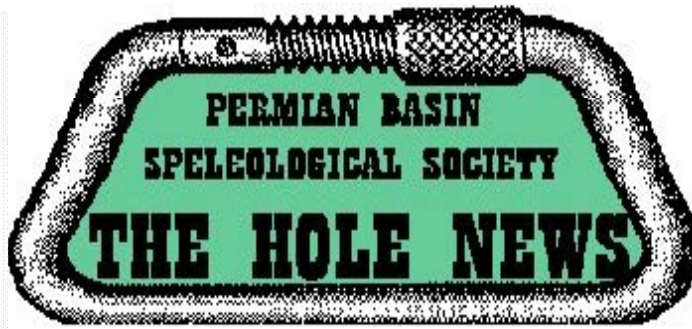


The Hole News

March, 2008

Volume 23 Number 3





March, 2008

Chartered in 1984 as the 300th Grotto of the NSS

Volume 23 Number 3

White Nose Syndrome Affects Bats in Eastern U.S.



Open letter from Virgil Brack of Environmental Solutions & Innovations, Inc.:

To everyone interested in bat conservation:

The White Nose Syndrome (WNS; aka White Death) scares the hell out of us. It has the potential to be the single most devastating impact on bats in North America that we have seen in recorded history, with the possible exception of the settling of this land by Europeans and subsequent habitat destruction. It is possible that this could be to bats what the chestnut blight and Dutch elm disease were to – well chestnut trees and elm trees. Perhaps less than coincidentally, fungal diseases were responsible for the devastation of these species, although we are not sure that the fungus associated with the WNS is the cause or a symptom.

To date, the WNS has been found only in hibernacula of New York and Vermont, affecting hibernating bats (Indiana, little brown, and northern long-eared bats), but we do not know whether it may affect other cavern-dwelling bats at other times of year. Potentially it could affect species like gray, Virginia big-eared (and other subspecies), Brazilian free-tailed, southeaster, and cave bats.

Recently, the death of a “few” bats by vandalism in a single hibernaculum (the same habitat affected by WNS) garnered high visibility and substantial financial support from both public and private entities - for a past event. The action of WNS is on-going, already more deadly than the aforementioned vandalism, and in the future could be devastating, but has elicited little response or support. While we laud the

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Upcoming Events

Mar. 10: PBSS monthly meeting at Murray’s Deli, Midkiff and Wadley in Midland. 7:00 p.m.

Mar. 15-16: Orientation to Cave Rescue at Colorado Bend.

Apr 5-6: SWR Spring Conference and restoration.

McKittrick Hill

Apr. 4-6: TSA Spring Convention, Kerrville.

Apr. 12: Honey Creek tower repair.

The following dates have been approved for CRF trips at CCNP:

May 23 to 26 - Memorial Day

June 15 to 20 - Restoration Field Camp

Aug 29 to Sept 3 - Labor Day

Nov 1 - CRF Annual Meeting - hosted in Carlsbad

Nov 26 to 30 - Thanksgiving

For more information please contact me at BarbeBarker@gmail.com or call 405-293-9033

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White Nose syndrome continues: effort to bring the vandals who killed bats to justice, we feel strongly that the current situation more merits funding and action.

Similarly, we laud the work of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, under auspices of the ESA, to avoid and minimize a take of endangered bats associated with individual developments, but the WNS seems far more likely to cause harm to listed species and unlisted species alike. Thus, we urge the USFWS, the premier organization for wildlife and endangered species in the United States, to allocate funding and resources to address this issue.

To begin to address this issue, we propose the following starting points.

1. Hibernacula Closure: Until this fungus is understood, caves and mines containing large populations of hibernating bats of any species, including but not necessarily limited to the Indiana, gray, Virginian big-eared, and little brown bats, should be closed to human traffic to help prevent the spread of WNS. Al Hicks (<http://forums.caves.org/viewtopic.php?f=31&t=6083>) has proposed measures to help prevent the spread of WNS among caves by individuals entering caves, but additional thoughts on the topic should be of value.

