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President's Column

By: Kayla Sapkota

Happy New Year, Friends!

With about one month into the new year, I hope you've made some great memories already. I always appreciate the "fresh start" feeling of a new year. I hope you have some exciting goals for this year and that they involve things that you love. I read a quote recently by A.D. Aliwat that said, "New year, old you." It made me laugh with its tongue-in-cheek nature, but then I started thinking how true it is. You're the same "you" as you were in 2025, and that's why we like you. Now, let's go visit some caves.

Onward,
Kayla Sapkota, President

Compliance Officer Updates

Candace Kovacs will continue to serve as CRF's Compliance Officer (CO). Candace lives in Missouri, where she works as a General Manager and spends her free time mapping and monitoring caves. She is passionate about cave research and protecting karst ecosystems.

The CO's primary responsibility is receiving and reviewing complaints of ethical or conduct violations that are unable to be resolved by the appropriate Operations Manager. The term will be one year and will be renewed or succeeded annually at the fall CRF Board meeting. Candace is serving a slightly longer term to get us on schedule, having started her CO tenure in April 2025. This is a volunteer position, as are all officers of CRF.

Basic Procedures: Joint Venturers (JVs) should first bring complaints of ethical or conduct violations directly to the Operations Manager involved. Operations Managers should be able to resolve the issue to the JV's satisfaction. If that fails, then the JV can bring the complaint to the Compliance Officer (CO). If the JV has a complaint against the Operations Manager and feels that they can't speak directly to the Operations Manager, then the JV can bring the complaint directly to the CO, who will gather information about the complaint. See CO position description here: <https://www.cave-research.org/business/index.html>. The CO may be reached at co@cave-research.org.

On the Cover

Salamanders in their egg sacs, from an Ozark cave. Photo by Kirsten Alvey.

REGIONAL EXPEDITION REPORTS

Ozark Operations Activities, September-December 2025

By: Scott House, with Kayla Sapkota and others

New agreements with the National Park Service (Ozark National Scenic Riverways & Buffalo National River) plus a new agreement with the U.S. Forest Service (Mark Twain National Forest) spurred work except that the federal government shutdown immediately slowed field activities. However, a great deal has been done in a series of day trips, weekend trips, and lengthy "expeditions." Some of the folks we work with include:

Ozark National Scenic Riverways
(ONSR or more properly OZAR): CRF Ozarks works with the Ozark National Scenic Riverways (NPS) under a cooperative cave management agreement. Trips usually originate from the NPS/USFS shared field office at Winona.

Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF):
CRF work on Mark Twain National Forest (U.S. Forest Service) is performed through a cooperative agreement covering inventory, survey, monitoring, and gating.

Missouri Dept. of Transportation (MODOT):
CRF and MSS work under a permit to collect survey data on MODOT rights-of-way.

L-A-D FOUNDATION:
CRF works with L-A-D Foundation and their wholly-owned arm, Pioneer Forest, to help manage caves on their lands.

Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC):
CRF and MSS work under unfunded permits to collect survey data on MDC lands. Ancillary support comes from CRF and cooperating federal agencies.

Missouri Department of Natural Resources – State Parks (DSP):
CRF works under individual research permits.

Perry County Cooperative Work:

On September 29, 2025, Scott House and Josh Cooper attended the quarterly Perry County Water Quality Committee meeting in Perryville, a useful, grass-roots, consortium of agencies and organizations. A week later (October 7) Scott helped lead a Missouri Natural Areas Committee field trip to examine an expansion of the Ball Mill Natural Area in Perry County. The expansion will now include the resurgences for the Moore Cave System.

MSS/MCKC/CRF Missouri River Expedition:

On October 10 & 11, CRF helped sponsor meetings of the Missouri Speleological Survey and Missouri Caves and Karst Conservancy in Boone County, Missouri. The cave highlights

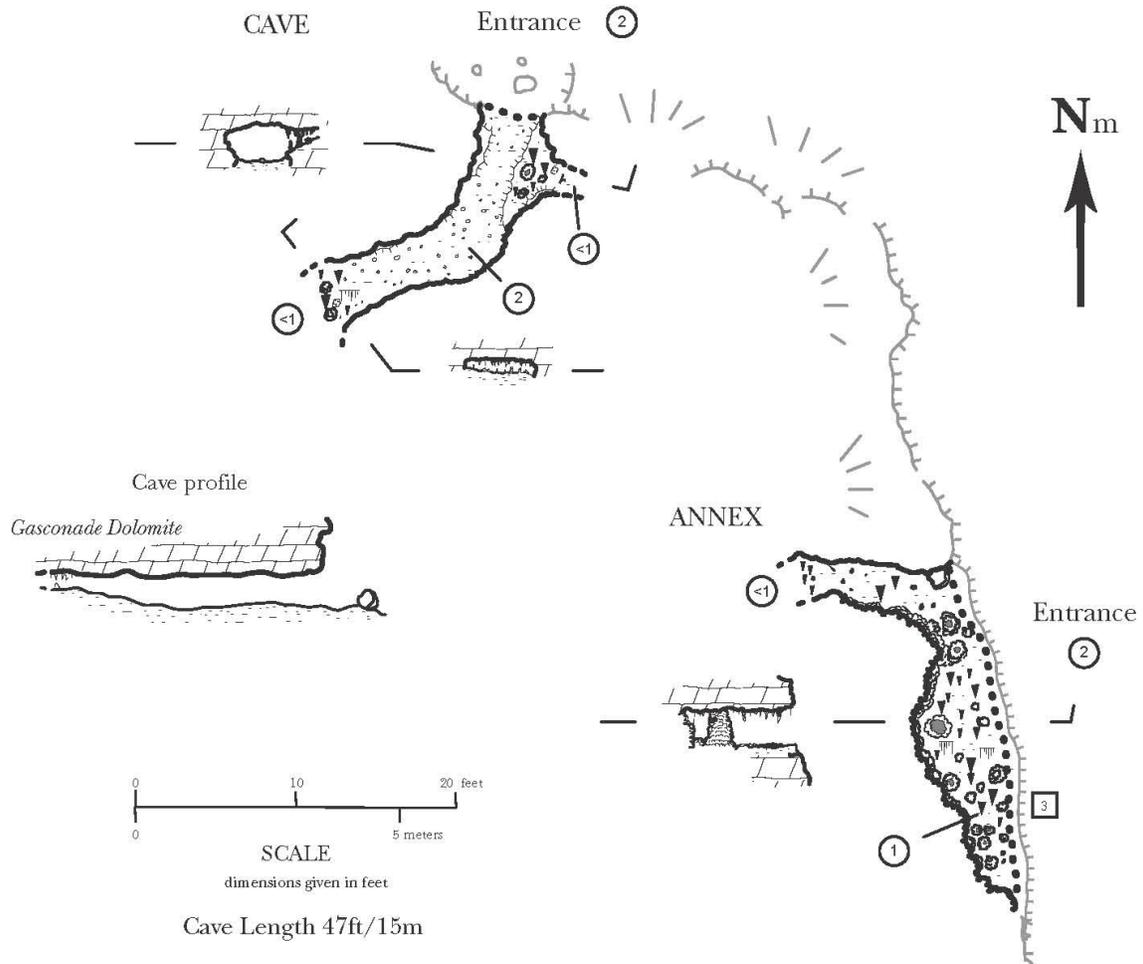
were specific goals related to restoring bat habitat and doing bat censuses where they had not been done before. Caves that had not been mapped were mapped while inventories were done. In Rocheport Cave, Mick Sutton, Sue Hagan, Nathan Curran, and Dani Lotz did biological survey focusing on invertebrate life while also attempting to get numbers on the vast number of gray bats still hanging about from their summer roost. The restoration crew (including Dan Lamping, Bob Lerch, Martin Carmichael, Shawn Williams, Kyle Mann, Rita Worden, Anthony Orazio, Ben Wolf, Josh White, Spike Crews, Matthew Chasen, Lorin O’Daniell, Mike Slay, Emily Rounds, Phil Heavrin, Preston Hunter, and more) worked for hours removing physical remnants of the cave’s brief commercial history. Out went a mountain of wiring, rotten walkways, timbers, etc. which were ingloriously piled up for the Missouri Department of Conservation to remove at their leisure. Along the nearby Katy Trail State Park, Kohl Mitchell, Corey Hart, Sylvia Hart and Hank Fosdick monitored 11 caves, six of which were mapped. Other folks helped in camp with arrangements and food preparation.

