

The Western Cave Conservancy

Protecting the West's Last Frontier

Vol 1 No 1

Winter 2004

Join The WCC Today!

Founding Members Campaign Kicks Off

The Western Cave Conservancy is proud to announce its first membership drive, the **Founding Members Campaign**. Those who join the WCC before January 31, 2004 will be designated "Founding Members" in appreciation of the faith they have shown in WCC at this early period of the Conservancy's existence. At just \$20, the cost is low. And of course, those who already donated \$20 or more in 2003 will automatically become founding members.

With offers on the table for caves in Oregon and California (as detailed inside), it's time to extend this invitation to cave enthusiasts throughout the far western states. WCC is interested in caves from the Pacific coast to Utah, from Idaho to Arizona, and we need folks from all over this vast territory to let us know what caves now on private land they'd like to see protected.

Members are crucial in a number of ways. Having a large membership with which we can communicate quickly will allow us to gauge support for specific projects and raise pledges toward acquisitions before we ever strike a deal. Members also help out by giving their special expertise and time. Membership fees provide a steady income stream critical for paying the expenses of property ownership. And finally, a large membership boosts WCC's clout and credibility when applying for grants or nego-

tiating with landowners. Ultimately, a large and active membership will be the key to the success of our mission.

Undoubtedly, the most important benefit of membership is knowing that you're helping to save caves for posterity; but this isn't the only benefit you'll receive. Members are entitled to our quar-

terly newsletter, available in paper form or on our web site and filled with WCC news about acquisition projects, access policies, meetings, and special events for the membership. You'll have access to our moderated email discussion list, and will have many opportunities to weigh in on issues affecting the Conservancy and its activities. In addition, members who join at the \$40 level receive our official WCC "P-Bottle," proving that even nonprofits can have a sense of humor.

Our goal is that every person in the west who cares

about caves will join. It all comes down to whether you agree with our mission:

Put simply, the Western Cave Conservancy is dedicated to securing permanent protection for threatened caves in the western United States. Read on, and if you like what you hear, we hope you'll join us as a Founding Member.



Photo: Dave Bunnell www.goodearthgraphics.com

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Rippled Cave Update

Many things threaten western caves, including destruction by quarrying and vandalism. However, some threats are not quite as obvious; for example, the loss of access to responsible visitors. Closed caves move to the fringes of the caving community's awareness, with the result that when threats to these caves arise, knowledge of the threat reaches the community too late to save them. And, when a popular training cave is closed by its owner, cavers within a few-hours drive lose an important opportunity to educate the next generation of cave defenders.

Rippled Cave is just such an important training cave, and it is faced with the threat of closure. Located in an area of explosive population growth, the California Mother Lode, Rippled Cave's 15-acre parcel is now surrounded by mini-estates where 20 years ago the land was open. Without pre-emptive action, it's only a matter of time before the Rippled Cave property is snapped up, built on and closed off to the public.

All kinds of cave enthusiasts visit Rippled for training and recreation. Adults and kids alike explore its 2,500 feet of mapped passage, comprised of a beginning caver's delight

of big rooms, walking passage, challenging squeezes, and extensive breakdown mazes leading to hidden decorated areas. Search-and-Rescue teams train in the cave regularly. Just outside, visitors rig ropes on the sheer walls of a 19th century lime quarry to practice climbing and rappelling, while others picnic under the shade of oak and madrone.

Because of the importance of this cave and the looming threat of development, the Western Cave Conservancy is negotiating with the owner to buy the property. Initial talks have been positive, although the price will be higher than we had anticipated.



Photo: Dave Bunnell www.goodearthgraphics.com

We're confident that a deal can be reached in the near future. As a member, you'll be among the first to know when we sign the papers.

Marble Mountain Cave

Late last October, WCC learned that the 642-acre property containing Marble Mountain Quarry Cave was to be sold at auction November 18th. Known since 1937, Marble Mountain Cave is the second longest limestone cave in Oregon.

WCC submitted an offer for the portion of the property containing the cave, being unable to afford a realistic bid for the entire property. Although this and all other offers were rejected by the seller, we have been advised that a party now negotiating with the seller may be interested in our proposed split to help finance their purchase of the remainder of the property.

Decorated with live white flowstone, draperies, stalactites, stalagmites, columns and rimstone pools, Marble Mountain Quarry Cave is con-

sidered one of the northwest's prettiest, despite extensive breakage during periods when it was left unguarded. With over 1,500 feet of surveyed passage on three levels and several large rooms, it has been described as a "cavers' cave." Yet for most of its history, it has been sealed against visitors.