2. Education:

- Cavers need to understand why their rights to access caves have been restricted

- Federal and state agencies need to understand why they should close the caves and why it is so important they fund research in a timely manner to address this issue

- The public needs to understand how important this is to a healthy ecosystem

3. Funding:

- The USFWS is the primary agency responsible for endangered species, such as the Indiana bat, and it seems logical that an initial response to this situation should indeed be lead by them, including costs to initiate re-

search and develop a concerted, comprehensive response strategy

- States should play a similar and supportive role to that of the USFWS

- Private entities, including individuals, conservation organizations, and companies who may contribute to conservation of caves, hibernacula, and endangered bats should add collectively to our understanding and resolution of the problem.

To this end, Environmental Solutions & Innovations, Inc. is willing to contribute matching funds of up to \$10,000 for donations by non-public entities to directly research and understand the cause, effect, and resolution of the WNS. The collection and administration of such funds must be determined, but logically should be through an entity such the Indiana State University, Center for North American Bat Research and Conservation. It is our hope and intent that the funds available for this effort far exceed the \$20,000 potential, and that private and public funds are combined to do the most good.

Finally, on a personal note, we hope that our concern is overblown and that in a short time people are laughing at us for saying "The sky is falling, the sky is falling." But until that proves to be the case, this, as we said, scares the hell out of us.

White Nose Syndrome Decontamination Procedures

The Department of Environmental Conservation is asking that cavers please follow these procedures for decontamination. At this point this is only a request but the caving community can help in the effort to hopefully control this mysterious White Nose Syndrome. We are doing this to prevent what could be a continent wide spread of a previously unidentified pathogen to all caves and mines, and all our cave dwelling bat populations in the east. We do not yet know what is happening, or why, but it could be extremely serious, and we have to assume that it is until we can prove oth-

erwise.

- Remove your caving gear when you get to the vehicle and put it in a closed plastic bag to prevent contamination of the trunk.

- Wash caving clothes using hot water, detergent and a normal bleach cycle.

- Dry the clothes thoroughly and dry them at hot temperatures.

- Scrape the dirt from boots and soak them in a bleach solution -porous boots longer than nonporous boots. (could find no specified periods for soaking).

- Do not forget cave packs or helmets/ (lights)

- Sunlight can also kill many things that live in dark places.

There is the real possibility of some caves being closed. Exit strategy for the cave closures are as follows:

1. We determine that the cause of death is something that people simply could not be spreading.

2. We can determine that decontamination protocols are sufficient to prevent the spread.

In the near future the DEC maybe conducting a survey to gather information for a caver database that will indicate all of your cave visits from the past several years.

If you are in a cave and see a bat (living or dead) with this White Nose Syndrome please contact Al Hicks of the DEC right away. If you find a dead bat outdoors or notice different behavior of bats please contact Al as well.

Alan Hicks

Mammal Specialist

Endangered Species Unit

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

625 Broadway, 5th floor

Albany, NY 12233-4754



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The Hell of a Thousand Breakthroughs

By Jacqui Thomas

Big Manhole Cave is entered through a slot in the desert floor, shielded on the uphill side by a low natural wall. The entrance is surrounded by rock, cactus, and scrubby junipers: We rig to the gate. The slot makes up the first part of a sixty foot drop. The last fifty or so feet is a free rappel ending on a giant chunk of breakdown on the edge of the rubble cone created when the large room of the cave was formed.



The air blowing through breakdown and up from edges is strong enough to have kept diggers going for (I've been told) twenty years. There have been several digs, all following air. The current dig starts in a corner where a dig was abandoned many years ago, after a resistivity study showing a large anomaly (read "void") prompted a re-opening. Although this dig has been going for ten years, power tools (hammer drills) have only been permitted for (if I remember correctly) three years.