The rest of October into November:

Nathan Curran and Dani Lotz did some work and faunal monitoring in St. Louis County’s Heinecke Cave on October 24. The next day and some considerable distance away, Marissa Schorr, Alex Gilsbach, and Joseph Kemp surveyed Crossing Hollow Cave on MTNF land in Phelps County. Although shown on the topo map for decades, it had never been mapped. Within the boundaries of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways on October 30th, Mark Jones and Paul McMullen monitored several caves, mostly on L-A-D Foundation land within the park. On Halloween, Mick Sutton, Sue Hagan, Marissa Schorr, and Megan Harder monitored Rogers Cave, MTNF in Phelps County. On November 3, Mark plus several cave “gaters” floated the Current River and briefly monitored one important cave. The next day, the same crew did the same on several caves along the upper Jacks Fork. Marissa Schorr and Ben Wolf surveyed Blooming Rose Cave on MTNF land in Phelps County on November 8th. On the same day, miles south, Chad McCain, Garrett Bell, Gunnar Wurst, and Logan Dowd mapped vertiginous Shannon County’s Pendulum Cave in the Ozark Riverways. This cave is only accessible by rappelling down a bluff (cliff to you non-Ozarkers) and swinging into the cave. On November 14, Mike Kovacs, Jessica Wilson, and Peter Schnegelberger

ROADSIDE CAVE & ANNEX
MARK TWAIN NATIONAL FOREST
Oregon County, Missouri
ORE-122

Surveyed 19 December 2025 by
S. House, C. Spencer, K. Alvey
of
CAVE RESEARCH FOUNDATION
Cartography by Scott House



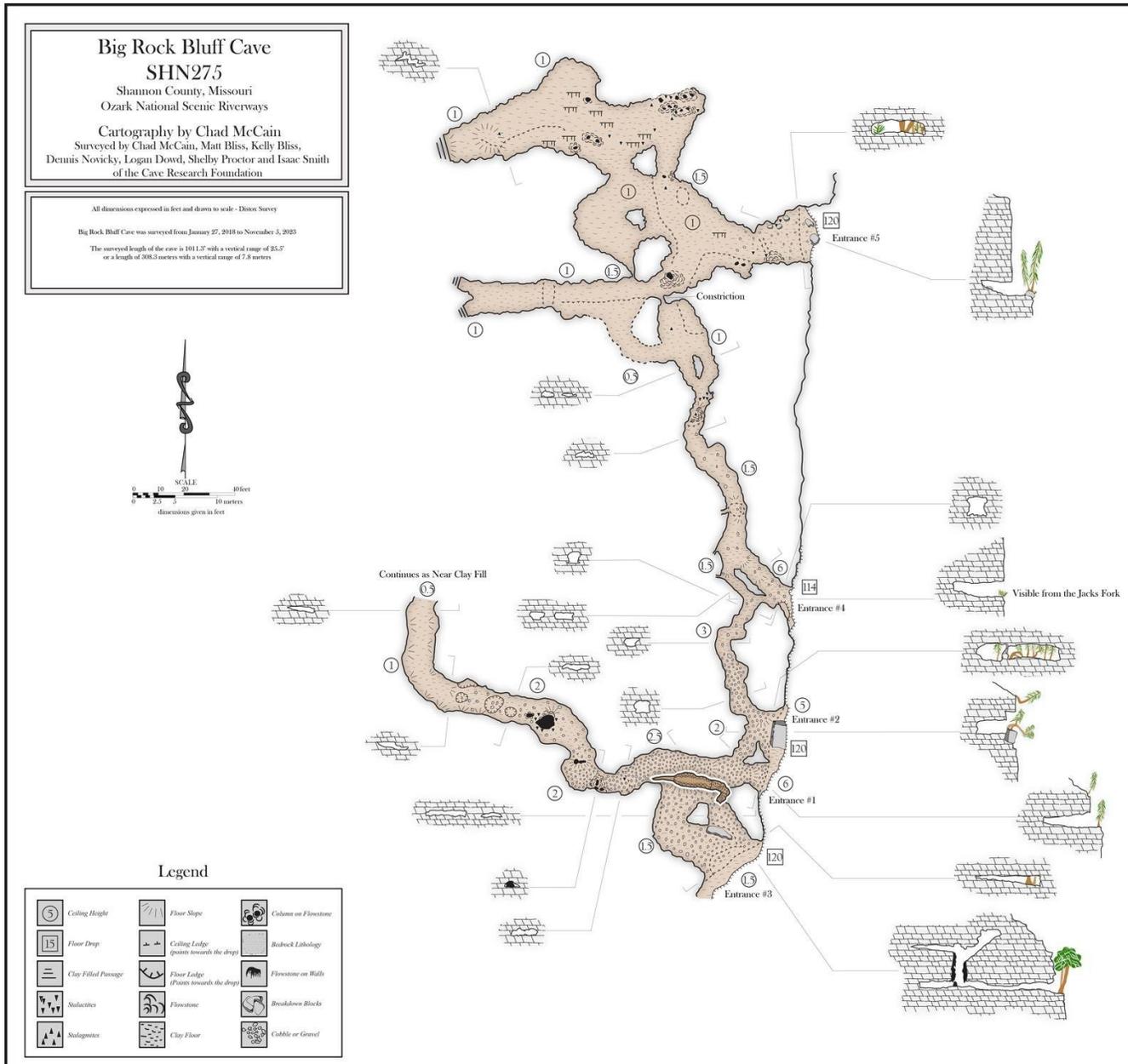
mapped 150 feet in Shannon County's Chrisco Bank Cave, finishing that project on MDC land. And on November 22, Kohl Mitchell, Maria Rodriguez, Diane Dawson, and Kyle Moore effectively ended the mapping project at Lost Boys Cave in Hannibal MO by finishing miserable, tight leads (disclaimer: the entire cave is tight). The survey length of the cave ended up as a bit over 6,000 feet.

CRF Annual Meeting, Springfield MO:

Hosted by Ozarks Operation, the meeting was a big success with the CRF board meeting on Halloween. This was followed by a gathering of cavers in a public show-and-tell session on November 1, with a series of presentations in the afternoon and banquet that evening. The next day saw one cave survey trip and a field trip to nearby Wilsons Creek National Battlefield.

Martin Cave Gating:

Martin Cave in Shannon County is a major gray bat hibernaculum with two entrances. Only one entrance had been gated (20 some years ago) because that's where the bats were. Over the years, additional bats began using the rear entrance and the cave became a priority one gray bat cave. Working with the owners (L-A-D Foundation) Mark Jones led an effort to build an upright bar fence-gate around the sinkhole entrance. Other participants in the effort (November 4-9) included Kirsten Alvey, Emma Kate Lowe, Shane McCurdey, Rishab Syed, Joe Williams, and Bradley Williams. The gating crew was greatly bolstered by four people from Missouri Department of Conservation and ten (10!) from the L-A-D Foundation. This enabled the project to get done quickly (only three days of on-site work) despite the extremely remote location with its inherent difficulty of access.



