



# Spring 2024 Brings New Challenges!

By Patrick Gibson, Chair

## Spring, 2024 Newsletter

Mary Gratsch  
RKC Membership  
3739 Quante Ave.  
Cincinnati, OH  
45211-3718

**Rockcastle  
Karst  
Conservancy**  
*Protecting Kentucky's Interior*

**Board of Directors**  
Patrick Gibson, Chair  
Werner Jud, Vice-Chair  
Janice Gott, Treasurer  
Mary Gratsch, Secretary  
Gary O'Dell, Director

Email: [rkcboard@rkci.org](mailto:rkcboard@rkci.org)

Website: [rkci.org](http://rkci.org)

Spring has sprung in Rockcastle County! The earth is re-awakening from her long winter slumber and there is much to do and enjoy outdoors. Mother Nature could use our helpful hand and stewardship to see her flourish into the future. RKC has several opportunities to give back that are highlighted further down. I thank you in advance for your continued support!

With the start of a new year, I think back on the trips taken, memories made, and the people that have passed. Charter and Life Member Bob Dobbs is one person that never knew an enemy and was a friend to all. His legacy lives on through his work at the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve, the flagship property owned by the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy. This paradise is managed by a dedicated team of volunteers led by Debi Pavey who selflessly put their all into maintenance, improvements, and the education of guests. Much like Bob did for countless years. We thank you, Bob, for all that you stood for and how you showed us to care for the Preserve and each other.

I would be remiss if I didn't also extend a Thank You to our other Preserve Managers. Sean Cain and Pete Stow for being co-managers of Misty Cave, Thor Bahrman, Jerry Brandenburg, and Josh Heinbuch for managing the Pine Hill Skylight and Hurricane Entrances, and last but not least, Mike Harrington and Joe Morgan for managing the Sloans Valley Cave Preserve. These Preserve Managers spend a ton of time managing access, maintaining the properties, planning for future improvements, and welcoming new guests to safely explore and learn about these caves we hold so dear. Next time you see them, give them a hearty Thank You and ask how you can help them!

The RKC Board has established two committees that will explore new and exciting opportunities to improve our organization and properties. The Waiver committee will explore the opportunity to move to an electronic waiver system. The goal of this committee is to provide recommendations to the Board for the new system after gathering input from all stakeholders. The Grant committee will take the project lists gathered from each preserve manager and search for grants that would help fund these important projects. The committee will also assist the respective project managers with applying for and managing the grant process to ensure successful completion of the project. Both committees already have a few people on each, but we are looking for a few more of our members to round them out. If you are interested in serving on either of these committees, please let us know. Without your support, the work falls on fewer people who are already stretched thin.

I am so excited to see what 2024 holds for RKC and all our membership. Your continued support allows your elected Board to pursue additional properties to safeguard them for future generations. Your continued support enables our Preserve Managers to effectively manage the properties as needed. Please consider maintaining your membership and encourage others that visit these properties to join the RKC. The Rockcastle Karst Conservancy exists to serve our members; that's you!

Thanks,  
Patrick



Planting of the Memorial Tree For Bob Dobbs in GSP's Back Field.



My earliest clear memory of Bob was probably during Karst-O-Rama in the summer of 1999. I had attempted to lead a small group of people to a nearby cave but missed a critical turn-off. As we came up the trail and saw the main road, Bob was driving by in his van. He stopped and offered us a ride back to the campground. Since that small gesture, I saw Bob Dobbs contributing to the caving community in so many ways.

Bob was the Membership Chair of the Greater Cincinnati Grotto from September 2001- August 2004. During his tenure he developed a new member's manual which he subsequently updated in 2017. He encouraged all grotto members to also join the NSS.

Next he became the Chair of GCG. His term extended from September 2004 to August 2006. From September 2016 through August 2017 he served again in order to support younger members who were stepping into positions of leadership.

He served as Chair of Karst-O-Rama in 2014, mobilizing many members to volunteer their time for this regional caving convention. In later years, he supported and advised others who ran KOR.

Bob served as the Chair of the GSP Committee for two terms from September 2007 - August 2009. At the end of his term, he looked around at the meeting for a volunteer for next year. Although I had not been a member of the Committee, and only attended most of the meetings for about a year, he encouraged me to take the position, which I did.

