

Western Cave Conservancy

Protecting the West's Last Frontier

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Summer 2006

We're Well On Our Way!

Rousing Start to Rippled Cave Capital Campaign

When WCC closed the deal on the Weller Natural Preserve (Rippled Cave) this spring, we expected strong support to pay off the property...and our members have not disappointed us.

Nobody likes to talk about money, and especially not to ask for it. Yet, money is what makes WCC's mission possible, and ask we must. Without it, we're dead in the water. To help you understand the need, and because our members have a right to know more details than might make polite conversation, we hope you'll permit us to share the following numbers.

Since we mailed our March appeal, friends of the Conservancy have given over \$11,700. Including that, in 2006 we've received over \$29,800 on top of the \$90,000 grant from the NSS Pacific Slope Cave Acquisition Fund (donated by a California caver in 2001). Much of the support has come in very generous donations of \$500-\$10,000. Of course, every gift of money or time, no matter how small, brings us closer to the goal. So far this year, one hundred ten households have given their support.

T-shirt sales and another successful fundraising dinner have raised an additional \$1,463, putting us just over \$31,000 for the year!

The year's not over yet, though. The sooner we can pay off our loans on the property, the less we'll have to spend. If we raise another

\$17,000 before the end of the year, we'll pay off Rippled Cave and save \$2,000 in interest.

Here's the breakdown:

\$150,000 Rippled cost
\$4,082 scheduled interest
\$90,000 received from NSS
\$13,860 available from previous years
\$29,862 donations in 2006
\$1,463 other income
\$135,185 total raised for Rippled
\$18,897 needed to pay off loans on time
(2,000) potential interest savings
\$16,897 goal for this mailing

If you are among the 900 known cavers and cave enthusiasts in the western states who have not yet donated in 2006, we're asking you now to join your friends in support of the WCC's first cave purchase.

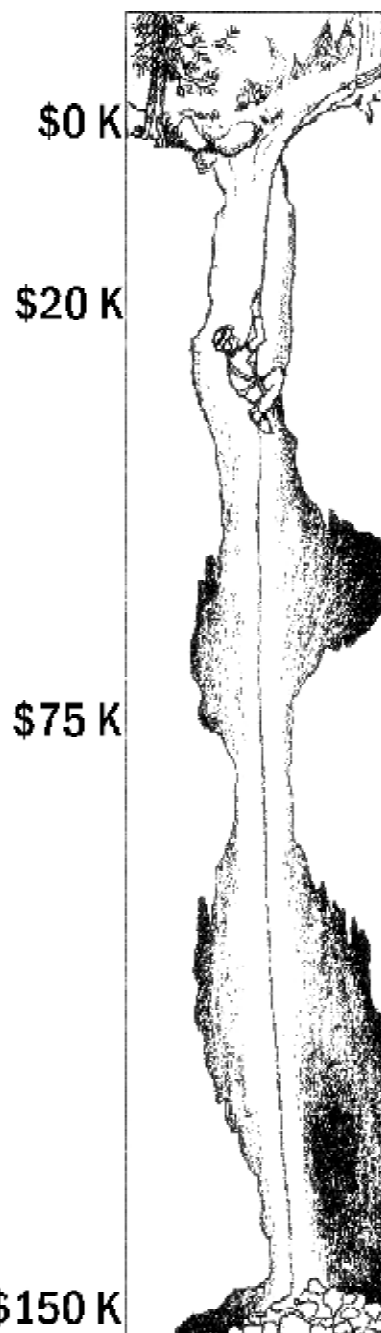
We have high hopes for Oregon, Washington, Arizona and California and offer tangible support to projects in adjacent states, as you'll see elsewhere in this issue (Utah Caves Helped by WCC). Even your wildest dreams for cave conservation can come to pass if we join together to build this organization to a size capable of taking on \$500,000-\$2,000,000 acquisitions.

There are some beautiful caves out there on private land, among them two of the longest caves in California, the deepest limestone cave in the north-west states (which some of you may have visited during this summer's NSS Convention), several large karst areas honeycombed with small but beautiful caves, unusual lava tubes, extraordinary talus and granite caves such as Upper and Middle Millerton Lake Caves, several endangered burial, bat, and bug caves. There are still more caves on public land owned by agencies unable to devote resources to manage them properly, and these, too, WCC is working to protect.

Thanks to many of you, we've raised \$30,000 in just the last 8 months. With the help of others, we can reach \$50,000 and own our first cave property free-and-clear. How about it...will you join WCC and make great things possible?