The rest of the days were involved in prepping for the effort, loading equipment, moving equipment, setting up camp, then reversing the process, ending up with equipment maintenance and cleaning.

The December Expedition:

Okay, this is a misnomer. While there was one scheduled expedition to Winona, the rest of the month was so busy that it all agglomerated into one continuous operation, spanning the entire month. This is how things happen in the Ozarks – making the most of the availability of people and nearly-decent weather to get a lot done with the cooperation of our partners, the state and federal agencies.

So, first up was the annual trip to Mary Lawson Cave, on MDC land in Laclede County, organized by project leader Matt Beeson. Here is the narrative from Matt:

Everyone met in the parking lot at 8 am. When everyone was ready we headed down to the cave. We did not have any problems unlocking the cave gate. I had brought some WD40 and oiled the lock. The three members from MDC were going to start their bio-survey from the entry, but I did take Kyle with me and showed him where the Indiana's are usually found under the ledge over the stream. It looked like several were present.

Kyle returned back to the entrance and the rest of us headed for Heartbeat Hole. After some effort to get all the packs and covers through Heartbeat Hole we continued on into the cave down Bear Passage. At station C19 the teams split up with Mike Kovacs team continuing on down Bear Passage and down into the lower levels to station G1. The hope for the day was that we would end up connecting in Surprise passage. Back at station C19 the two other teams turned right into Surprise passage and began the slow trip to the end at station C72.

After more than an hour we arrived at station C72. The plan was for Kohl's team to begin mapping at C72 and Matt's team to go up ahead a little ways and begin mapping there. Right around the corner was a tight squeeze up an incline with sticky clay. I made it through and Nathan began working on getting through. He was having some difficulty so while him and Zach worked on getting through I decided to look ahead to see what we had. After continuing for another 100 feet and going through another low squeeze I came to a small room and thought I saw a survey station across the room. I made my way over there and sure enough it was station G1. The passages did connect!! Not seeing the other team I decided to continue on to make sure they hadn't gotten lost and eventually ran into Candace. They had made a wrong turn, but eventually figured out the right direction.

Their team began surveying at G1 and I returned to check on the progress of Zach and Nathan. Zach had made it through, but Nathan had not. We tried one more time with me helping but the clay was too tacky for him to slide and it was a little tight. So he stayed where he was and Zach and I went ahead and did some mapping and made the tie to the Kovacs team at station G8. Kohl's team was able to get through the tight squeeze and they surveyed toward us and we tied in at station Q5. We then made the plan for all the teams to head out together in Surprise passage but Mike Kovacs was not able to get through the squeeze at station Q1. So their team headed back the way they came and the two other teams headed back the way they came. We met back up at station C19 where we had parted ways that morning. We slowly made our way through Heartbeat Hole and exited the cave. Everyone was covered head to foot with the sticky red clay and pictures were taken at the entrance and back up at the parking lot to remember this very tiring



Left: CRF public event at Springfield Conservation Nature Center. **Right:** CRF awardees at the annual meeting. Left to right: Andrew Mayer, Derek Thompson, Treavor Bussard, Marissa Schorr, Jenn Ellis, Cheryl Johnson, Eliezer Ugarte, and Riannon Colton. Photos by Scott House.

trip. The lower levels of Bear passage and Surprise passage are miserable: lots of low crawling over sticky red clay. Technically we still had time to finish those two small leads in Bat passage, but we were exhausted. All we wanted to do was get out of the cave. Mapping teams were: Matt Beeson, Nathan Burton, and Zachary Burton; Kohl Mitchell, Maria Rodriguez, and Jack Rufener; Mike Kovacs, Candace Kovacs, and Jessica Wilson.

Next up was a trip (December 9) to Lake of the Ozarks State Park, led by Jim Cooley assisted by Peter Schnegelberger and Dillon Bond. Using a boat (too small of a vessel complete with a reluctant engine) they managed to finish three cave maps. All of these are on drowned bluffs and a boat is a necessity. Two more planned days were cancelled owing to dropping temps and higher winds. Brrrr.

On December 12 began the regularly scheduled Lower Ozarks (ONSR and MTNF) expedition. Mark Jones and Kirsten Alvey finished one cave map in the Paddy Creek Wilderness (MTNF Texas County) while monitoring two others nearby. They then hiked out and drove to another MTNF cave which they also monitored. The next day Mark and Kirsten monitored six caves on the upper Jacks Fork River of the Ozark Riverways; sadly, bats were no-shows but one short cave had six cave salamanders. Meanwhile, some distance away, Kohl Mitchell, Jack Rugener, and Jerel Waters backpacked into the wilds and continued mapping the Marvel – Blair Creek System. Kohl tells the story of their two-day effort:

Jack, Jerel, and I arrived at the Little Blair Creek Ozark Trail parking lot at around 8:30 and started hiking along first the OT, then unmarked forest roads, and then a bushwhack down into Marvel Cave Hollow, finally arriving at the cave at about 10:30. We spent about an hour setting up camp before making our way down into the Marvel Room. On this trip, we rigged a hand line to navigate the sketchy climb between the first and second levels of the room, making this maneuver much safer. We then climbed down the chimney to the bottom level of the Marvel Room, where on top of a large, heavily eroded flowstone mound just to the right of the chimney is the entrance to the Connection Passage, which leads to the Blair Creek Cave entrance.

Our goal on this trip was to survey the entire passage, connecting to the survey Maria, Caleb, and I had done in Blair Creek Cave a year before. Several solitary bats were noted as we navigated the Marvel Room, though no massive clusters like those present in June were seen. The Connection Passage begins with two significant rooms, separated only by a curtain of formations that would be the highlight of most other caves - about 20 feet across, 8 to 10

feet high, and festooned with formations throughout. Several side passages branch off from these rooms, which we noted for the next day's survey. Just past these rooms, however, passage quickly shrinks and reaches a tight (approximately nine inch) squeeze that Jerel was just barely able to bypass. We were amused to see a piece of flagging tape, presumably left by the abortive survey project in this cave in the early 2000s, fluttering madly in the wind (which was present throughout this passage) just outside of this squeeze.

Past this point, the passage maintains at about one foot high and sloping rather steeply downwards for about 30 feet until it opens back up into a complex series of multiple levels of overhanging ledges and canyons, still liberally decorated with formations, that provided some of the most challenging sketching I've ever had to do. Several side meanders from this area will need survey in the future. The route gradually lowers to the base level of these canyons, where we reached the first intersection with the active cave stream at station C22, which crosses the main route perpendicularly, with rather grim but still navigable (therefore needing survey) water passage continuing in both directions.

Past the stream intersection, the route again becomes rather tight and we had to navigate a few squeezes as the passage doubled back and looped over itself in an area that took some careful navigation and study of the 1966 map. Around station C35, where passage again began trending back to the west, the cave again became rather large with some quite impressive formations, particularly in an upper cutaround beginning around station C40, that we left for future survey. Portions of the passage in this area again became quite complex and canyony, though not as difficult to sketch as the mazy meanders in the C20s. By the time we reached an area of tight, sharp turns that we had to navigate in the bottom of the canyon around station C53, team morale was beginning to collapse, as it was nearly 9 PM, and none of us had eaten a proper meal all day. The promised connection was nowhere in sight. However, we finally met up with the stream again at station C58, meaning that we truly were about to reach the 13-foot waterfall that Blair Creek survey terminated at.