The earlier digs all have names. This particular Manhole dig, the one I have

been attending as often as possible for three years, now also has a name: The Hell of A Thousand Breakthroughs. We seem always to end a dig with a void, a change in rock from solid to breakdown, a hole through which we can maybe see something... We even found a room—"Breakthrough!—oops...never mind..." Right before I joined the group, the diggers abandoned a room of unstable breakdown—the "Anxiety Chamber"—and started a tunnel under the bad stuff to get back to the air. We got under, we got back, we changed direction, we became concerned with instability, we dug a 17-foot shaft, we lost the air, we went back, and just before this last dig over President's Day weekend, we dug to a solid wall corner with floor that came up by the handful, exposing tantalising pockets of darkness and moving air. We could hardly wait to return.

Participants this time were fearless leader Steve Peerman, Arizona cavers Rich Bohman, Brett Cook and new digger Ed (Coleman?); John Lyles, Ron Lipinski, Steve Fleming (former dig leader) and Peg Sorensen visiting from Virginia; Paul Dunlap, Mike Bilbo and Michael Queen. People came and went but we always seemed to have eight or nine diggers present. This was barely enough people to get the buckets from the dig to the main room, and often we had to stockpile buckets then change positions, so we were all pretty tired out by the end of the day. The weather was cold—40s and super windy Friday night, cold then colder Saturday and Sunday nights. Saturday night several of us squished into the back of Bilbo's truck to see (and comment upon) pictures and short videos

of previous Manhole digs.



The first thing we did for this dig was clean out a path to the new dig face. Facing the dig, there is solid wall on the left, a space wide enough to crawl (and to hand buckets) through, then on the right a wall of small breakdown, mostly cemented together by a thin layer of orange-colored flowstone. The solid wall on the left joins another wall in an almost perfect right angle, and the dig is confined by this "L" shape.

The solid walls are covered with tiny popcorn and the left-side wall contains a few vertical cracks. I noticed at the end of the last dig that the first of these cracks was blowing air. Of course, the obvious name for this was "Jacqui's crack," and on this latest dig the next few cracks in the same wall, all blowing air, were all "my" cracks. By Sunday, these had evolved into "Jacq-er Cracks" and have become as official as the name "Hell of..."

When we started losing big air we briefly returned to a previously (before my time) back-filled bypass of the Anxiety Chamber, just to see if the air was bigger there than at the dig face, but it only took about ten buckets of backfill to determine that we were best off right where we were.

Continues on page 7 with the report conclusion and more pictures.

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PBSS February 2008 Meeting Minutes

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Vice President Sharon Long. Attendees included Tony Abernathy, Bill Bentley, Kelly Long, Sharon Long, Jacqui Thomas.

Old Business:

December minutes are still not available but we forged ahead by reading and accepting the January meeting minutes.

Kerry couldn't be at the meeting so we didn't have tee shirt quotes. We agreed to discuss that next month.

Jacqui submitted a sealed copy of the book, "50 Years of Texas Caving" to the group. Sharon will prepare an inscription and contact Kerry about presenting it to the Midland County Library.

Discussion continued on PBSS's 25th Anniversary plans. Bill will dig information up on past members. We discussed how to celebrate the anniversary including a canopy with our banner at the October TCA convention and serving refreshments. Kelly agreed to be in charge of beverages (a.k.a., some kegs). We can have drinks, chips and dips and discuss good times. The suggestion was made to perhaps place an ad in the NSS News. We'll discuss this further next month.

Barry hasn't gotten hold of the Abyss guy yet, so we'll wait to hear from him about that one.

New Business:

We discussed the Bexar Grotto challenge and decided that we didn't have enough members present to make a decision. We'll discuss that at the next

meeting.

The site for the March meeting has been changed back to Murray's Deli. As you may know from reading your emails, Kerry contacted Andrews School District only to find out the climbing facility is no longer in existence.

The time has come for all good PBSS members to 're-up.' Just a gentle reminder, all memberships are due in January, so if you haven't paid your dues for 2008, bring your check to next month's meeting or snail mail it to Barry prior to the meeting.

Bill reported that Roger Hostenback is donating photographs to the TSS Archives. His photos include the original discovery pictures of the Caverns of Sonora.

