

# Rockcastle Karst Conservancy



December 2024

## New Year, New Beginnings

The weather is turning colder as the daylight struggles to maintain pace with the busy holiday season before us. Soon the holidays will be but a recent memory, but the cold will remain. On the flip side, the brave daylight will push its way back into our evenings allowing for more time to enjoy its warmth as a new year begins.

The holiday season always provides a pause to think about the year that is coming to a close. I think back on the trips taken, memories made, and the people that have passed. May we hold these memories close and our loved ones closer.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to extend a Thank You to our Preserve Managers. Debi Pavey and the Great Saltpetre Cave Management Committee for managing all aspects of our flagship property the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve, Sean Cain and Pete Stow for being co-managers of Misty Cave, Thor Bahrman and Jerry Brandenburg 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 considerable amount 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!

With this newsletter, we recognize the dedication to editing this periodic newsletter made by Gary Bush. His commitment to compiling and delivering a quality newsletter for years will be a hard act to follow. With that, I welcome our new Newsletter Editor, Leah Schneider. She's a familiar face to many, her writing talents are extensive and I'm excited to have her onboard! If you have anything that you would like to see included in the RKC newsletter, please send it along.

I am so excited to see what 2025 holds for RKC and 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!

Patrick Gibson, Chair

### Board of Directors

Patrick Gibson, Chair

Mary Gratsch, Secretary

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

Werner Jud, Vice-Chair

Gary O'Dell, Director

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

Janice Gott, Treasurer

## Open House 2025 at The Great Saltpetre Preserve is scheduled!

Saturday May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025 –  
10:00am – 3:30pm

Sunday May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025 –  
10:00am – 3:30pm

Scan the QR Code below  
for more information,  
photos and directions.



SCAN ME

Rockcastle

Karst

Conservancy

*Protecting Kentucky's Interior*

# Misty Cave Cleanup

## With Central Ohio Grotto

On August 24th, COG hosted a cleanup at RKC's Misty Cave Preserve in Jackson County, KY. A few of us have been talking about doing this trip for years and I'm extremely happy that we were finally able to do it. We presumed that it would be difficult to get several tires out of the creek and up the ravine, so we brought gear to rig a pulley system.

We had 13 volunteers set out from GSP to the coordinates provided by the RKC on Saturday morning, including a few Scout volunteers whose trip got cancelled. After a few minutes of figuring out exactly where to park, we all started unloading the cars when a few ATVs stopped by. As it turned out, it was the landowner who owns the thousands of acres surrounding the preserve. He was very appreciative of what we were doing for the preserve and helped us out quite a bit by letting us use a trail on his land and bringing all the trash we collected up in his ATVs.

While the majority of the volunteers collected trash around the creek area at the mouth of the cave, Ryan, Andy, and myself went in search of the tires to figure out what rigging would be necessary. Since we had help from the landowner, we only needed to get 1 truck tire uphill

about 50 feet. With all the help we had, we completed the cleanup in around 2 hours.

Since it was about 90 degrees out when we finished up, we were excited to get underground in the cave. With a few maps in tow, we headed in to see which route we would take since we learned there would be a crawl with water. We decided to do the crawl route first and it was relatively dry due to lack of rain. The cave is pretty tricky with lots of unmapped paths which we are itching to go back and check out. There is a corkscrew at the end which (depending on which route you take first) brings you up or down about 5 feet and this tiny little hole, which would be easy to miss, is the only way to complete the route in the cave instead of turning back. Thankfully we found it, and mostly walked the rest of the way out of the cave.

The Misty Cave Preserve is gorgeous (made even more so now that the trash is removed) and the cave was a fun one. I'd love to go back to check out more of it. After the cleanup, many of us headed to Ryan's favorite restaurant, Limestone Grill, and hung out at the shelter afterward where we enjoyed desserts and spirits.

- Jennie Hawkey



Photos by Jennie Hawkey & Justin Michael



# Great Saltpetre Preserve News

## 2024, A Year in Review – by Debi Pavey

### Springing into Action

This Spring marked the beginning of a bustling season at GSP. We faced a challenge when the caretaker left, but our dedicated committee members and a few loyal volunteers stepped up to handle all the general maintenance while we searched for a new caretaker.

### Open House Success

Our Open House on May 18 & 19 was a huge success! We welcomed 3,904 visitors (1,333 cars) and led 113 cave tours for 3,848 people, thanks to the incredible efforts of 70 volunteers.

### Community Engagement

Throughout the year, we hosted around 246 Outreach participants (88 of which were repeats, potential new cavers), welcomed 577 Scout troops (both scouts and adults), facilitated 9 school field trips (providing a program and tours for 675 students), and organized 14 other various events.

### KOR Event

The GCG hosted the KOR event from June 20-23, attracting 371 cavers, the biggest turnout we've had in a few years.

### Caver Appreciation

Our Caver Appreciation event on September 13-15 was a heartwarming occasion. As usual, we saw some committee members depart and welcomed new ones. We were thrilled to introduce Kristen Harper as our new caretaker. Kristen felt an overwhelming sense of love and belonging from the caving community. There were roughly 50 cavers in attendance.

### Halloween Fundraiser

From October 25-27, we hosted a fun-filled Halloween Party, complete with pitch-in dinner, costume contests and the daiquiri wacker even made an appearance. There were about 40 people in attendance.



### Maintenance and Improvements

This year, we had to purchase a new zero-turn mower, as our old one was beyond repair. We're still paying off the loan for this purchase and repaying community members who loaned us money for the caretaker house. We also performed essential maintenance on the caretaker residence to prepare it for Kristen. We also focused on much-needed water line repairs. Although the ticket house project has been delayed, we continue to make lighting updates within the cave. A special thanks to James Clements for donating most of the materials and labor to put a new roof on the shower house. Over the winter, we'll be focusing on much-needed repairs for the tractor, which were delayed due to our mechanic's back surgery.

### Looking Ahead

In January, we'll be updating the front gate lock combination and adding new key lock boxes.

### Save the Dates for 2025

- January 10-11 | GSP Committee Meeting @ GSP
- April 12 | Surveying Class
- May 3-4 | Open House Work Weekend
- May 17-18 | Open House
- June 6-8 | Karst-O-Rama
- June 23-27 | NSS Convention in New York
- September TBD | Caver Appreciation
- October TBD | GSP Halloween Fundraising Party

Cave softly and see you in 2025!

Warm regards,  
**Debi Pavey**  
GSP Chair

# Volunteer Opportunities

Where you can help the RKC and GSP

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

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.**

## Remember to renew your RKC Membership!

RKC’s membership year runs from April 1st to March 31st. 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.

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.

**Follow the QR Code to the right for more information or to register online! Mail-in forms on next page.**



# The Cave Preserves of RKC



Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve



Misty Cave Preserve



Cornhole Cave Preserve



Skylight Preserve



Sloan's Valley Preserve



The Rockcastle Karst Conservancy

Membership Application Form

Apply online at: [www.rkci.org](http://www.rkci.org)

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

## 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

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

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