Unfortunately, when we reached a one foot high crawlway across a flowstone slope, Jerel reported from the lead that several large clusters of bats were just ahead of us, and continuing through the rather small passage would inevitably disturb them. After scoping it out myself, I determined that we couldn't continue and we had to turn back an estimated 80-100 feet short of the connection. We made it back up to camp at about midnight, where we got a decent night's sleep and returned to survey around 9 in the morning. We worked on side leads in the two rooms at the beginning of Connection Pas-

sage, starting with the B-survey at a pit just past the entrance of the passage. This ended up being a surprisingly complex passage that branched off itself at a couple of points and ultimately circled back into the Marvel Room via a quite nasty formation squeeze, re-entering just above the water crawl. We then investigated a lower crawlway leading off from the B-survey into a maze of low belly crawl meanders, setting a couple of stations to make it easier for future parties to begin in what we called the L-survey. Next, we entered an upper lead from this passage, which turned out to be yet another cutaround leading into the Marvel Room, this time near the entrance to Connection Passage. After this, we climbed down into a nine foot deep pit in the second room in the Connection Passage, from which a meander led in two different directions. We began by setting a couple of stations going to the left as the A-survey, then by setting two more going to the right as the T-survey.

Our final objective in this area was to check out the last lead in the entry rooms, a small pit just below station C3. This ended up dropping into a tight meander that looped back around and ultimately led us right back to the A-survey, which we tied back into and thus finished off these two leads. In this area of the cave, the L-survey and the T-survey are the only leads remaining. With a few minutes left before our designated departure time of 3 PM, I decided to take a couple of shots down the water crawl in the base of the Marvel Room (ignoring the barely concealed groans of my teammates) to make it easier for the next team who would survey in this area to get started. With that, we began climbing back up out of the cave, and since we'd packed up camp in the morning, we were able to make good time on the hike out and ended up back at the vehicles around 4:45 PM.

Also on the 13th was a bio-monitoring trip to two caves on MTNF in Ripley County. Mick Sutton, Sue Hagan, and Chloe Smith (MDC) made this happen, which resulted in finding stygobitic amphipods in a shelter cave, a rarity. And, on the same day somewhat to the north, Marissa Schorr, Alex Gilsbach, Emily Rounds, Ben Wolff, Carmen Fort, Danielle Zieleske, and Patrick Szopinski all mapped three caves while monitoring them and four other caves, all on MTNF land in Pulaski County.

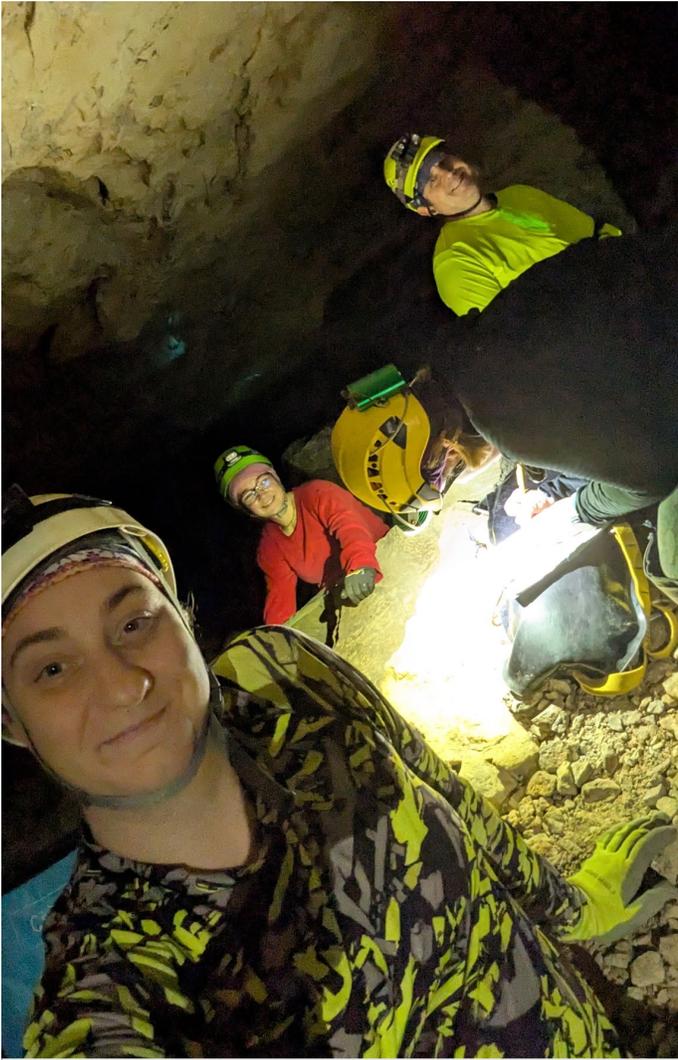
December 14th was a work day at the Winona Work Center, preparing materials for another gating effort, plus general cleaning and files work; all accomplished by Mark Jones, Scott House, Andrew Porter, and Kirsten Alvey. Part of the effort was re-installing a cave interpretive sign at the Powder Mill Campground (the old one was trashed by the great flood of 2017). The next day Mark, Kirsten, and Andrew all worked on fixing a broken cave gate on Ryden Cave, an MDC cave in Phelps County. The

effort was made easier by utilizing CRF's battery-operated welder, which has been of enormous benefit. The day was completed by a MDC-CRF bio-inventory of the cave which netted: nineteen pipistrelles or tri-colored bats (*Perimyotis subflavus*), six big brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*), five dark-sided salamanders (*Eurycea longicauda melanopleura*), a long-tailed salamander (*Eurycea longicauda longicauda*), twenty larval and four hatchling salamanders (*Eurycea sp.*), six pickerel frogs (*Lithobates palustris*), sixty-four cave isopods, an aquatic cave amphipod (*Crangonyx forbesi*), an unidentified snake, and a variety of beetles. The crew got back to Winona for a big supper and cleanup work.

On the next day, the 16th, Scott House, Mick Sutton, Sue Hagan, Mark Jones, and Kirsten Alvey tackled an area of MTNF in southern Shannon County along the aptly-named Hurricane Creek (it only flows when it floods). Nine caves were bio-monitored, including one new cave, and two were mapped by Mark and Kirsten. On the 17th, Mark and Kirsten, aided by the talented Chloe Smith of MDC, began a survey of a privately owned cave several miles "downstream" on the dry Hurricane Creek. Mark describes the trip:

With an unknown water level, we decided to wear wetsuits for this survey. A short hike brought us to Hurricane Creek and soon after to the climb up to the belly-crawl entrance at the base of the bluff. Today Kirsten was on point setting stations and shooting backsights, with Chloe taking foresights and me on book. A dry, leafy twenty-foot crawl gradually transitioned to a cobbly twenty-foot-crawl to a huge flowstone mound. Christened "The Turtle Shell", this formation offered two options, a two-foot-high crawl over the top or a low, cherty belly-crawl underneath. We opted for the first route. A four-foot drop on the other side opened into stoop-walking passage with a wall of collapsed breakdown to the west and a wall of flowstone to the east and soda straws dotting the ceiling in-between. An inaccessible drain along the east wall cut under the main passage to a spring at the base of the bluff to the west. For the remainder of the survey we would be wading

Next page, clockwise from upper left: *Claty Barnett, Monique Dinsmore, Kayla Sapkota, and Aaron Thompon in a mine. Photo by Claty Barnett; The massive entrance of Rocheport Cave. Photo by Dan Lamping; Cavers restore cave habitat in Rocheport Cave, Boone County, MO. Photo by Dan Lamping; Herman the dashboard bat finds a temporary roost. Photo by Kirsten Alvey; Lining up for an ear-wash in an Ozark cave. Photo by Mike Kovacs; Aaron Thompson, Treavor Bussard, Claty Barnett, Kayla Sapkota, and Mike Slay in Slippery Hollow Natural Area. Photo by Claty Barnett.*



in a mixture of shallow water and red unctuous clay. While few formations were found along the west wall, the ceiling and east wall were covered in a variety of speleothems. For the first 150 feet the cave trended southerly but at that point it turned left (east) 180° to the north. 40 feet later it cut 90° east for the next 50 feet to another 90° turn, this time to the south. The passage continued in that direction for 60 feet before once again taking a sharp turn to the east. Covered in sticky mud with a long crawlway ahead we tied off at an easily identifiable stalagmite. During the 365.5 feet of survey, we inventoried a nice selection of formations including stalactites, soda straws, drapery, helictites, stalactiflats, rimstone dams, stalagmites and columns, to name a few. Three well-decorated domerooms were included in the map.