Having obtained the property through a foreclosure sale last January, the present owner, a lender-created LLC, wishes to recoup as much as possible of the million-dollar loan on which the previous owner defaulted. That amount is now known to be significantly greater than the market value of the property, owing to the sale of the timber rights in 2000.

Although the large quarry immediately adjacent to the cave has been inactive since before 1987, the mining permit is current and the seller is marketing the property as an aggregate quarry. WCC has not been able to determine whether the quarry is viable.

If the quarry is reopened and expanded, or the walls

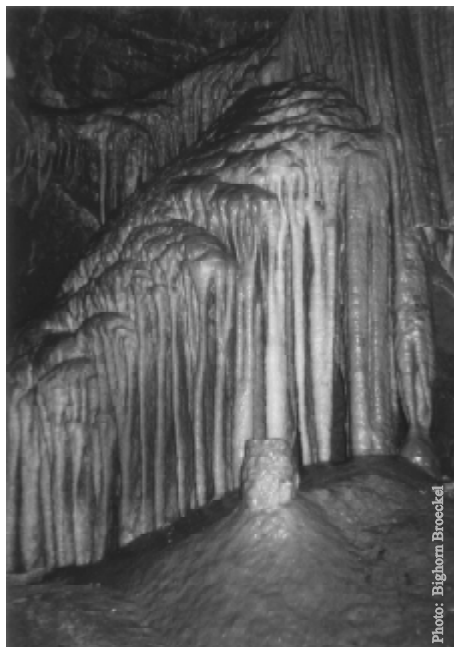
are benched to allow mining at the greater depths that contain most of the remaining limestone, Marble Mountain Cave will be destroyed.

In the short time between learning of the auction and the deadline to submit bids, WCC collected from northwest cavers over \$9,000 in pledges to back a \$50,000 low-interest loan offered by two west coast cavers for this purchase. The pledges expire at the end of 2004 if we cannot conclude a purchase.

The tremendous response to the pledge drive gave the WCC board the confidence to offer \$40,000 for an 82-acre partition of the property. The costs of splitting the parcel, estimated at \$10,000, would be paid by us.

The proposed partition would protect the north wall of the quarry, in which the cave is located, while not inhibiting development of the quarry to the west and south.

We are grateful for the assistance provided by Oregon caver/attorney Mike McNichols, to Steve Knutson, and to WCC's man on the ground, Ernie Coffman, who conducted valuable title research in county records and hosted the WCC officers who drove up to inspect the Marble Mountain Quarry property.



Letter from the President

Greetings:

Welcome to the premier issue of the Western Cave Conservancy newsletter! I can't believe that it has been a year and a half since we took the first steps to create the conservancy. By last fall we were approved as a California non-profit corporation and by early 2003 we learned from the Internal Revenue Service that donations to the Western Cave Conservancy would be tax deductible. In March the NSS Board of Governors voted to make us an official NSS Conservancy! Then our efforts and attention focused on the 2003 NSS Convention in Porterville. As many of you who attended will remember, we hosted a well-received Wednesday night dinner and staffed an information table all week. Many generous people made donations to help us get started and we received approximately \$5000.00. For this outpouring of support we are very grateful.

We have been very busy since August too! Some of our officers were able to attend a four-day seminar for land trusts where we learned a great deal about running a successful conservancy. We have also been pursuing two possible cave acquisitions. In the Mother Lode region, we are working to purchase Rippled Cave, long a favorite to many central California cavers. In the northwest, we are exploring ways to acquire Marble Mountain Quarry Cave, the second longest limestone cave in Oregon.

To round out 2003 with a bang, we are finalizing our website, initiating our newsletter and offering western cavers the opportunity to join us as founding members of the Western Cave Conservancy. Membership will keep you in the know about our activities, give you ways to communicate your ideas and concerns with us, and provide information about the many ways you can help us succeed in our mission. Please enjoy this free newsletter, learn about what we are doing and consider joining us! With your support we will succeed in protecting caves we love, now and into the future!

Marianne Russo

President, Western Cave Conservancy

VOLUNTEERS AHOY!

