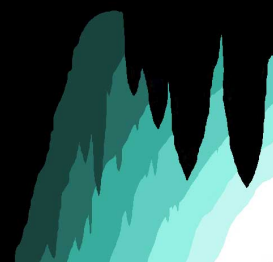


Western Cave Conservancy

Protecting the West's Last Frontier

Vol 6 No 1 Spring/Summer 2009



The WCC Fieldhouse is Complete!

After many months of toil by numerous volunteers during the last half of 2008, the WCC fieldhouse at the Weller Natural Preserve is ready for use. In fact, we have already used it for two events! On April 25th the Board of the Western Cave Conservancy held their Spring quarterly meeting there and just a few days ago, on May 16th, NCRC Western Region put on a one day class called "Knots, Anchors and Rigging for the Vertical Caver". Both events were served well by the fieldhouse. With the aid of a small generator, such amenities as overhead lights, computers, and a digital projector were made available, and of course having the cave a mere 150 feet away was so very convenient for the rigging exercises.

As was reported last fall, the framing, siding, roof sheathing, windows, and the door were finished by sometime in September. Then toward the end of that month we began applying the roofing material, installing the skylights and finishing all the trim around the windows, vents, door, and corners. We also counter-sunk all the outside nails in the siding and trim and filled the holes with caulking. This was truly a "pain in the butt" job but sooo worth it after the building was painted. You can't even see where any of the nails are!

Two other September jobs included some additional earthmoving to bring down the grade on the uphill side (required by the county inspector) and having about 10 yards of gravel delivered and spread around the building. This was truly an inspired decision since over the course of the winter and spring through several good storms, this thick layer of gravel has kept the building clean and unstained by the local iron-rich red dirt.



Photo: Marianne Russo

In October it was "painting time." This is always a popular pastime and it was not difficult to get extra volunteers to help out. The exterior was painted a warm light brown with a trim of light greenish-blue. We used a darker brown for the door and vents and some of the window trim.

While all this was going on at the fieldhouse, Jerry

Johnson was busy working on what we are now calling the Stool Shed. This has had a variety of monikers, including, but not limited to: Burrito Bungalow, Poop Palace, and the Log Layer. At the Spring Board meeting though, it was unanimously decided that "Stool Shed" was the winner. Well, I digress.... Jerry decided that his mission was to make this out-house into something sturdy, useful, and nice to look at. As you can see from the picture he succeeded. We still want to paint the inside and add some small improvements such as a cabinet for the toilet supplies and a table for people to set things on. A cement entry step is also planned since the floor is pretty high off the ground.

Breaking News! We don't have to make cave burritos at the preserve any more. For the NCRC class Jerry donated a brand new large size RV-style "porta-potty" which works sort of

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213 Elm Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Telephone (831) 421-0485
Fax (831) 421-0485

Email
mail@westerncaves.org

Web site
www.westerncaves.org

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Editor Heather McDonald

Board of Directors

Dr. Rolf Aalbu
Dr. Jerald Johnson
Bruce Rogers
Don Dunn
Marianne Russo
Eileen Belan
Martin Haye

Staff

Marianne Russo
*President, Steward of the
Weller Natural Preserve*

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*Vice President, Director of
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Peri Frantz
Communications Associate

Dr. Jerald Johnson
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Dale & Sherry Hartwig
Volunteer Coordinators

Bruce Rogers
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Pat Helton
Communications Associate

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Western Cave Conservancy

WCC Stewardship Update

by Martin Haye

As the new stewardship director I'd like to give our members a brief overview of plans and progress managing WCC's caves. We have two main stewardship tasks at present: taking care of the Weller Natural Preserve, and re-opening and managing Windeler Cave.

First the easy part for me: the Weller Preserve is being managed admirably by Marianne Russo. From tracking cave trips to marshaling volunteers, from brush clearing to neighbor relations, from reconstructing the building to making a plant inventory, I couldn't be more pleased. So my job is clear: I'm just going to keep out of the way! The only part I need really be involved with is completing and circulating the formal management plan, a commitment we made and intend to keep.

So on to my more difficult task, that of recharging the Windeler project. This effort has languished for a few years, and I intend to fix that. Many people have asked me about the cave and are impatient to see it reopened, and I very much share

their enthusiasm. I see three main challenges: people, complexity, and time.