On December 18th, Mark, Kirsten, and Casie Spencer monitored two caves in a heavily visited area of the Ozark Riverways, finding the road and cave gate secure on one; the bat population was low but there were four species of salamanders present. The other cave had noticeable graffiti, but the team lacked the supplies to fix that. Kirsten and Casie returned with Scott House the next day to clean the graffiti, which was done with the aid of a rechargeable drill with brushy, hand brushes, and diluted vinegar. The team then returned to Winona before heading south to a cave in MTNF but along a highway with Missouri Department of Transportation (MODOT) easement. An adjunct section of cave was inadvertently blasted open during a bridge replacement with a display of speleothems diverting drivers' attention. The two segments were mapped and alternatives for preservation were discussed. While all this was going Dani Lotz and Nathan Curran hiked over hill and dale to finish mapping one cave, and along the way, followed up on some old leads and found several more new caves, two of which were surveyed – all with the Ozark Riverways boundaries.

Saturday, December 20th, saw several crews enter a large stream cave in Shannon County, within the boundaries of the park but on MDC-owned land. The purposes of the trip were to do biological survey in the remote nether reaches of the cave while also answering cartographic questions and adding cross-sections. Nathan Curran, Andrew Mayer, Sabrina Morris, and Dani Lotz made up one crew and, as Nathan describes:

Were tasked with doing map quality control and a bio inventory of Flat Canyon and Terabyte Hall in the far reaches of the cave. We traveled with the other team that was heading to the Eastern and Western Borehole passages, led by Spike (Jeff Crews), until we reached Arroyo Wash. During this period of combined travel, Dillion Freiburger went first to inventory biota.

Due to unforeseen circumstances Sabrina and Andrew had to exit the cave upon arrival at Arroyo Wash. Dani and I continued into Flat Canyon to complete the objectives. In Terabyte Hall, we encountered two vertical pitches (a climb followed by a rappel), both with permanently rigged ropes. The first rope was muddy but in good condition and anchored to a column and two stalagmites. An additional piece of webbing was used to prevent the rope from coming up and over the stalagmites unintentionally. The second rope was also in good condition and anchored to a large flowstone column. Both ropes appeared secure and were left in the cave at the conclusion of our visit. Below the drop, we searched an isolated room for biological observations. We then climbed a steep clay slope to the north without rope, followed by a short walking passage with a narrow squeeze around flowstone. The final vertical sequence, split across two ledges, was downclimbed without rope to reach the terminal room. As Dani and I were finishing up our final rappel, Marissa Schorr came to inform us that the team was waiting for us at Arroyo Wash to egress from the cave.

The second crew of Spike Crews, Dillon, Candace Kovacs, Mike Kovacs, Jessica Wilson, and Marissa did the same in other parts of the rear portion of the cave. An MDC crew monitored bats in the outer portion of the cave and a nearby upland cave (lies over the other) which had a healthy population of Indiana and gray bats in it.

Also on the 20th, Stefanie Voss, Chase Barber, Bre Henderson, Casie Spender, Kat Krydynski, Claire Jackson, and Jessi Schoeneweiss monitored two MTNF caves, one in Phelps County, and one in Texas County. The primary purpose was archaeological monitoring, but they also did faunal counts as well. One of the sites has had unfortunate sorts of visitation.

After Christmas break, things started up again. Mike Kovacs, Candace Kovacs, and Jessica Wilson monitored two caves on MTNF in Christian County on the 28th. In Bright Hollow Blowing Cave they found previously unknown passage (drat the luck - my map!) as described:

Next page, clockwise from upper left: *Eradicating graffiti at a public site. Photo by Kirsten Alvey; Ozark version of a morning meeting at Winona. Photo by Scott House; Chloe Smith shooting instruments in an Ozark cave. Photo by Kirsten Alvey. The MSS_CRF_MCKC campsite on the Big Muddy. Photo by Dan Lamping; Helm Cave. Photo by Dan Lamping; Going stream passage in the Lower Annex of Berome Moore Cave. Photo by Dan Lamping; Scott House and Casie Spencer at part of Roadside Cave. Photo by Kirsten Alvey;*



While monitoring, Jessica Wilson traveled through a low side passage for some distance only to pop up into a large walking passage similar to the other common passages (Pierson layer), that continued for some distance. Subsequently, we could not locate this passage on the existing 1981 cave map. We suspect Jessica may have stumbled into a significant unsurveyed passage. We would like to return with a map in-hand to verify that this passage is accurately located and is not in fact on the existing 1981 map. We will then survey the new section we found if that is in fact the case.

The next day, the 29th, on the other side of the state, a joint MDC and CRF effort was underway at Wayne County's Helm Cave. Participants included Shelly Colatskie and Dillon Freiburger from MDC (both also CRF members), Dan Lamping, Nathan Curran, Andrew Mayer, Dennis Novicky, Korey Hart, Rick Ihnat, Derik Holtmann, Bobby Swain, and Rita Worden. Dan tells the story:

The temperature was frigid in the low twenties to upper teens, so we didn't spend too much time before hiking to the entrance and rigging. I rigged the pit with 11 mm static rope; it's every bit of a 20 ft. drop with half of it free hanging. We set an out time of 3:30 at the cave entrance to allow time for everyone to climb out and de-rig. No significant bat populations were found, though three species, Big Brown, Tricolored, and Little Brown were all observed, including various invertebrates. Notably, Dillon and Shelly observed a rather large amphipod in the pool within the main part of the entrance passage, which they were both interested in.

In terms of mapping, Derik, Dillon, and I finished mapping the main room, building off the survey that Tony Schmitt and I began in 2008. Andrew Mayer, Rick Ihnat, and Rita Worden went into the crawl to the end of the survey to continue on. The other four split into two, two-person teams and leapfrogged ahead. Nathan and Korey began mapping back towards Andrew and Dennis and Bobby went ahead. After our team completed mapping the entrance room we went into the crawl and found Andrew's team. Nathan's team was just connecting to their survey. Once that occurred we all went ahead to just past where Bobby and Dennis began. There was a tight constriction which I could not fit through. Rita and Derik made their way out while everyone else went ahead to continue mapping. I waited at the constriction for a while before deciding to also head out and begin ascending in order to avoid a bottleneck at the entrance. When I got to the entrance Derik was nearly at the top of the pit. Rita and I climbed out and made our way back to the vehicles. We were all headed off by 4:00. Some evening chili at the House cabin nearby.