Bob was the coordinator for School Field trips at Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve since the Spring of 2004 through 2021 when he stepped back to focus more attention on his wife, Cyndi's, medical concerns. GSP has become known throughout the educational community for enjoyable and informative field trips, which we hold primarily in the fall and spring. Students come in buses from local schools and spend the day.



They view an age appropriate video and take a guided tour through the Cave. There has been a group of cavers that volunteer their Thursdays and Fridays to assist with this outreach. Bob also recruited a local member of the community who is not a caver, but is a nature lover, who supports the mission to educate the youth in the region about living on karst.

He organized a booth at the Bittersweet Festival in Mt. Vernon, Kentucky to share information about the Greater Cincinnati Grotto and Rockcastle Karst Conservancy. This was part of his mission to become familiar to the people of

this community where we cave.

Bob was the coordinator of Open house at GSP May 2010 & May 2011. Subsequently he prepared a list of tasks with dates by which they should be completed, for use by others in planning future Open Houses. At Open Houses, he made sure there was information available on how to join the NSS.

Since 2008, an idea floated around within the GSP Management Committee and interested people about a *Friends of GSP* group. Many people have asked at Open House how they can help care for the Preserve and there was no good answer. Bob worked diligently for two years to bring this to fruition, and it launched in 2018. The purpose of the *Friends* is to get people from the community involved along with cavers and to strengthen our relationships.

Bob was a member of Rockcastle Karst Conservancy since its inception. He was instrumental in organizing the *Music in the Mountain* fundraising events for RKC in August 2011 & August 2012 and the subsequent *Dinner in the Mountain* event in September of 2016. These events not only raised money for RKC's Land Acquisition fund, but also provided an opportunity to share our respect for the natural environment and our stewardship of the Great Saltpetre Cave with people in the local region.

Bob was involved in the Land Acquisition Committee for RKC since the first meeting in 2008, and actively searching for new properties to purchase since 2012. He became the team leader in 2013 and facilitated the purchase of the Sky-light Dome and Hurricane pit entrances to Pine Hill Cave. This is now called the Skylight Preserve. Simultaneously, he was tracking the foreclosure status of an entrance to a significant Cave in Pulaski County, Kentucky. Bob communicated frequently with the Bank representatives, the local realtor, and the people living on the property. He managed to broker a deal through which RKC acquired Sloan's Valley Preserve in 2019.

At the heart of it all, Bob just wanted to go caving and wanted to share this with other people. For many years he organized at least one ridge walking trip each winter for all grotto members to search for new caves. Often this drew as many as twenty people, breaking the pattern of always exploring with the same folks. In all that he did, he encouraged others to develop their own skills and to serve the caving community.



## Great Saltpetre Preserve Management Committee — Chaired by Debi Pavey

The property suffered more flood damage this spring, but, with a lot of effort, it's slowly returning to good condition. Mud has been cleaned from the buildings from last year's flood and electrical outlets were replaced, where needed. Gravel was spread on the campground road. The roof on the lower mondo was generously replaced by James Clements. Frozen pipes and the instant water heater in the kitchen were repaired by Werner Jud. Werner also repaired other kitchen items. Renovation of the old Ticket House is proceeding, but slowly, as resources are available.

With the warmer weather, local school outings to GSP have resumed. Bob Dobbs, until his passing last April, had continued to educate and delight the youngsters from Rockcastle and surrounding counties by showing them through the GSP cave and with interesting videos about bats and caves. His leadership for these trips will be sorely missed. Neena Jud has taken up the flag to keep these youngsters engaged.

Scout troop visits are starting to resume for 2024. Darryl Marsh and Josh Heinbuch welcome them from near and far to camp at GSP and they lead them on wild-cave trips to nearby caves. These Youth Group efforts will, hopefully, inspire a new generation of cavers or, at a minimum, encourage the future Kentucky citizens to support the preservation of these important local natural resources.

The accelerated erosion to the creek bank just east of the shelter is continuing. The heavy rains have caused multiple creek flows to overflow the dam. The resulting turbulent water flows continue to cut into the bank below the dam, as is

shown in the photos below. A repair study is still underway.