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Almost out of the hole...

Rippled Cave Reopens

While WCC's Stewardship Committee develops a long-term management plan, the Conservancy has reopened Rippled Cave and the Weller Natural Preserve under an interim plan. This essentially reinstates the access policy developed by the Mother Lode Grotto of the NSS, which informally managed the cave for the previous owners from 1993-2005.

We realize this policy does not address access for all caving organizations or access for visitors not affiliated with an NSS chapter. There are many other issues it does not address. For the present, other organizations and individuals may arrange access through one of the six NSS chapters listed in the interim policy. These chapters will likely welcome experienced cavers who wish to join them on their next visit to Rippled Cave. They can also accommodate and train a limited number of newcomers.

Long-term management of the preserve requires the careful creation of a written property and cave management plan that details how the property is managed, maintained and secured. To that end we are soliciting your input towards that plan. WCC welcomes all comments whether they are from independent cavers, NSS members or officers, an organization or the general public.

Upon request, the WCC will endeavor to provide to your group staff and presentations to discuss the cave, the property and its management. Please send your comments to the Stewardship Committee Chair, Joel Despaigne, at joel_despaigne@nps.gov or at 41170 Oakridge Dr. Three Rivers, CA 93271. We will collect comments for the next several months and expect a final plan to be approved by the Board of Directors late this year or early next year.



Rippled Cave Interim Access Policy

Trip Allocation:

Each participating NSS grotto will be issued a key to the locked gate and given a trip number limit based on historic use by the grotto and grotto size. This limit is in response to neighbor concerns over the years about frequency of trips and overuse of the privately maintained road.

Columbia Grotto (3 trips per year)
Stanislaus Grotto (3 trips per year)
Diablo Grotto (5 trips per year)
Mother Lode Grotto (6 trips per year)
San Francisco Bay Chapter (6 trips per year)
San Joaquin Valley Grotto (to be determined)

These are the maximum number of trips each grotto can take. Based on the last few years' records it is expected that the actual number of trips will be much less, but having the maximum number higher gives grottos greater flexibility in planning. In general we think the neighbors would be very comfortable with a combined average of two trips a month.

Gate and Parking Procedures:

When you arrive at the cave unlock and swing the gate outward. Pull your car(s) in and close the gate immediately behind you. Do not leave the gate open unattended since it crosses the main road and we don't want someone to run into it. Please lock yourself inside (just like we do in gated caves) so that no one can follow you in or steal the lock. Leave the key in a safe place outside the cave and show at least one other person where it is hidden in case of an emergency.

There is room for about 10 cars behind the gate, but that is really squeezing them in, so try to limit the number of vehicles. DO NOT park along the road. If you forget the key please change your plans and go caving elsewhere. The neighbors know that people with permission to visit the cave will have a key to the gate, so walk-ins are considered trespassers.

Night Trips:

PLEASE DO NOT VISIT THE CAVE AT NIGHT! If a day trip runs over into the evening, especially during the winter, the neighbors will surely understand. However they do not like to see cars coming down the road late in the evening and hear things going on late at night.

Sanitation:

The neighbors have expressed concern about how we are dealing with sanitation. So, we are asking that visitors pack out burrito bags with any solid waste and urinate away from the road, taking care not to leave any toilet paper on the property.

Last But Not Least!

Finally, please be considerate of the neighbors. Drive slowly and carefully on the access road, keep the noise levels down and do not trespass on other properties. In particular, the owners of the old limekiln across the road have explicitly denied permission for anyone to walk over on his side of the road to look at this archeological feature. Please don't use their driveway across the street for a turn-around or pull-out.

Contact:

Marianne Russo is the contact person for this interim policy if you have questions or need a key replacement. We suggest you coordinate trips with her to avoid colliding with other grottos. Please notify Marianne immediately if you see any damage to the cave, the gate, or the property. Phone (916) 663-2571 (preferred), or email: mrusso@softcom.net

Utah Caves Helped by WCC ...Nuttty Putty Cave To Stay Open

Thanks to the Timpanogos Grotto of the National Speleological Society, Utah's most popular wild cave and three nearby caves will remain accessible to the public under a management agreement signed in April by the grotto and the landowner, the State of Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration.

The Western Cave Conservancy awarded the grotto a \$700 matching grant for materials used to gate the caves in accordance with the state's requirements.