In order to get people more involved, I rebuilt the committee to make all its members part of every decision. It's been working well and we've reached consensus on most of the sticky issues. The project's complexity has been evident at every stage. Constructing the gate, for instance, has been a gradual process of discovering problems and then solving them. But time has been the biggest difficulty: it is maddening how slowly things move, and with experience, I can see that it's inevitable in any multi-stage volunteer effort.

To me the Windeler project feels similar to the long journey of acquiring the Weller Preserve, with success always just out of reach, around the next bend. Although each step brought a new twist in the path, we did finally arrive. So I just want to say this: keep the faith! The Windeler project is back on track, and I have absolute confidence that we will succeed.

NEW WCC POLICY

A few months ago we experienced an unfortunate "lack of communication" regarding our Windeler Project. Without going into unnecessary details the upshot of the situation was that several concerned individuals were unaware that an update of information had been recently publicized in the newsletter because they had signed up for electronic versions and had not had a chance to download and read them prior to the email discussion. Part of the problem may have been to a delay in posting the newsletter on the website until a significant time after the paper copies had been mailed out. Due to the many personal commitments of our various volunteers it is very hard to always assure perfect coordination in this respect.

So to make sure all of our members receive the latest information as roughly the same time we have decided to return to sending everyone a paper copy. Since our newsletter is normally fairly small (4-6 pages) and costs us only one first-class stamp, we feel this is an economically and ecologically appropriate decision. The newsletter will also be posted, in full color, on the website as soon as possible and members will be able to view them there anytime they wish.



Letter from the President

Greetings Everyone:

I can't believe summer is almost here again. It just seems like the other day we were getting started on the new field house up at the Weller Natural Preserve and now the bulk of the work is done and we are seeing it used for meetings and classes. Rippled Cave is now seeing an average of one grotto trip per month, which is wonderful. In fact there was even a trip set up by the Southern California Grotto last December and a second on Memorial Day weekend. It's great to have more NSS Western Region cavers get to know this delightful cave.

Fundraising over the last few months has been going well also. Generous attendees at the Western Region's Speleo-Ed event donated \$2,800.00 and around \$5,000.00 has been collected to finish paying off the fieldhouse construction costs. With the Weller Preserve in good shape and the Windeler Project starting to move along it looks like a good time to start planning for our next opportunity. There are two great ways for you to help out:

- 1) Renew your membership or make an extra donation now, giving as generously as you can.
- 2) Get involved by helping us find and manage a new worthwhile project or getting more involved in the running of the WCC (see "Join the Advisory Board").

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize some very important volunteers. At our January meeting this year two of our Directors, Joel Despain and Mike White, stepped down from their positions. Joel's strong support for the conservancy from the very beginning and his willingness to give us a great start on our Stewardship mission has been invaluable. Joel promises to help out whenever he can in the future from a position on the Advisory Board. We will hold you to that promise Joel! Mike's support, especially with his personal contacts in a cave-rich area, was greatly appreciated. We wish him well in his future endeavors. Speaking on behalf of the entire Board of Directors, I want to express our sincere thanks and appreciation for their service.

At this time I also want to welcome Eileen Belan to the Board of Directors. Eileen has filled the open position of Secretary and is doing a great job since she started in January. Director Martin Haye has taken on the additional responsibility of being the Chair of Stewardship, the position left open by the retirement of Joel Despain. Martin is eager to see us finish the gating and reopening of Windeler Cave and has jumped into his new job with great enthusiasm.

I'm looking forward now to the International Congress of Speleology in Kerrville, Texas. There should be some great presentations and networking opportunities for those of us involved with cave conservancies. I always come back from these types of meetings with a few great ideas that we can put to use here. We have arranged for a place to put up the WCC display and have some volunteers to staff it so we may even come home with some new WCC members!

See you underground!

Marianne Russo

The Great Weller Work Day Experiment

by Marianne Russo, Preserve Manager

We decided to try something different this year, scheduling regular work days well ahead of time. A few folks had mentioned last year that they needed to know these dates early in order to have any hope of attending. Accommodating we try to be! We settled on the last Saturday of every month, January through April. Our principal task this season would be clearing and burning brush along the access road. This was done about 15 years ago but all the brush had grown back and in some places was actually leaning over the road, a very dangerous condition with regard to fire safety. When we first acquired the Preserve we consulted with the local Cal Fire Captain and one of the measures he recommended was to reclear the road corridor so that residents and fire fighters would have some chance of using the road during a wildfire.