The Western Cave Conservancy is an all-volunteer organization. To accomplish big things, we will need lots of help. Some tasks will be ongoing and require a hefty commitment of time and energy, while others will be intensive but intermittent. Putting on an event like the WCC Convention dinner could not have been accomplished without the help of numerous volunteers. Folks on the Public Relations committee worked on the planning of this event for weeks ahead of time. All those plans, however, would have been useless without the help of a couple of dozen other people who stepped up in the hours just before showtime. These wonderful people set up tables and decorations, served food and beverages, and cleaned everything up at lightning speed—just an example to show that folks with any amount of time or talent, big or small, can be a vital part of the organization.

We have several standing committees—Public Relations, Research, and Acquisitions—that require a significant time contribution but allow participants to have a real effect on what happens. Some special types of volunteers we are looking for include persons with critical knowledge of the caves of the western states and persons with spe-

cial professional skills. These skills include real estate law, land surveying, land appraisal, environmental assessment, non-profit and tax law, accounting and cave management to name a few. Some of these professional skills are ones that we will have to pay for if we cannot find someone to volunteer their time. If you or someone you know can help us in these or related areas, please contact us!

Just because you live far away from central California, where most of our meetings currently take place, doesn't mean we don't need your help or that we won't serve your interests. With the use of conference calls and email, distance is not the obstacle it used to be. Even if you have very little time to offer but have knowledge of the caves and cavers in your region, you would be a good communication point and source of information.

Board member Joel Despain has taken on the job of coordinating our volunteer program. He will act as a clearing-house of volunteer information, coordinating jobs with people. The best way to make sure we know that you are interested in helping and have all the contact information we need is for you to contact Joel directly. His email is Joel_Despain@nps.gov. Our website will have a link to him also. Director Jerry

Johnson will be assisting, especially when Joel is out of town, and he can be reached at jjj@csus.edu. Once your name has been entered into our database, you will be sent a short questionnaire to complete and return. This information will allow us to appropriately match you with a job or position as the need arises.

Of course, the best way to keep informed about our activities and keep the lines of communication open is through being a member and visiting our website! Also, as our database expands we plan to set up a member and volunteer list serve which will provide yet another way to share information. Your support in any amount, be it time, money, or both, will be precious and critical to our success.

Be sure to check out the Western Cave Conservancy website:

<http://www.westerncaves.org>.

It's the place to go for all the latest information about WCC acquisitions, activities, and history, and it boasts a gallery of photographs of threatened, protected, or otherwise interesting caves.

Our thanks to webmaster Matt Bowers, matt@thirdmedia.com, for both hosting and managing the site, and Peri Frantz, apfrantz@pwpconsult.com, for content coordination.

WCC goes to the 2003 NSS Convention

This past summer from August 4-8, the Western Cave Conservancy made its formal debut at the National Speleological Society's (NSS) national convention in Porterville, California. Hundreds of conventioners stopped by our information booth to look at our tabletop display of threatened caves in California, pick up one of our new brochures, or purchase meal tickets for WCC's dinner Wednesday.

Wednesday night's gala served 228 hungry cavers piles of lasagna, pizza, salad, and all the soft drinks, beer and wine they could drink, at the low price of \$7 per head. Many volunteers pitched in, including a crew from the Cave Conservancy of Hawai'i. We are also grateful for the facilities and support provided by the Convention Committee, and for substantial donations of beverages and serving apparatus by convention staff, Widemer Hefeweizen brewers, Fetzer Vineyards, Damian and Amanda Grindley, Bill Papke and Matt Bowers.

Marianne Russo (WCC President), Joel Despain (WCC Director and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park Cave Specialist), and noted photographer and cartographer Peter Bosted gave outstanding presentations on the mission of the WCC and what it is we hope to

protect. Between our donors and the dinner, we raised over \$5,000, nearly filling the cave map donation meter contributed by Peter. Special recognition is due to very generous gifts by Jim and Claire Lakner, Dick Blenz, Cindy Heazlit and Bill Papke.

In addition, numerous vendors and cavers donated door prizes ranging from books to caving equipment to art. Thanks are due to Rolf and Denise Aalbu, Peter Bosted, Steve Bumgardner, Joel Despain, Gonzo Guano Gear, GoodEarthGraphics.com, Guadalupe Mtn Lampworks, Inner Mtn Outfitters, the Mother Lode Grotto, the NSS Bookstore and Bill Papke and Speleobooks.

The heartwarming support given by everybody involved exemplifies the public-spiritedness of the caving community. It is that spirit above all else that we believe will bring success to our mission.

Photo: John Hargreaves