The GSP Committee is diligently working to draw down the list of other active projects at the Preserve. The major projects on their agenda include:

- Repair of a leak in the water main to the property.
- Conversion of the internet vendor to PRTC fiber optic.
- WiFi set-up and re-installation.
- Ticket house electrical wiring re-installation.
- Ticket house ceiling and wall board replacement.
- Kitchen electrical panel replacement.
- Shower house shingle and roof vents installation.
- Entry driveway repair
- Flood-proof bridge to the Point.
- Hiking trail signage repairs and replacement.
- Permanent hot tub reconstruction.
- Accounting software conversion to cloud-based system.

Both funds and resources will be needed to complete these projects. The Committee is exploring sources for grants to assist with the costs, as expected donations will not suffice.

### GSP Open House to be held May 18 & 19, 2024

Saturday, May 18, 2024 - 10am to 3:30pm (gate entry; last cave tour begins at 4pm)

Sunday, May 19, 2024 - 10am to 3:30pm (gate entry; last cave tour begins at 4pm)

(Note: The Open House is always the weekend after Mother's Day)

Great Saltpetre Cave was a significant source of saltpetre for gunpowder during the War of 1812. The property has been an important part of the Rockcastle County community. Come and enjoy it.

Join us for:

- Guided tours of the Cave. They're free!
- Free soup beans and corn bread.
- BBQ and Food concession stand, operated by the Livingston Fire Department.
- Souvenir concession stand.
- Miles of hiking trails.

The public is welcome and encouraged to attend. Bring the whole family for a great day of interesting fun. The free cave tours last 45 to 60 minutes. The cave has electric lights. The cave floor is generally flat. Dress for the cave environment - comfortable shoes and a sweat shirt. The cave is 57 degrees year-round. Bring a flashlight, if you wish. Bring a picnic lunch or patronize the Livingston Fire Department's BBQ concession stand.

## Field Trips at Great Saltpetre Preserve Provide an Education for Young and Old by Neena Jud

As part of GSP's service to the Community, we offer Field trips to the schools in the surrounding counties. In 2023, we had four schools visit in the spring (late April through early May) and three schools visit in the fall. We also hosted the Richmond Police Department's Youth Camp, which provides activities for young teens during the summer months. Two different groups came for Cave tours.

Our program of offering Scouts and similar youth groups the opportunity to take a wild cave trip, often camping at the Preserve and taking a tour of GSP, continues to grow. In 2023, we had 29 scout and youth groups bringing approximately 435 youth to experience the underground spaces we enjoy. Most of these troops are returning, which gives the older scouts a chance to mentor the younger ones. So, they not only experi-

ence the underground, but they also grow in their leadership skills. This has been mirrored with our volunteers, now that we have a program to train the guides!

In addition to these organized programs, we had a variety of Special Groups visit GSP. They ranged from an extended family group who made a special request after a school field trip to a few hiking groups to a Masonic Lodge who was able to confirm that documentation exists of Masonic activity in our Cave.

All this was made possible by our volunteers who help us care for the Cave and share the principles of "Leave No Trace" with the visitors.

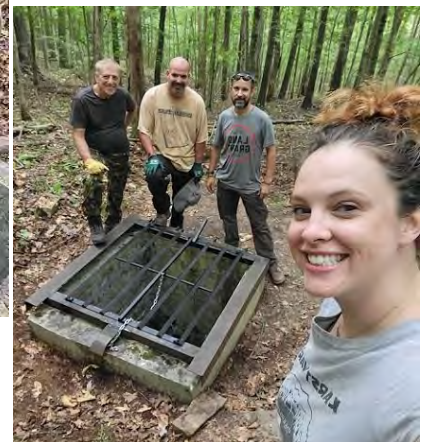
Neena Jud, for the GSP Management Committee  
December 2023

## Skylight Preserve Management Committee

— Chaired by Thor Bahrman III, Jerry Brandenburg, and Josh Heinbuch

[Editor's note: The Committee had previously determined the gate on the Hurricane Pit entrance to Pine Hill Cave had to be replaced to make it easier to open. This article by Nina Soluski details the day that the new gate was installed, accompanied by photos taken at that time.]