January 31

This was our first work day. 10 volunteers showed up and after an orientation and safety discussion began cutting and stacking brush with enthusiasm. The work was started about half of the way down the road to Rippled Cave. Almost the entire length of the road fronts on the Weller Preserve and at the halfway point there is a small drainage and the road changes direction from a southwest orientation to a southerly direction. It is at this point that the heaviest brush occurred on the south-southeasterly facing slopes, west of the road. We began clearing in the direction away from the cave and toward the county road. Since it was not a permissible burn day we stacked up the cut brush for burning later. Lunch was a special treat. Tammy Meredith had donated Togo's sandwiches, with chips and cookies for everyone! By the end of the day, at least



Photo: Matthew Leissring



Photo: Matthew Leissring



Photo: Matthew Leissring



Photo: Matthew Leissring

300 feet of road frontage had been thoroughly cleared of brush, leaving mature trees and well placed young ones.

February 28

This time we had an even better turnout: 14 volunteers! This was a burn day so almost everything we cut was burned. With the extra hands we charged ahead, working our way through a dense manzanita thicket and getting about half way to the upper end of the property. An isolated infestation of Scotch Broom was discovered a short distance uphill from the brush clearing zone and on a couple of subsequent weekends in March work began on the uprooting and burning of these invasive non-native plants.

March 28

Attendance was light, with only 8 volunteers, but we made the most of our crew. Some folks helped with the continuing effort to eliminate the isolated Scotch Broom infestation discovered in February, while others worked on gathering and burning any leftover piles from previous work-days. One of our neighbors, Mr. Carper, whose property is opposite the area where we had been working, gave us permission to remove any Scotch Broom we found along the road on his side. This was tackled with glee and the dozen or so plants were quickly removed and taken to the burn pile.

April 25

Our final date was a combined Weller work day and WCC Board meeting. We put the 9 volunteers who showed up in the morning to work on two tasks. The first was removing brushy vegetation in the immediate area of the road going south from the halfway point (toward the cave). Dale Hartwig

led two volunteers in this direction where they busied themselves with their loppers. The rest of us spent an hour or so moving some previously cut brush down to a burning spot, and then Matt Leissring led two more volunteers up to the head of the road where our biggest infestation of Scotch Broom occurs. Two years ago we had removed virtually all of the large plants, but there has been significant regrowth, it was obvious that this spring many of these rejuvenated plants were planning on blooming (and seeding!). So it was important to uproot or at least cut back as many of these potential seed bearers as possible.



Photo: Matthew Leissring

During our lunch break other folks arrived for the board meeting, and all but four volunteers retreated to the fieldhouse for the rest of the afternoon. Those four spent the rest of the day working to cut or pull and burn as much Scotch Broom as they could.

These four workdays have been very productive, allowing us to make great progress on our goal of reducing the fire risk along the road. We've tackled the densest and most fire prone section and finished a significant portion of that zone. The entire upper half of the road frontage has now has between 50 and 100% of the brush removed. The next rainy season should see this area finished with the exception of continued Scotch Broom seedling removal. With any luck we will also make more progress on thinning out the brush along the lower portion of the road. One unexpected but delightful benefit of all our work this winter was a lovely wildflower display in the newly opened areas. The lovely pale yellow wild iris plants bloomed like crazy, and in fact some are still blooming. Yellow and blue lupine appeared here and there along with Mariposa lilies and numerous other flowers in lovely shades of yellow and pink.



Photo: Matthew Leissring



Photo: Matthew Leissring

Interested in making a difference?

Want to get more involved in the WCC and keep up with what is going on?

We are looking for you! The WCC Advisory Board might be a good fit. Advisory Board members are individuals who are interested in seeing the WCC succeed and interested in learning more about how they can help. They are appointed for two-year terms, renewable indefinitely, and are welcome, but not required, to attend the quarterly board meetings and are included on the board email list where we discuss project, issues, plans and upcoming meetings and events. Members will receive copies of meeting agendas, minutes and reports to keep them up-to-date on WCC decisions, news and needs. What the WCC is looking for from the Advisory Board members can vary widely. It could be the expectation that we will have a local representative who knows what is going on and can "talk us up" with cavers in their local area and bring back questions and ideas from these folks to us. Or perhaps a member might have some special expertise that can be contributed occasionally (legal, real estate, insurance, accounting, procurement, building, etc.). We are also looking for a few people willing and able to take on roles of real responsibility by becoming Directors of the organization.