Upcoming trips were discussed:

Bradford Cave on February 23. Contact Jacqui and Kel if you're interested in going.

Lake Cave on March 1. Contact Karen for information

Mirror Lake Restoration in Carlsbad Caverns on March 2. Again, Karen is the trip leader.

Southwest Regional on April 5 will be at McKittrick Hill caves. They will be deciding who does what for the continued restoration project.

TSA is also April 5 weekend. That will be in Kerrville.

Meeting was adjourned a little after 8:00 pm.

*Notes respectfully submitted by
Sharon Long*

PBSS Officers

President

Kerry Lowery

Vice President

Sharon Long

Secretary

Karen Perry

Treasurer

Barry Hayes

Newsletter

Kel Thomas

The burning question of this millenium continues to be:

*What has
happened
to Brad
and Janet?*

Perhaps Brad and Janet have run off to an all inclusive B.U.T.T. cross-dressing seminar and bake sale; wherever they are, the editor has not received an installment of their saga from D. Pohl. So we will have to continue to wait, maybe until the next Hole News, to find out if Janet's Cave does, in fact, "still go."

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Ft. Stanton / Snowy River Update

By John Corcoran

FSC Newsletter #2, 2/14/2008

All,

There have been a number of activities already this year:

The BLM bunkhouse had another plumbing leak due to frozen pipes in the ceiling over the two bathrooms BLM and several volunteers did repairs and added insulation to the existing pipes. Water was drained from the system after checking for additional leaks. Paul Dunlap and Steve Peerman led the repair effort.

It was estimated that 80,000 gallons of water leaked into the building then flowed under the back door forming an ice lake. Despite the large volume of water and multiple leaks, no major damage was seen.

Design work for a Drill Shaft surface bunker and permanent stabilization of the Don Sawyer Memorial Hall (DSMH) to Mud Turtle Dig has begun.

This is being done through a senior design class at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology in Socorro. Dr. Andrew Budek of the Civil and Environmental Engineering Dept. is leading this class of four senior engineering students (Tracy Baker, Jeremy Brown, Michelle Lente, and Scot Youngblood). Additional support is being provided by Dr Penny Boston (regarding impact on Micro-organisms), and Dr. Claudia Wilson (Civil and Environmental Engineering Dept.). A conceptual design and preliminary design have been prepared and are undergoing review.

The Environmental Assessment document for the proposed Drill Shaft was issued by BLM on January 29. Design work on an electronic security system for the Drill Shaft bunker is being done

by a team of FSC volunteers/engineers led by John Lyles and Pete Lindsley and coordinated with NM tech. This is being supported by Steve Peerman, John McLean, Wayne Walker and John Corcoran.

Steve Peerman has designed a Fort Stanton Cave Study Group T-Shirt and would like those persons interested in buying them to send him an estimate of the quantity and size you would like to have by March 31. (gypcaver@comcast.net) This will allow Steve to order appropriate numbers of shirts in the right sizes. Sizes offered will be S, M, L, XL, and XXL. The impressive design is to be unveiled at the April 26 – May 4 trip this year!

There is continued controversy regarding the drilling of deep water wells up-aquifer from the Fort Stanton Cave System. A developer has completed two deep wells (approx. 3,100 feet deep) and plans to pump them to water a new golf course.

There were two “spills” of drilling foam into Bitter Creek than ran down and into the Rio Bonito.

There are several concerns related to the cave system. It is known from dye tracing that the Main Corridor of the cave system captures water from the Rio Bonito. Second, it is now known that at least one of the deep wells was drilled into the San Andreas Formation, which is known to be quite porous, in which the cave is formed. It is suspected that the water that flows through the Snowy River passage has its origin in the same general area where the wells were drilled.

We are concerned that any draw-down of the aquifer by the developer may affect the water in Ft Stanton Cave.