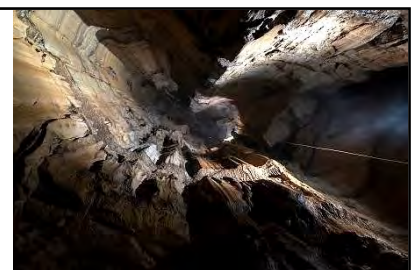
We arrived on site at 8:30 am on September 8, 2023. We chummed it up with the neighbor, Charlie Crabtree, and he was kind enough to lend his 4-wheeler and torch system for the welding.



Dana Sutherland, and Jamie Thompson were quick to start getting the torch set up and we got to cutting. Please refer to the photos of our process. Cutting the cross-bars off, then the kickstand off. We then had to drill holes for the new aluminum cage to sit into the frame. Dana installed a lock and welded the bolts to the screws shut for extra security. It was all a successful, but long, process. It took us about 2.5 hours from start to finish. We left the scrap on site, as it was extremely heavy, and we hoped some scrapper would find it and be happy.

Nina Soluski

**The View up the  
Nearby  
Skylight Dome**



**Sloan's Valley Cave Preserve Committee** — Chaired by Mike Harrington and Joe Morgan

The Sloans' Valley Preserve became the 5th property operated by the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy on May 2nd, 2019. The Preserve contains the Crockett and Scowling Tom's entrances to the Sloan's Valley Cave System, located south of Burnside, in Pulaski County, Kentucky. (Note: The newly renamed Crockett Entrance was previously known as the Garbage Pit Entrance. It's named in honor of Tom and Kathy Crockett, the previous owners of this property.) Sloan's Valley is a 24-mile-long cave system, the fourth-largest

known cave in Kentucky, with many entrances. The Committee held a Thanksgiving get-together and the event was wonderful. They camped on railroad property and caved. The management committee is still planning a kiosk, and they are encouraged to submit a plan to the Board. They want to include a map of the property on the kiosk. As there are always things to be done, they are working on a Preserve project list. Replacing the entrance ladder with a more permanent one is on the list.



A Clean Up at Sloan's Valley Preserve was held on 4-22-23. About 12 volunteers came. We successfully cleared a lot of Greenhouse plastic that's been buried there for decades.



In April, 2023 we had a visit from Hazel Barton and Derek Bristol. They came to take some samples and were assisted by Mike Harrington, Mick Harrington, and Joe Morgan.



A Group from Wittenberg University that visited in early November. Boy Scout Troop 236, Ft Mitchell, KY Leader Dave Martin led 9 scouts. They left a note and a donation. We have really enjoyed seeing the amount of visitors to Sloan's Valley Cave Preserve increase over the last couple of years. To see others enjoy what we have done here is what makes it all worth while.



We went over and did the Christmas decorations. It also lights up, if anyone gets a chance to visit after dark. That's about it for us here.

Mike and Rhonda

***Sloan's Valley System is the 4th longest cave in Kentucky !!!  
 RKC now must repay the Acquisition Fund to buy more Caves !!!  
 Donate to the RKC Cave Acquisition Fund to help !!!***

Peter Stow has joined Sean Cain as Co-chair of the Misty Cave Preserve Committee.

Pete Stow led a trip to Misty, and reported that all there was well. There remains a need for a clean-up trip to Misty Cave, when Sean Cain gets the opportunity to organize it.

Random photos of Misty Cave are shown.



Misty Entrance



Relaxing on a Smooth Rock



From Inside



Yes, we have nice formations



The Main Passage



Enjoying the Cave

## Volunteer Opportunities ... Where You Can Help RKC — by the RKC Board

RKC, like most non-profits, only runs successfully on the volunteer hours of its members and friends. The old saying is that in most similar organizations, “80% of the work is done by 20% of the members”. That sounds trite, but, unfortunately, it’s not far from the truth. The sad part is that it really doesn’t have to be that way. If each of us does a little, the sum of our efforts adds up to a vibrant and dynamic organization ... and a happier membership. No one feels put-upon, all the work gets done faster ,, and probably better ... and we all get the satisfaction of helping our organization thrive. So, each of us should be looking for ways to help RKC get the work done.

