UNDERGROUND OHIO

Ohio Cave Survey, Inc.

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Mission Statement

The purposes of this organization shall be to maintain a collective and current survey database of caves within the state of Ohio, and to further the exploration, research, and conservation of our state's caves.

Geologizing with an ODNR Expert

by Curt Harler

If you are fortunate enough to get to explore a "closed" site with extremely knowledgeable people, there is no option other than to gear up and get there. That was the case in April when Ohio Cave Survey members Frank Vlchek, Mandy Mooter, Kai Getrost, and I were able to visit the back-of-beyond areas of Holden Arboretum with host Dan Best. Ohio Geological Survey Senior Researcher Dr. Mohammad Fakhari was the lead figure, bringing his geological knowledge to the event. Rounding out the company were several powerful researchers including Patrick Biliter and Volunteer Resources Manager Sarah Hartley.

The outing was nicknamed "Sharin' the Sharon" and was an exploration of Little Mountain's Sharon Conglomerate features, including both the unique and unusual, as well as common characteristics seen at all of the regional Sharon Conglomerate ledges and outcrops. If you have seen The Ledges at Cuyahoga Valley National Park or sites like Nelson-Kennedy, Thompson, Worden, or Whipps Ledges, you know the geology.

A primary goal of the outing was to visit a feature referenced in a paper by Dr. Ira D. Sasowsky, professor of geosciences at Akron University. We would be the beneficiaries of knowledgeable analysis and commentary by Fakhari. Sasowsky reported what he thought was a possible seismite ("SYZ-myt") on the Arboretum property. The seismite, if such it was, was likely the result of an ancient earthquake some 350 million years ago. Or is the twisted rock nothing more than soft sediment deformation? Fakhari, a structural geologist, would provide answers. The cavers amongst us were also interested in his evaluation of King's Cave and the Little Mountain sinkhole… the collapsed roof of a subterranean crevice or cave.

Dues Information

Membership is open to all persons and similar-minded organizations interested in speleology and caving.

Regular (18+): $15/yr
Associate (18-): $5/yr
Organization: $30/yr

Dues are prorated (half price) if new and joining between July - November.

Paypal, credit card, or mailed check are accepted. Follow the link below to become a member today!

Ohio Cave Survey Membership

Minutes

Miss a meeting?
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OCS Minutes

Links

Central Ohio Grotto

Dayton Underground Grotto

Greater Cincinnati Grotto

Wittenburg University Speleological Society

Cleveland Grotto

National Speleological Society

Newsletter

Editor: Brittany Parrick

Email submissions to bdparrick@gmail.com

Dr. Mohammad Fakhari, ODNR geologist, explains the genesis of this swirling seismite feature on Little Mountain, Geauga County. The feature is not far from Devil's Kitchen Cave or Little Mountain Caverns.

Fakhari first confirmed that the suspected seismite is, indeed, a seismite. He even was able to point out the direction to the epicenter of the earthquake that deformed the rock. Remember that Ohio was located south of the Equator at the time, so the direction in terms of today's geography is relative. When Mandy and I pleaded ignorance of the geological forces forming the seismite, Fakhari patiently offered a series of on-the-spot drawings which, even for me, made it clear how to differentiate tectonic fissures from those formed by other forces (the key difference being that tectonic fissures occur at angles around 60° or 120°, whereas fissures occurring at 90-degree angles are fractures).

Kai Getrost ponders the drop at one of the skylight entrances to Little Mountain Caverns. There are three such openings plus a wading entrance at an old pump house.

Fakhari's analysis of the sinkhole at the grandiosely-named Little Mountain Caverns agreed with that posited by Frank earlier. Fakhari suggested that the openings over Little Mountain and the nearby Devil's Kitchen caves were caused by the erosion over many years of a weaker stone like a mudstone causing the caves today to be topless.

The group made two other brief stops at local caves, all of which are in the Ohio Cave Survey database.