Prior to the agreement, 1,355-foot Nutty Putty Cave attracted more than 5,000 visitors per year, most ill-equipped for the cave's climbs and tight passages. Nutty Putty had seen four highly-publicized rescues of trapped visitors, two within a few weeks of each other in 2004. Alarmed by this, and by recent fatalities in Utah caves, state officials last year were on the verge of closing Nutty Putty Cave forever.

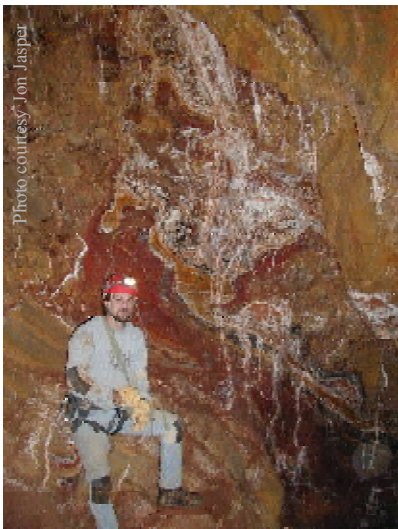
Three nearby caves, Rabbit Trap, Silly Putty and Blowhole were also threatened with permanent closure, as it was believed that visitors denied access to Nutty Putty would turn their attention there.

In addition to its obvious recreational value, Nutty Putty Cave has a rich

biota and interesting geological features, including numerous trace fossils in its walls and evidence of hydrothermal alteration including its peculiar namesake inclusions. Blowhole Cave is nearly as extensive but vertical in nature, over 340 feet deep, and possessed of a spectacular multi-hued section of wall known as the Navajo Blanket.

Quick involvement by Utah cavers including Jon Jasper, cave specialist for Timpanogos Cave National Monument and president of the Timpanogos Grotto, resulted in the state offering a compromise whereby they would lease the Nutty Putty to any organization able to secure a \$1-million liability insurance policy. They found no takers.

After protracted negotiation, Jasper and the grotto signed the present agreement with the state on April 16, 2006.



The "Navajo Blanket" of Blowhole Cave. To view it in color, download the high-res newsletter at www.westerncaves.org/newsletters.asp.



Photo courtesy Jon Jasper

ting torch. The total cost of the project was only \$1,300.

Since implementation of the permit system, Jon reports that visitation has dropped dramatically. Visitors seem to be obeying the safety guidelines. The grotto has already begun graffiti removal and cleanup projects. So far, the gates have held, though break-ins are to be expected, given Nutty Putty's popularity.

Timpanogos Grotto was recognized in 2005 with the NSS Grotto Conservation award, given in recognition of a chapter's outstanding contributions to cave conservation. The Nutty Putty project is the latest in a long string of cave restoration, public education and cave management projects organized by this very active group.

Jon and the Timpanogos Grotto deserve the heartfelt thanks of cavers everywhere for protecting reasonable, respectful access to these extraordinary caves. They continue to demonstrate what a committed group of volunteers can achieve with limited funds, a lot of persistence...and a bit of metalworking expertise.

WCC strongly supports such well-conceived grassroots cave management efforts. If you are organizing a similar project in California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona or Utah, we invite you to contact us at mail@westerncaves.org.



Photo courtesy Jon Jasper

Speleo-Ed Fundraiser

On May 13, 2006, the WCC hosted a fundraising dinner at the Speleo-Educational Seminar put on by the Western Region of the National Speleological Society (NSS). Previous fundraisers have been held at the national NSS convention in Porterville in 2003, the Western Region meeting in Sonora in 2004, and the 2005 Speleo-Ed at Sequoia National Park.

WCC chef Eileen Belan outdid herself, despite being limited to a campground barbecue pit (we won't reveal her secret). For \$15 per person, 75 attendees were served as much roast pork loin, scalloped potatoes, green beans, corn, and cookies as they could eat. Bill Papke pitched in with a delicious Vidalia sweet onion salad. There was so much pork loin left over that the remainder was auctioned for \$45!

Assisting Eileen and Bill were Wayne Babros, Mark and Sharon Bowers, Ric Gates, Dale Hartwig, Greg Wilson Hartwig, Marc Hasbrouck, Theresa Robinson, Mike White, Courtney White, and Michael White Jr. Thanks to these volunteers and our guests, the WCC raised \$1,065, or \$749 after expenses and sales tax. Thank you all!



Photo: Scott Schmitz

Eileen with Speleo-Ed organizer Matt Bowers.