Currently, the Board has asked us to provide additional people to help in two specific areas:

1. **Helpers with the Local School Trips at GSP.** This one is a bit tough, because the school outings at GSP happen during school hours ... that means on weekdays. Neena Jud now heads up the scheduling of these trips. If you can help, either with the slide presentations at the shelter or as a guide or tailgunner for the GSP tours, please let Neena know. She usually keeps the trip schedules on the calendar on the GSP website. The password to access the Calendar is “niter1798” (all lowercase letters). I can attest that these outings are fun and fulfilling.
2. **More members for the Grants Committee.** We need volunteers to help research and write applications for grants to obtain funds for the many projects that are not getting done, due to a lack of sufficient money to pay for them. These efforts consist of mostly internet searching, making telephone calls, and writing grant applications. Our Green Latrine at GSP is a prime example of a project that wouldn't have happened without the grant that funded it. The money is out there; we just have to go get it

These jobs might not sound exotic, but they are extremely necessary, if we are to continue to fulfill our mission.

Do you know someone who needs information about RKC? Send them the link to our new brochure at:

[https://www.rkci.org/rkc\\_brochure.pdf](https://www.rkci.org/rkc_brochure.pdf)

### It’s Time to Renew Your RKC Membership

April 1st has come and gone. My! How time flies by. RKC’s membership year runs from April 1st to March 31st. So, to continue making a difference in maintaining open access to Kentucky caves and to preserve the significant cave and karst resources in Kentucky, we need your help.

And now with five Preserves to maintain, we need your support, more than ever. Please use the form on the other side of this page to renew your membership —or— go to <https://rkci.org> and use the button on the page to renew online. It’s too easy to let it slide, so do it now.

Because our needs are so much greater, please consider moving up to a Sustaining Membership. For \$5, \$10, or more per month, you can forget about annual renewals.

I can assure you, that small amount on your credit card won’t be noticed and you’ll know you’re helping RKC move further and faster to becoming the premier conservancy.



Who? Me?

Yes, You!

There are already 17 different Scout Troops signed up for wild caving weekends at GSP. Can you help make their experiences the best that they can be? Please contact Darryl Marsh.



*Donate to the RKC Cave Acquisition Fund !  
Your Dollars Will Last for Years !  
Our Thanks Will, Too !*

**The Cave Preserves of RKC** (Photos by Nathan Williams, Tammy Otten, Mary Gratsch, Maksim Popov, Phil Francis III)



Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve



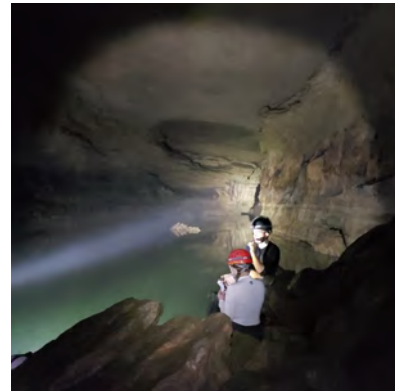
Misty Cave Preserve



Cornhole Cave Preserve



Skylight Preserve



Sloan's Valley Preserve



**Join RKC**

*We can't do it without YOU!!!  
We can't do it without YOU!!!*

**The Rockcastle Karst Conservancy**  
**Membership Application Form**  
 Apply online at: [www.rkci.org](http://www.rkci.org)

**Membership Categories and Dues**  
 (Circle Membership Type)

**Memberships for Individuals – Voting**

Individual Member                      \$15 / year (Apr. 1–Mar. 31)  
 Lifetime Member                         \$300 / one time

— OR —

Sustaining Member \*                    \$5 - \$50 / month\*  
 (Credit Card Charge via PayPal)

\* Sustaining Memberships can only be done online  
 (Go to [www.rkci.org](http://www.rkci.org))

**Institutional Memberships – Non-Voting**

Institutional memberships for groups that would like to support RKC  
 are also available:

**Supporting** - Non-profit, grottos, and youth organizations—\$25/year  
**Supporting** - All other organizations — \$50/year

**Make all checks payable to: Rockcastle Karst Conservancy**

**Mail Completed Form to: Rockcastle Karst Conservancy**  
 c/o Werner Jud  
 1044 Vacationland Dr.  
 Cincinnati, OH 45231-4749

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name - Please print clearly: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State & Zip+4: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

RKC is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt, non-profit organization.

**Please Join or Renew Now !!!**