Berome Moore Cave Survey:

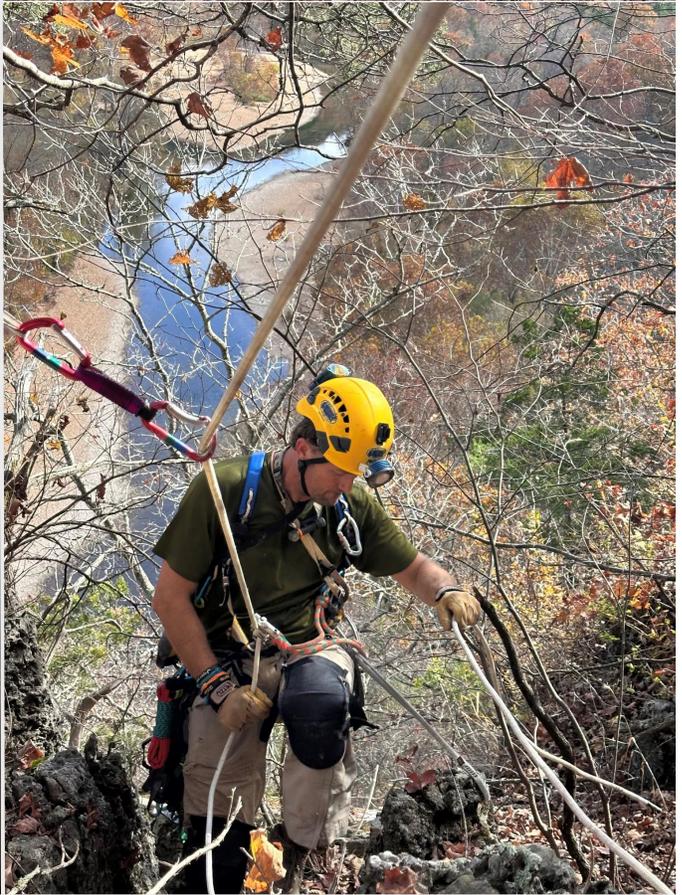
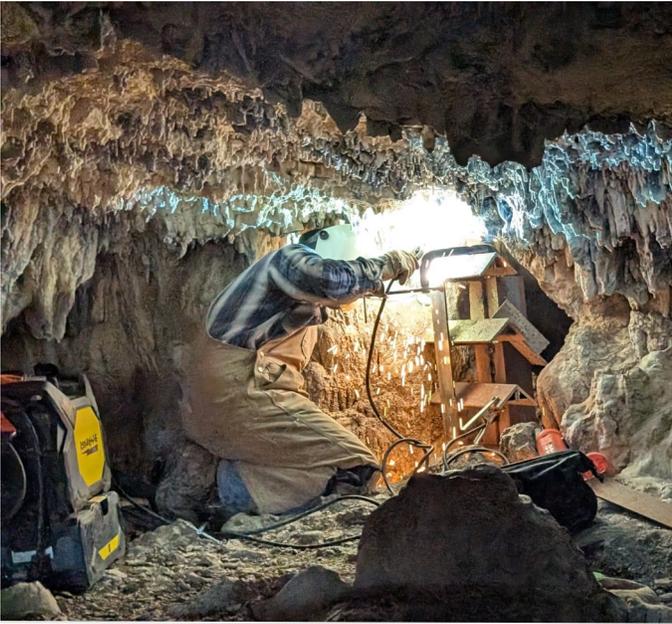
While all this was going on, Chad McCain led a massive effort to continue surveys in the downstream end of the cave. The effort started on the 13th with one large trip. Chad tells the story:

This weekend's annual December survey, aka the final survey of the year, went better than I could have hoped. Due to the handful of folks crashing out last year due to being inexperienced, we went with a different style, a first for me. I invited sketchers first, and based on those replies, I reached out to those with high stamina and drive to deliver results. One thing we have not had a lot of on this project is wasted team trips. Some recruitment was done at the CRF annual meeting in Springfield, MO. As a result, after several weekend issues and last minute drop outs, no offense by the language but it's inevitable to happen, six teams were fielded.

Gary Resch led Mike Kovacs, Candace Kovacs and Jessica Wilson to upper annex to rip off 1518.4 feet of new survey from cut arounds that were bypassed during the initial upstream survey. Joe Sikorski sketched the flooded section of Lower Stream Annex while Dan Lamping and newcomer Bryce Sondag finished the Annex/Main Stream loop. Their 804.4 feet of survey closed a loop that is 1.25 miles long by 0.5 miles wide and over 3.5 miles of total survey in the loop. This has been a long time coming and thanks to Dan's diligence of surveying every year this project has been ongoing, with many trips to Annex, this has finally been completed.

Michael Bradford, Andrew Mayer, and Mark Collins knocked out 819.7 feet of survey in Black Water passage, which is a parallel passage to the main stream. Their efforts are still ongoing as there are a couple leads in what they surveyed but also about 250 feet left until they close another loop. Mark Brooks continued his ongoing efforts at the Cataract (a waterfall that crashes down into a sump pool) with Brian Biggs, and Dylan Dakota Durand shot all the data while Derik Holtmann took some salon quality photos. This was the first sump of the cave, where the trunk hits a joint slot and takes a 90 degree turn to the west and the entire cave changes character. High detail was drawn as they skirted the left (south) wall to try and find

Next page, clockwise from upper left: Andrew Porter welds a gate repair. Photo by Kirsten Alvey; Completed Martin Cave gate. Photo by Mark Jones; Chad McCain at Pendulum Cave. Photo by Chad McCain; The ladies survey team deep in Berome Moore take a lunch break. Photo by Derek Holtmann; A flood-washed passage deep in the Moore system. Photo by Derek Holtmann; Main stream of Berome Moore. Photo by Gretchen Asselmeier.



any passage going north towards Pink Planaria passage. Why was he hugging the south wall? Because the current end of survey in Pink Planaria was 250 feet south of the area he was working in. As it was, Isaac Smith, Gunnar Wurst, and I hit the end of Pink Planaria with hopes the passage would loop in with the sump like last year's discovery. Unfortunately, after about 281.9 feet the cave turned abruptly west (just like the main stream) and shut down to a belly crawl that was 5 feet wide, less than a foot tall and very wet with a calcite floor. Spot lighting ahead after I couldn't fit any further showed the passage continued at least 45 feet, but less than six inches high. Our dreams were defeated. We fell back to the entrance of the Cataract Cutoff, or bypass or whatever you want to call Melissa Meyer's discovery from last year, and started burning the candle from this end.

What candle? Gretchen Asselmeier sketched some terrible passage, while Melissa Meyer led the way through her push trip discovery from last year. Cathleen Yung was on point, and they surveyed 289.1 feet before we "met in the middle" of some of the worst survey possible. This was a herculean effort by three young women with incredible drive, determination, and discipline to produce good data in the worst conditions. I can't tell you how proud I am of these young ladies of CRF. No one else could have mapped what they did and I could not have been prouder to have been their mentor. I gave them an objection that was grim, and with 0% doubt that they would deliver good data. Any lesser team would have given up and not produced any data at all. I was given sheets of data coated in mud, soaking wet, and illegible. But as the mud wiped away, glory was found and pride was felt.

As a result, we knocked out 4,241.53 feet over the weekend unexpectedly and pushed the cave to 26.89 miles. Who wants more? There is plenty. Only the determination and pride of being part of something bigger than oneself keeps this going. The brotherhood and sisterhood built on these trips will last a lifetime.

The effort continued on the last day of the year as again told by Chad:

An end of year survey trip was thrown together for two objectives. Find the beetle that Mark Brooks found on the last trip, and continue surveying the downstream maze at the Cataract/Sump area. This was my first time actually getting all the way down there as I took on the Pink Planaria passage survey (two passages left in there to map that may go to a trunk line segment).

Anyhow, Mark Brooks, Dylan Dakota Durand, Mark Collins, Gunnar Wurst, Josh Cooper, Isaac Smith, and myself went down there. Some broke off for a bug hunt at the Lower Annex Crossover while the rest of us

continued to the end of survey just past the Cataract waterfall. During this time, I was able to get an alternate route to the sump mapped, which was skipped originally. This route goes below another route, and we ended survey in a wide, low pot hole filled bedding plane maze, that slams into another joint slot before dropping down two levels and taking a nose dive downhill toward the P trap sump, which is apparently the Devils Jump-off sump pool on the blue spring branch on the surface.