As Donald Davis noted: “If the de-

velopers actually pump 500 acre feet per annum from each of the wells, as applied for, that would withdraw 43,560,000 cubic feet per annum from the aquifer, if they draw competitively from the same source as Snowy River, that would be quite enough to stop Snowy River from flowing after the wells are in use.”

We now have reason to believe that at least one of the wells has struck water in the San Andres formation. We are still in the early planning stages for the first trip (April 26 – May 4) of this year, so most of the details of the planned tasks will be described in the trip announcement (due to be emailed around mid-March). A few comments about the planning so far are given below.

- o Work will continue on enlarging the bottom of the DSMH dig to prepare for the permanent stabilization.

- o Arrangements are being made by Jim Hardy to resume the Precision Theodolite Survey in the cave, possibly during the April 26 – May 4 trip. Gralin Coffin and Walter Feaster will be leading this effort, but additional volunteers will be needed. More details later.

- o We do not know the current status of water in the Snowy River complex. The cave has been closed since early November and is not scheduled to re-open until April 15th or thereabouts. If there is no water in the Snowy River then we plan to begin the tasks that have been approved by BLM for the Snowy River complex. This would include science and exploration activities. More details will be provided in the April/May trip announcement.

- o Science inventory of various areas within the “old” part of the cave system are planned to continue. Science

Continued on next page

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Ft. Stanton continues

inventory is also needed in the Mud Turtle Passage.

o The Helictite Hall and Hell Hole #2 digs may be continued depending on volunteer turnout.

o Survey of Promise Passage is planned. Wayne Walker says John Lyles and Kathy Walker need to be on this team (hint: small caver modulus...).

o Surface reconnaissance and resistivity surveys are planned.

Fort Stanton Cave Study Project trip schedule for 2008.

April 26 – May 4

June 28 – July 6

October 11-19

There will be an announcement and call for volunteers about 4 weeks before each major trip. The announcements will contain details regarding specific tasks and activities for the individual trips. There may be additional short trips scheduled during the year as needs arise.

Hell of a Thousand Breakthroughs continues...

Part of the decision to back track was because of concerns about the stability of the area around the current dig, but bringing down a nearly 400-pound boulder and breaking it up into bucket-able bits cleared a safe dig space.

Mostly we followed the air into the floor, which is over three feet lower than when we started.

Most everyone left Sunday night or Monday morning: Those of us who stayed measured air at the constriction



Things can get pretty tight during shift change.

before the room with the dig face, which had gone from blowing enormously to sucking at just a tick over one mile per hour. We pushed a few rocks around, determined that the next dig—the second weekend in April—would pick up

in the same place, and all headed out, hoping that next time would be the beginning of the final breakthrough, and that “One Thousand” is truly an exaggeration.

Photo Credits

COVER PHOTO:

Dripping formation in Bradford Cave by Kel Thomas

PAGES 4 and 7 PHOTOS:

Big Manhole by Mike Bilbo

If you have pictures to share and would like to see them in “The Hole News”, please email them to me at: kthomas@sonoratx.net.



All we need is...More Power!

The Hole News

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Leave No Trace

The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics is a national non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and inspiring responsible outdoor recreation through education, research and partnerships.

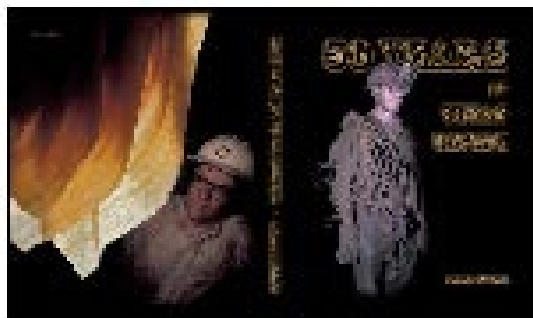
Leave No Trace builds awareness, appreciation and respect for our wildlands.

The Leave No Trace Principles of outdoor ethics form the framework of Leave No Trace's message:

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

For more information contact Leave No Trace at 800.332.4100 or on the web at www.lnt.org.

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Visit this URL for further information:

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