. There were only two cave trips this summer. The Harrison-Crawford Grotto will also complete a volunteer day in November at the preserve and likely focus on fixing the gate.

A large oak is leaning at the back of the barn. John needs a volunteer to address this issue soon. He will also solicit quotes from local vendors who can help with the trimming/removal so that barn is not damaged. Carla will inquire if energy companies can help with the trimming because they sometimes volunteer for this type of work for NGOs in their service area.

Shawnee Karst Preserve – About one acre of the property was treated (cut and stump treated) for autumn olive as part of the pre-meeting stewardship day. The trails and driveway were also cleared of any downed trees, visual intrusions and/or sticks.

Wayne Cave Preserve – Cris and Keith sprayed the stilt grass and it seemed like about 95% of it is now dead. Cris is also continuing to do work on other invasives. Lastly, Cris relayed that there is still trash in the new addition of the property that will eventually need volunteers and a trailer to remove.

Indian Creek Conservation Easement – Bambi continues to learn the boundaries and responsibilities of the easement monitoring with the help of Keith. The

annual inspection has been completed, but the notifications have not been sent out yet.

Sullivan Cave Preserve – A workday occurred this summer that focused on invasive control, mowing, opening up a drainage culvert, and doing a second roof re-sealing of the wood shed. Joe will also solicit the help of other cavers about doing some maintenance of the driveway and camping area.

Nate led a cave restoration day this summer that targeted graffiti clean-up with mainly CIG members. He would prefer to work with smaller groups until the cave restoration project is more established, but he may request more help from IKC members or other grottos in the future. Carla requested that Nate communicate with Joe or Goni about any upcoming restoration events so that they can notify Board members and request if Board members want to participate. Nate agreed to do so for future events.

Keith has suggested merging the two property tax parcels of the Sullivan Preserve to slightly reduce our property tax obligations, which will require that the two parcels be listed on the same quitclaim deed. There were no objections for Keith to spend \$45 for the paperwork fees to merge the two parcels and streamline our taxes (this will be ~10 year payback).

Items from the Floor

- Sue relayed from Laura that the next Orientation to Cave Rescue class will be held in Harrison County. Langdon's Cave is no longer an option for the mock-rescue because it will still be closed due to the bat season, so she is looking for suggestions for another option to be used in late March.
- Bambi inquired about the minimum number of cavers

allowed on IKC trips. Keith relayed that the recommended minimum number of cavers per our management plans is four, but Cave Patrons may allow for smaller caving groups in special circumstances (ex. research in the entrance area).

- Keith will have honey and persimmon pulp for sale from his sister. 100% of the purchase price for the pulp and 50% of the purchase price for the honey will go as a donation to the IKC.

Next Meeting Date and Place Selection

The next IKC Quarterly meeting is scheduled for Saturday, December 13, 2025 at 1:00 PM EST at the main branch of the Monroe County Public Library (303 East Kirkwood Avenue, Bloomington, Indiana), with a social hour being planned prior to the meeting.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4:08 PM EDT.

Respectfully compiled and submitted by Goni Iskali, IKC Secretary 🦋

Editor's note: There was an editing error in the June Board meeting minutes (published in the September *IKC Update*) that should have identified Goni Iskali as the new Board Secretary in the Board Present roster. My apologies.



Kriste Lindberg



INDIANA KARST CONSERVANCY – NEW MEMBERSHIP / DONATION FORM

I would like to help the IKC protect Indiana's unique caves and karst features. Use the QR code below or complete this form and mail to: **IKC, PO Box 2401, Indianapolis IN 46206.**

\$ _____ for IKC membership dues at \$20/year (please pro-rate \$1.66/month to expire on March 31st).

\$ _____ donation to the general fund (to be used for education, stewardship, etc).

\$ _____ donation to the restricted cave/land acquisition fund.

☐ I know of an area worthy of protection, please contact me.

☐ I would like to volunteer to help, please contact me.

Name: _____

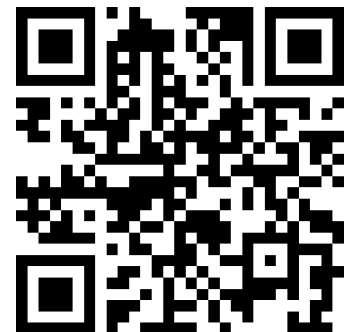
Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ ☐ cell

Email: _____

Newsletter: ☐ digital PDF ☐ printed/mailed





Scott Frosch

What Backbreaker? Some may not recognize this as Sullivan Cave's famous passage... But if you are the "right" size, the Backbreaker is an easy half mile of walking passage. Many of the Scouts on Scott Frosch's recent trip were scratching their heads about the name of the passage. The adults, not so much. 🦋