We ended survey about 52 feet short of 27 miles.

And that's what's happened in the Missouri Ozarks this fall!

Arkansas, including Buffalo National River and others

By: Kayla Sapkota

Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission

November 8, 2025: Treavor Bussard, Riannon Colton, Charlotte Boehme, and Shane O'Riley mapped 75 feet in two small caves at the Garrett Hollow Natural Area. Kayla Sapkota, Perla Romero, Keeva Sapkota, and Macy Vogt mapped 137 ft in Woodpecker Cave at the same location to complete the survey.

November 14, 2025: Kayla Sapkota, Mike Slay, Claty Barnett, Aaron Thompson, and Treavor Bussard measured the entrance to Marble Falls Cave at the Slippery Hollow Natural Area and took photos for use in designing a future gate or fence. The crew also mapped 136 ft in the upper level before turning away for bat presence.

Arkansas State Parks

December 7, 2025: Claty Barnett, Riannon Colton, Kayla Sapkota, Treavor Bussard, and Aaron Thompson continued mapping in War Eagle Spring Cave at Withrow Spring State Park, netting 493 ft of very muddy survey.

Buffalo National River

September 13, 2025: Kayla Sapkota, Ben Damgaard, and John Davis mapped 140.2 ft in a pit cave in Broadwater Hollow. Max White, Sam Pruitt, Ashley Mitchell, Charlotte Boehme, Perla Romero, Dave Milner, Mollie Ratliff, and Ethan Robbins divided into two groups and mapped Cliff Hollow Shelter Cave and Pillar Shelter, netting 172 ft of survey. Kevin Liow, Christine Saw, Treavor Bussard, and Riannon Colton mapped 521 ft in Devil's Den Pit.

October 18, 2025: James Gould, Joseph Marin-Suarez, Laney Edwards, Joanna Cooke, Malachi Hall, and Jolie Holmes bio-monitored and photo-documented a couple of mines and small caves in the Lower District of the Buffalo National River. John Davis, Katy Baumgardner, and Olivia Clark bio-monitored Yellow Rose Mine, Mined Cave, Buzzard's Egg Cave, Pig Pen Cave, and Cujo Crawl, as well as located another small mine feature. Kayla Sapkota,

Aaron Thompson, and Claty Barnett mapped 1,317 ft in a mine near Rush.

November 15, 2025: Josiah Gordinier, Aubree Sullivan, Jolie Holmes, and Alicia Jameson bio-monitored Saltpeter Cave, Fireplace Cave, Small Cave, and Saltpeter Pit, as well as located another pit (roughly 20 ft deep) and a former commercial mine. Charlotte Boehme, Riannon Colton, and Megan Noble mapped a

few shots in Beaver Slide Cave, finding no beavers but spying a water moccasin. Kayla Sapkota, Claty Barnett, Aaron Thompson, and Monique Dinsmore mapped 865 ft in a mine. Treavor Bussard led a team mapping and bio-monitoring a few mine features. John Davis led a team that bio-monitored Toney Barnes Cave, Tom Barnes Cave, and Jawbone Cave and located a new small feature.

Mammoth Cave: July Expedition, June 26-July 6, 2025

Dave West and Karen Willmes, Expedition Leaders

By: Karen Willmes

For a change, during the weeklong expedition, we didn't have any weather-related issues. Water levels were still somewhat high, but we didn't have flooding rains.

We had 45 participants and fielded 37 parties in Mammoth and other local caves. 32 teams caved inside the park. Of those trips, 27 trips contributed to cartography, one trip supported the small cave inventory, four trips helped with various scientific objectives, and one trip restored access to the Bedquilt entrance of Colossal Cave. Some trips supported multiple projects. This amounted to 993.56 volunteer hours or 124 people days.

Two parties worked in Great Onyx Cave, three trips went to the New Discovery section, 13 parties entered Colossal Cave, three parties used the Elevator, two parties went in the Austin Entrance, eight parties used the Frozen Niagara Entrance, one party went in the New Entrance, and one party went to Salts Cave.

For science support, four parties looked at the geochemistry of minerals in Great Onyx Cave, Frozen Niagara, Snowball Dining Room, and New Discovery. They gathered images using long and shortwave lights and identified a possible new mineral.

Using the elevator, two parties worked on resurvey for the Snowball Dining Room mapsheet. One party resurveyed part of Eleusinian Way. They sorted out a complex junction, made a voice connection through a low spot, and found some new leads. For future teams they found an easier route to the area. Another team finished the unpleasant lower level of Miller Avenue. Total new survey 446.9 feet, total resurvey 916.9 feet.

In New Discovery, two teams worked on the resurvey of Big Avenue and Fossil Avenue. One party checked a shot and surveyed several loops that hadn't been done before. Another party learned the route and resurveyed in the Canyon of Shadows. Total new survey 95.3 feet, total resurvey 446.8 feet.

Seven parties worked on the Frozen Niagara mapsheet using both the Frozen Niagara entrance and the New Entrance. The new cartographer familiarized himself with the area and resketched some areas. The Radio Room was resurveyed. A side chamber off the Corkscrew

was surveyed. Total new survey 53.6 feet, total resurvey 1,124.65.

One party working on the East Cocklebur mapsheet found some nice waterfalls, virgin walking passage, and many leads near OPS Junction. Total new survey 247.87 feet.

A major focus of the expedition was Colossal Cave. Eleven parties went in the Colossal Entrance. Five teams mopped up leads along Grand Avenue and Sandstone Tumbledown. Three teams surveyed in the Sandy Crawl, resurveying the main Sandy Crawl route and also surveying side leads, one of which continues into virgin territory. Two teams worked on resketching Colossal Dome. One party surveyed leads near New Years Junction. Another two parties recovered and used the Bedquilt entrance. They were able to reach the gate from the Bedquilt side for the first time in several years as flooding has been putting obstacles in the entrance. This year's flooding appears to have removed much of the blockage and rearranged the entrance passage. The Omega 13 room was resketched. Total new survey 808.25 feet, resurvey 2,200.715 feet.

Two teams went in the Austin Entrance. One surveyed Woodward Avenue for the Gravel Avenue mapsheet. Down the tight crawl that was new survey, they found what they first thought was station RB 62, then realized that they were looking at Roger Brucker's initials from 1962. Since Roger (now 95 years old) was attending the expedition, they had fun describing their find. The other did the long trek out Northwest Passage. Total new survey 178.7 feet, total resurvey 463.8 feet.

In Salts Cave one party continued the profile of Salts Trunk, focusing especially on the Grand Forks and Dismal Valley Junction areas.

One party went to Great Onyx Cave but found the objective needs a thinner crew.

Total survey footage inside the park was 7,204.535 of which 1,830.62 was new survey and 5,373.915 was resurvey.

Outside the park, three teams went to Roppel Cave and two teams went to Shorts Moonshine Cave. In Roppel Cave, two teams continued the resurvey of the S survey between the Roppel Entrance and Arlie Way. One party did paleohydrology work in Arlie Way. One party identified

and tied in points at the entrance of Shorts Moonshine Cave. A team continued the A survey and mapped a tight side lead.

Chris Groves brought several visiting scientists to breakfast one day to say hi.

On the Fourth of July, Dave West and Spike Crews performed the usual fireworks show.

Thanks to Nathan Brucker, who offered to be camp manager for the second weekend; Pat Kambesis for cooking all day on Friday; Bill

Koerschner for barbecuing the chicken; Ed Klausner and Cheryl Johnson who helped cook breakfasts on many days; Joe Walko who acted as camp manager for one day and cleaned all the time he was in camp; Diana Tomchick for assistance in the kitchen; Megan Harder for cleaning and camp closing help; Tim Green for cleaning at the close of camp; Lynn Brucker for calibrating digital survey instruments.