Joining the Advisory Board is a big statement of your concern and commitment to the WCC but NOT a big commitment of time unless you choose to give it.

Interested? Email or call Marianne Russo: mrusso@westerncaves.org (916) 663-2571 (until 11:30 pm).

Volunteers at the Weller Preserve

by Marianne Russo, Preserve Manager

I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize and give a great big Thank You to all the wonderful volunteers who have made all our accomplishments on the Preserve possible. Some folks were only able to join us once or twice while others have come back time after time. However, each and every contribution has been important and an integral part of our success. I would like to single out a few of these people for special contributions and recognition:

We are truly indebted to Scott Redenbaugh who acted as our contractor on the building project. He contributed many days of his time to helping me plan and prepare for the project as well as putting in several hard days of labor during the foundation, framing, and roof sheathing phases. We couldn't have done this without his guidance and know-how.

Wayne Cedidla also gave us many long days throughout the initial construction and worked hand-in-hand with Scott to build the roof framing. After the framing and sheathing were done he came back several more days to help me finish putting on the roof and installing the skylights. Then he stuck around again to help us clean up all the loose dirt left by the backhoe and spread the gravel we had delivered. We owe you Wayne!

Eileen Belan came up several times to help with the painting. She painted brown coats, trim high and low, primer on the Poop Shed, and then painted some more. She and I spent some really lovely days just painting the hours away. Eileen, you sure made the job go a lot faster.

Another person I don't want to overlook for his generosity is Weller Natural Preserve neighbor, Wes Schultz. Wes saw Wayne, Jerry and me spreading the new gravel with rakes and shovels one afternoon and stopped to offer help with his tractor. He had this neat attachment called a "box spreader" and within 45 minutes or so had 90% of the work done for us.

Dale Hartwig has been a special mainstay of our vegetation management work. He has been there on all the official work days and on many impromptu days as well. With his background as a fire fighter we have learned a lot about conducting safer brush pile burning. Plus he always puts in a hard days work and on official work days makes sure the volunteers all get to the Preserve and fill out the appropriate paperwork.

He also brings his Personal Assistant, Rebel Hartwig (an absolutely precious Golden Retriever) who is the absolute epitome of doggy decorum. We love Rebel (and Dale).

Two other special volunteers are Matt Leissring and Heather McDonald. In addition to their help on the building and at the cave, they rarely miss an opportunity to cut and burn brush or work on boundary survey. Of course their special



Photo: Marianne Russo



Photo: Marianne Russo



Photo: Heather McDonald



Photo: Matthew Leissring



Photo: Marianne Russo

mission is Scotch Broom annihilation and they do this with an unbridled enthusiasm. With an adversary as canny, tenacious and determined as they have, this is absolutely essential. You go!

I would also like to make a special point of thanking Tammy Meredith for helping out on one of our work days in a unique way. Tammy really wanted to be able to get involved this spring but due to her acute sensitivity to poison oak she is unable to help with the brush clearing. So she decided that what she could do was to provide lunch for everyone on our first work day this year, which was Jan. 28th. It was great having everything all made up ahead of time. We even got to order the kind of sandwich we wanted! Thank you Tammy, that was a VERY NICE thing to do for us.

Weller Natural Preserve Volunteers 2008-2009

Fieldhouse Project

Tracy Audisio
Eileen Belan
Wayne Cedidla
Chuck Chavdarian
Don Dunn
Ric Gates
Morley Hardaker
Dale Hartwig
Marc Hasbrouck
Martin Haye
Pat Helton
Jerry Johnson
Matt Leissring
Heather McDonald
Bill Papke
Catherine, Abby &
Caleb Purciel
Scott & Rosalie
Redenbaugh
Bruce Rogers
Marianne Russo
Wes Schultz
Hooshang Shoja
Daniel Snyder
Rich & Melissa
Steffensen
Rich Sundquist
Greg Wilson-Hartwig

Brush Clearing & Boundary Survey

Rolf & Dannique Aalbu
Konrad & Eric Allert
Ron & Chrissy Davis
Deana Del Barba
Don Dunn
Bill & Peri Frantz
Tom Grundy
Morley Hardaker
John Hargreaves
Dale & Rebel Hartwig
Martin Haye
Jerry Johnson
Matt Leissring
Adam Mazzotti
Heather McDonald
Tammy Meredith
Daniel Norris
Dan & Maria Parks
Bill Papke
Ben Robinson
Marianne Russo
Daniel Snyder