Chasing History

by Frank Vlchek

The week before Memorial Day weekend, OCS did a little cave fact-checking in Geauga County. Our records, many of which come from historical accounts, are often less than perfect and contain contradictions between different authors. Some of our GPS coordinates put caves in the middle of a road, or sometimes cave names are mislabeled, putting a cave in a totally wrong location in the county. So, we decided to visit several cave locations in order to try to clear up some of the questions we had. "We" were retired park naturalist Dan Best and OCS members Mandy Mooter, Curt Harler, and Frank Vlchek. After securing landowners' permissions, we met at a nearby metro park and carpooled to our first target.

Card's Cave is well documented in the historical literature, but the coordinates in our records didn't seem to be in the correct location. So we went in search of the cave with several written descriptions from the 1950s and 1970s. Curt had been to the location about fifteen years earlier, but we searched for an hour before finding what he thought was the cave. But that small cave did not match the description in the historical accounts. We did turn up several smaller caves that didn't come close to the 150' length that Card's was reported to be.

A friendly barking dog finally led us to the landowner's brother, who came to do some work on the property. Carl was a great help in filling us in on the more recent history. He grew up in the area and explored the cave as a ten-year-old child. As he took us to its location, he also informed us that the cave had been pretty much destroyed. The previous owner had pulled it apart and used it for landscaping boulders. He pointed to a sinkhole where he remembered going into the cave that was now back-filled in. As I stepped on the fill, I could feel some sponginess, but it would take a lot of digging to open this possible entrance back up.

He joined us as we searched for other remnants, which were now just a few short passages here and there. What a shame, as one of the historical papers described part of the cave as the most beautiful passage in the county. It is now just a memory with a correct GPS reading of where it once was.

Our second location contains a group of caves known as the Dart's Cave/Merkle Caves group. We believed that some of our historical cave names were duplicates of the same caves, renamed by different people at different times in history. This group of caves is located in a box canyon-type gorge. The first cave we came to was Leaning Cave. This cave is obvious with its massive, tall entrance that is angled or leaning to the left. We then came to two small caves that Curt had named Geauga 1 and 2 when he was there fifteen years ago.

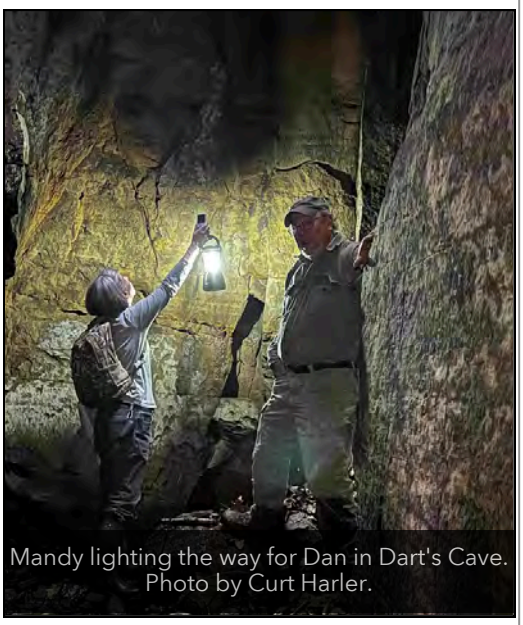
Curt at the entrance to Leaning Cave. Photo by Frank Vlchek.

The next cave is possibly the most impressive and beautiful in the county, Dart's Cave. It has a walk-in entrance that has a stream coming out of it. Before long, you are in a chamber with thirty-foot ceilings and a twenty-foot waterfall. One can see daylight down a side passage that would require a steep climb. Moving up the gorge, we came to two more entrances to Dart's, which Curt had called Geauga 3 and 4 on his previous visit. Both of these entrances lead to a passage that takes you back to the waterfall room on a ledge fifteen feet above the floor. We determined that the one entrance was also called Extension Cave in the past.