Mt. Shasta Caves Safe From Sale...For Now

The Bush administration has delayed until next year its proposal to sell 300,000 acres of U.S. Forest Service Land, mostly in western states. Among the lands listed in that plan were three well-known northern California lava tubes: Pluto's, Barnum, and Sand Caves.

The administration introduced the land sales plan as a means of funding an extension of the Secure Rural Schools Act, which expires in September. This act offsets revenue lost by rural counties as a result of declining timber sales from national forests, and enjoys wide support in the western U.S.

The land sale proposal, however, received an unfriendly reception from western lawmakers of both major parties, even those having a record of opposition to environmental protections. WCC was among over 130,000 concerned citizens and grass-roots organizations who sent comments to the Forest Service, overwhelmingly opposing the sales.



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In May and June, House and Senate appropriations subcommittees omitted the sales from the interior appropriations bills, ostensibly killing them, but the administration indicated it would still press the proposal before congressional committees that oversee the rural schools program. In response, Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon held up all nominations to the Interior and Agriculture Departments.

On August 7, Department of Agriculture

Undersecretary Mark Rey—a former timber industry lobbyist and the principal spokesman for the land sales proposal—sent a letter to Wyden and two other senators leading the opposition, agreeing to delay the proposal for at least a year.

Pluto's Cave and the Sand and Barnum system have special biological and cultural significance. Ironically, these caves were only acquired by the forest service in recent years in

Pluto's Cave in 1863

"October 10 in the morning we went to visit a cave about three-quarters of a mile distant, just discovered, and of which extraordinary stories were told. It was, indeed, quite a curiosity. It is called Pluto's Cave. The surface of the country is a gentle lava slope, very rocky, with but little soil and with stunted cedars and bushes, the lava rising into innumerable hummocks a few feet high. Under this the cave extends. It looks as if the surface of the great lava flow had cooled, but that the crust had broken somewhere lower down and a long stream of the fluid had run out, leaving a long, empty channel or gallery. The roof of this gallery is beautifully arched—in places it is at least fifty feet high and as many broad. The bottom is of broken blocks of lava, and the sides are occasionally ornamented with fantastic shapes of stone, where the melted or viscous fluid has oozed through cracks, sometimes in a thick, black stream, like tar, then cooled, in others like froth on the surface of the molten mass—but all now cool enough, hard, rough, black rock. We went in near a mile [actually 2,500 ft], to the end, or at least to where the fallen fragments blocked up the way.

"Multitudes of bats lived in it, even to the very end. Near the entrance the roof had broken in in several places, and there were many skulls of mountain sheep that had got in and perished. These are the chamois of the Rocky Mountains and Sierra. They are nearer a goat than sheep, and have enormous horns, hence some hunters call them the 'big horn.' On one of these skulls the horns were 14 1/2 inches in circumference at the base and 33 inches between the tips."

—Wm. H. Brewer

Farquhar Francis P., ed. *Up and Down California in 1860-1864: The Journal of William H. Brewer*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1930. p.473-474.

hopes of reversing a century of abuse of the caves. All three lava tubes receive heavy local use and suffer from severe graffiti and littering.

WCC sent comments to the Forest Service in March expressing deep dismay that these parcels were included in the sales proposal.

Because Sand and Barnum Caves contain large winter hibernacula of Townsend's Big-Eared bats, the American Cave Conservation Association and the Shasta Area Grotto (SAG) of the NSS gated them for Klamath National Forest in 1999-2001. The gates were seasonal, left open in the summer to allow continued public access.

After a period of initial success during which the winter bat populations increased, vandals broke the gates. SAG continues to monitor Pluto's, Sand, and Barnum Caves for the forest and is investigating ways to better manage these troubled caves.

WCC Website Resurrected

Even if you've done so in the past, please check out our website:

<http://www.westerncaves.org>

Many of our members have noticed its moribund state over the past year. Well, we have good news. She'll live...and indeed looks much improved already, with updates to the donor list (including the anonymity we promised several of you), financial documents and minutes, full-color newsletter archives, home page stories and a new photo gallery. As we transition to a new webmaster, you'll notice other changes in the coming months.

We wish we could say we ran a well-oiled machine, but as an all-volunteer organization, we're really driving an old Model T or '66 Volkswagen Beetle, held together with duct tape and baling wire. 'Course, the advantage of a vehicle like that is that we can fix it ourselves.

In the meantime, we're always on the lookout for new parts—er, volunteers. We don't have enough, and those we have do the very best they can all the way up to the day something has to give. We love them all, and are grateful for all they've done for WCC, caves and caving.