Dining in Rainbow Basin Another Successful WCC Fundraiser

On the weekend of March 20–22 the Western Region of the NSS held a Speleo-Ed event at Rainbow Basin campground, just a few miles outside of Barstow, California. Organizer Matt Bowers asked if the WCC would like to put on a fund raising dinner and our new head chef, Marc Hasbrouck was ready to give it a go. It was a well-attended weekend, and in spite of rather windy conditions everyone had a great time visiting, listening to really interesting presentations, and going on a wide variety of field trips. While most folks were out of camp in the afternoon, Marc and the dinner volunteers got started on meal preparation. There were lots of potatoes to peel and meat chunks to cut up. We put three big kettles on the stove, poured in six bottles of red wine and several containers of vegetable stock to start. We really lucked out with a large wine donation from Redwood Creek Winery, which Matt got ready to serve with our dinner. There was a keg



Photo: Marianne Russo
Chef Marc Hasbrouck prepares stew for the masses.

of beer as well, and of course we provided the usual non-alcoholic options, so a lack of beverages was not going to be a problem. By 6:30 folks were lined up and it was “Show Time.” 75 of the attendees bought dinner tickets for \$20 each. We served the dinner inside the very large Regional tent. Folks brought their chairs, and after getting their food, sat with their friends to eat and visit. But wait, there’s more.... Dessert!

Our former WCC Chef (and newly elected WCC Board member and Secretary) Eileen Belan, brought dozens and dozens of her famous cookies in three varieties: snickerdoodles, chocolate chocolate chip and oatmeal chocolate chip. I’m happy to report that not one of these tasty morsels survived the night. The stew was delicious, everyone had plenty to eat and the WCC made lots of money: \$1,500! And last, but not least, all that money went directly to the WCC bank account because Marc very generously donated all the food and Eileen’s cookies were also a total gift.

Finally, the last event of Saturday evening was Marianne Russo’s now famous Schnapps Tasting Party. This event was quite well attended this time, with donations swelling to \$300 in cash. And to top it all off, one very generous person took the opportunity (during the Schnapps Tasting) to slip us a check for \$1,000. Woo hoo!! Thank you everyone.

CAVE CONSERVATION HERO

Dan Snyder

It's hard to say when the seed was planted, but around this time seven years ago, the Western Cave Conservancy was germinating in the minds of Martin Haye and Dan Snyder. Throughout most of 2002 Dan was a major force in acquiring and digesting the information needed to bring this organization to life. There is not a shred of doubt that without his hard work, persistence, and ability to understand and synthesize this mass of information the Western Cave Conservancy would never have been more than an idea.

Once the WCC incorporated and formed our first board of directors, they elected Dan as Secretary. While he refused a board position and thus could not vote, his influence in the organization was equal to that of any of the directors. In his capacity as Secretary, as an active member of several committees and as the "go-to" guy for almost any kind of information we needed, Dan was a huge part of making this organization come as far as it has. As Secretary he went well above and beyond the prescribed duties of that position and helped keep the rest of us on our toes.

Thank you Dan, for six years of outstanding service! We look forward to having you back on board in some other capacity after your well-deserved break.



Photo: Dave Bunnell

Dan in the Bear's Den in Rippled Cave.

WCC Fieldhouse, continued from page 1

like a real toilet. The only down side is that periodically we will have to take it to a dump station or similar setup to dispose of the waste, but that's better than baggies, right?

While the bulk of the painting was finished by the beginning of November, finishing all the little fussy trim details and final coats stretched into December. The last things we did were to do a final cleaning of the fieldhouse floor and apply a two-part coating that included a bonding primer and a final coat of a cream-colored cement paint. This finished off a rather ugly cement slab beautifully and the light color greatly helps lighten the interior.

We also have some additional plans for inside the fieldhouse. We will finish the walls, install some cabinets for our tools and other supplies and hope-

fully do a little wiring and install some outlets so we don't have to run the cord from the generator through an open window and have extension cords running all over the floor. We will also be buying some stackable chairs, maybe a couple of tables and some other supplies that will be useful when people use the building for meetings or other activities.



Photo: Marianne Russo



The Stool Shed, outside and in.

exactly \$9,000—a bargain possible only through the hundreds of hours of labor donated by volunteers.