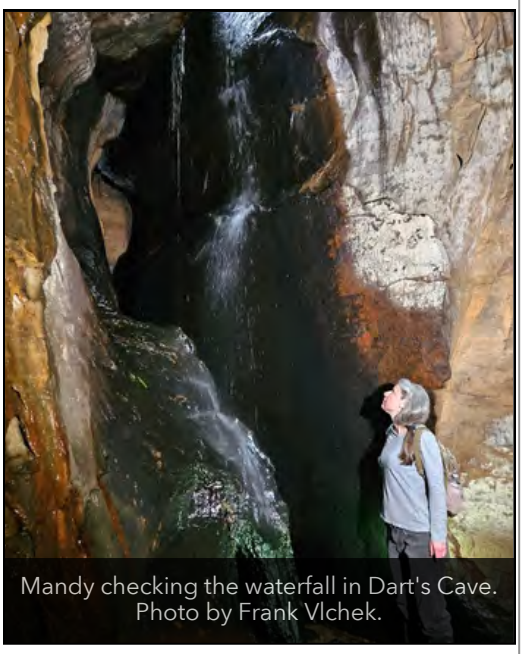
Pushing farther into this cave, I discovered some turkey vulture eggs, one hatched and one apparently not viable and unhatched. We also determined, from some new historical accounts we received from ODNR's Erin Hazelton, that Skylight Cave (which was on our Geauga lost cave list) is actually Dart's Cave. 3M Dome Cave was the next one we found. The entrance requires a five-foot climb, where a short passage leads you to a dome room, and another short crawl from there leads to another dome. Merkle's Caves is an open area in the gorge with a couple of natural bridges and several small caves in the walls. Here we were interested in finding I've Got Nothing Cave and Merkle's #3 Cave. We did find several caves but none of them really matched the description we had for either. We later determined that we were not downstream in the gorge enough to find I've Got Nothing. But we did see some interesting small caves in the Merkle's Cave group, one of which had an iron-colored flowstone that was actually mud, not rock.

Taking GPS readings at all the caves resulted in some corrected coordinates for some and confirmation for others. We also took disto measurements on all the smaller caves - not a real survey, but a rough estimate of the cave length. On our way back, we ran into the landowner. She was very friendly and quite interested in what we were doing. She invited us back to continue our search for the caves we did not find, and we told her we would be happy to have her and her husband along so we could show them what we know about the geologic resource they own.

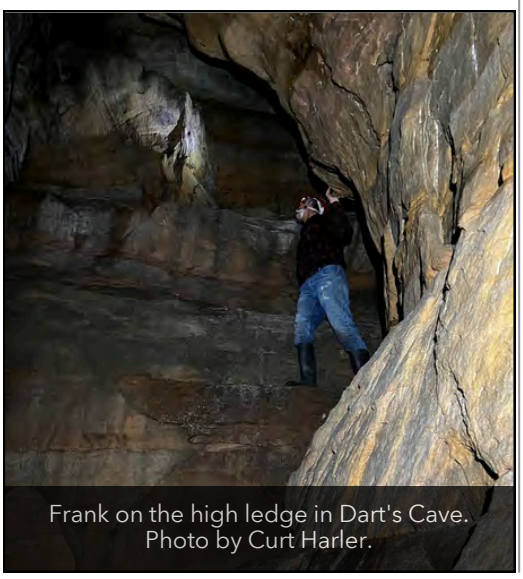
It was another successful day of correcting the OCS data and even adding to it. On top of that, we practiced some good landowner relations and overall had a good time in the wilds of Geauga County.



Mandy lighting the way for Dan in Dart's Cave. Photo by Curt Harler.



Mandy checking the waterfall in Dart's Cave. Photo by Frank Vlchek.



Frank on the high ledge in Dart's Cave. Photo by Curt Harler.

Central Ohio Caving Chronicles

By Ryan Braga

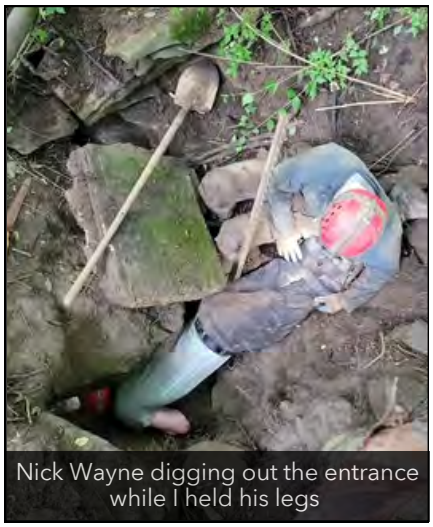
This story starts out like many other cave stories. I got wind of a large cave - large by Ohio standards - and decided to head over and knock on the door.