Mammoth Cave: October Expedition, October 10-13, 2025

By: Mary Schubert, Expedition Leader

This year's October expedition was most unusual. The Government shut down on October 1 and was still shutdown for the duration of the expedition. In previous years during shutdowns, the park allowed us to work on leads in caves within the park. However, this year, the caves in the park were off limits to us. Therefore, I reached out to local landowners, with caves on their property, to have objectives for this expedition. This provided a great opportunity for CRF to improve landowners' perception of cavers, opening the door for future opportunities. As it turned out, we had more caves available to us than we had people to survey. Hopefully, future expeditions will be able to investigate these private caves.

October expeditions are usually small, and this expedition was no exception. Family obligations, health issues and few having the holiday off, prevented some people from participating. Ultimately, 21 people attended. New survey totaled 268.2 feet and resurvey totaled 3404.45 feet.

Friday, October 10

John Feil and Dick Market worked at Hamilton Valley taking care of yard work and various maintenance issues.

Saturday, October 11

Well Cave: Tomislav Gracanin, John Ladd (Temporary JV), and Ashley (Ash) Irons Adkins

traveled to a local landowner's cave: Well Cave. This cave was so named due to a wall of bricks around the opening, looking like a well. The landowner specifically requested that Tomislav and John lead this trip. This cave had been partially surveyed 25 years ago. Fortunately, after much research, an old trip report was located prior to heading to the cave. After rigging and descending 2 different drops down into the cave, the team began new survey starting at what they believe was station A9. The passage started out pleasant; however, by their 3rd station the ceiling lowered, and the passage became nearly blocked with flowstone. John squeezed through and managed to extend the passage by another two stations. A large lead to the left, contained broken formations. John pushed a tight lead below A9 for at least 70 feet, reporting it to be a body size (his body) passage with mud. Due to time constraints, they had to leave the cave early. More work is needed. They completed 77.1 feet of new survey.

Whispering Whistle Cave: Rick Olson (book) led Matthew Shimmel and Nate Vignes to a local cave. The landowner (Landon) was enthusiastic about having his cave surveyed. He and his family came up with a name for their cave: Whispering Whistle Cave, so named because one can hear the train whistle from inside the cave. Landon had already purchased a headlamp and knee pads, and Nate provided a helmet, thus Landon



Left: Tim Green and Eli Winkler mapping. Photo by Mike Conover. **Right:** Mark Wilson and Rick Hoehstetter making the alfredo sauce. Photo by Mary Schubert.

was able to go with the team as they surveyed. Even the family cat joined the survey party. Eventually the passage pinched down to less than a foot high with no air flow. Some fossilized shark teeth are in this cave and evidence that the cave was used by early native people. The landowner and his family (including the cat) were thrilled with the outcome of the survey and pleased with the professionalism of the CRF team. Rick, Matthew, and Nate were great community ambassadors, generating a goodwill relationship between CRF and these local landowners. Well done. They completed a total of 191.1 feet of new survey.

Riders Mill Cave: Tres Seymore and his dad graciously offered CRF the opportunity to survey the family owned cave. There had been a rudimentary survey done in the 1970s. It was time for a more precise representation of their cave. Tres led Rick Toomey, Elizabeth Winkler (book), and Tim Green. This cave is a maternity cave for gray bats, which are known to hibernate in James and Coach caves. It contains fossils, including shark teeth, is rich in terrestrial and aquatic biota, and has some evidence of pre-Columbian human use. The passage was mostly walking with an occasional crawl. Tres's father was quite impressed with the professionalism and courteous manner of the entire team. Well done! Much more work needs to be done here. They completed 742.4 feet of resurvey.

Roppel: Bill Koeschner, Bob Alderson, and Mike Conover ventured over to Roppel Cave and entered via the Weller entrance. Their objective was to resurvey Popcorn Alley. They accomplished their resurvey objective, and upon finishing, they went back and re-measured the distances between the old stations, confirming that they were all about a foot too long. It is a mystery how this might have happened. Much more work needs to be done here. The team completed 274.7 feet of resurvey.

Hidden River Cave: Dave West and Karen Wilmes traveled to Hidden River Cave. After chatting with staff, they went into the cave once the last full tour had departed. Dave sketched

and Karen helped as Dave began turning angles toward the entrance. Time ran out and they planned to return the following evening.

Sunday, October 12

Riders Cave: Today two separate teams went to Riders Cave. Time Green, Elizabeth Winkler, and Mike Conover started where yesterday's team ended, Tres Seymore, Bill Koerschner, Bob Alderson, and Sully Sullivan went deeper into the cave. The teams planned to survey towards each other. Both teams were grateful when they finally met up, as they were all ready to call it a day. Much more work needs to be done here. Again, these teams impressed the landowner with their professionalism and respect. Total resurvey for the day was 1341.2 feet.

Hidden River Cave: Dave West and Karen again planned to turn angles, measure inclinations, and sketch in Hidden River Cave. Rick Toomey acted as surface watch so I could go along to help. Having given ourselves more time this night, we finished the objective and returned to camp. Completed and 303.75 feet of resurvey.

Thanks

Huge thanks to Rick Hoehstetter who served as camp manager and his sous-chef Mark Wilson. We ate delicious food and were all well fed! And when they weren't cooking, they spent hours replacing the screens on the bunk room doors. Bravo. Another huge thanks to John Feil and Dick Market for all the work they did around Hamilton Valley.

In attendance:

Mary Schubert – EL,

Rick Hoehstetter – Camp Manager, Mark Wilson – sous-chef

Ash Adkins, Bob Alderson, Mike Conover, Tomislav Gracanin, Tim Green, Bill Koerschner, John Ladd, Rick Olson, Tres Seymore, Matthew Shimmel, Sully Sullivan, Rick Toomey, Nate Vignes, Dave West, Karen Wilmes, Elizabeth Winkler

John Feil, Dick Market – HV grounds maintenance

The Philip M. Smith Graduate Research Grant for Cave and Karst Research

Deadline: March 1, 2026

Inspired by Phil Smith's lifelong support for science and his early influence on the organization of the Cave Research Foundation (CRF), the graduate research grant program is dedicated in his memory. Each academic year, CRF accepts proposals for graduate student research in cave and karst studies leading to either a master's or doctoral degree. Proposals may be in any field of the earth, natural, or social sciences so long as the research addresses topics related to caves or karst. The award ceiling is determined annually by the CRF Board of Directors; however, typically, four to six grants are awarded annually, ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,000 each. Students must be enrolled in a degree-granting institu-

tion, and preference is given to research directly related to the student's thesis or dissertation project. Competition is open to U.S. and international institutions, but application materials must be in English.

Submission of Application: Application materials should be submitted **electronically**, preferably as a single Adobe Reader-type PDF file to the Grant Committee co-Chairs, Dr. Patricia Kambesis (pat.kambesis@wku.edu) and Dr. Kayla Sapkota (knsapkota@asub.edu), by the deadline. For more information on application requirements, visit <https://cave-research.org/grants/>

New Fellows and Certificates of Merit Awarded at Annual Meeting

Each year at the CRF Annual Meeting, new Fellows and Certificates of Merit are recognized. In November 2025, we recognized the following individuals. Kudos to them for their hard work and dedication.

Fellowships:

Treavor Bussard, Jennifer Ellis, Cheryl Johnson, Andrew Mayer, Marissa Schorr, Derek Thompson, Joe Walko

Certificates of Merit:

Charlotte Boehme, Shelly Colatskie, Riannon Colton, Bill Copeland, Kevin Liow, Christine Saw, Eliezer Ugarte