When I pulled up, I was greeted by an older house with a "No Soliciting" and "Private Property" sign in the front yard, along with a camera doorbell. After trotting up and ringing the bell, I was greeted with a “hello” through the camera. While the connection wasn’t great, I was able to pitch what I was looking to do, and the landowner gave me his number so we could have a proper conversation - the doorbell mic just wasn’t cutting it.

After talking with Jerry on the phone for a bit, we set up a time to meet at the property and check things out. The following week, I brought Nick Wayne with me, and we met with Jerry to see several of the sinkholes on the property (We know of five!). Jerry also shared some of the property’s history. After digging for a bit on one sink, we decided to turn our attention to the main cave we’d heard legends about and try to open it back up. After extensive digging from Nick and I, we left it in a much closer-to-open state than we found it.

First look at the cave entrance

After moving the concrete, no digging yet



Nick Wayne digging out the entrance while I held his legs

The following week, I organized a small group of Central Ohio Grotto members to return and help with the dig. Those who came included Nick Wayne, Grace Croswell, Nate Iden, another name I’m blanking on, and myself, Ryan Braga. We also had two non-grotto members join after hearing about the project at a grotto meeting.

Grace focused on the sink that Nick and I had started digging previously, and she made a ton of progress - enough that there’s now a small hole moving just a bit of air. The issue with this hole is all the metal scraps that’ve been found inside, which makes digging difficult. Grace plans to keep working on it and see where it leads.

The rest of the group focused on the main goal: Courtesy Cave. We rigged an elaborate setup with two come-along winches and managed to lift out a massive boulder - we estimate it weighed between 200–250 lbs! After that and a lot more digging (and my superb supervising skills - Mark Swelstad would be proud), we got it open enough for me to slide in and finally enter darkness.

a 200lb-250lb boulder blocking the entrance we got out

Grace Croswell and I digging on a nearby sink that is blowing air

After squeezing for about ten feet, the passage bends and opens up into a canyon with a floor that drops into a pit roughly 20–25 feet deep. After cleaning up the entrance, everyone took a look at the pit, and we called it a day.

The next week, Nick, Andy Schofield, and I returned to rig and drop the pit. I went in first to determine bolt placement. The tight canyon made it difficult to find good spots, and the rock quality wasn't great. I brought out my new drill and started to work - the bit went in very easily. Was that because the drill and bit were that good, or because the rock was piss poor? (I'm guessing the latter.)

After placing the bolt, I needed a backup - you never rappel on just one bolt - and we decided that a sketchy natural anchor would have to do (trust me, that was the best option available). In the cramped canyon, I awkwardly put on my vertical gear while sitting down and got on rope. After rappelling only about 3 feet, I realized how tight it was - tight enough that there was no chance I'd be able to climb back out. After backing out, Andy gave it a try, but had the same result. While all that was happening, Andy spotted a previously unnoticed sink about 15 feet to the northeast, actively taking water. I began digging on it and opened it up a bit, but it's full of bottles and scrap metal. Still - there's karst!

Overall, this has been a super fun project, and I'm very thankful to Jerry, the landowner, for letting us poke around on his property. We're currently discussing next steps for how we might get into the pit and explore further - along with surveying.

Stay tuned for the next update!

The entrance of the cave before the pit

Finding a Lost Cave (Plus A New Addition)

by Frank Vlchek

As has become the norm in my quest to pinpoint cave locations, a previously unrecorded cave was added to our list. Mandy Mooter located what she believed was Roaring Springs Cave in Geauga County. As the weather broke this April, I took the opportunity to check out her find. I arrived at the cave owner's house armed with copies of the OCS introduction letter and landowner info sheet. A knock on the door got no response except from a tail-wagging dog.

I turned my attention to one of the Geauga Park District reservations just down the street. I had been wanting to get some GPS readings to figure out some cave locations there. The park is home to Ansel's Cave. Now, Ansel's Cave is not a cave at all, but an alcove in the exposed Sharon Conglomerate that locals historically called a cave. But on previous hikes, I had noticed what appeared to be a cave nearby. I wanted to verify if that cave was Ansel's Real Cave, which is in the OCS database. But always two steps ahead of me, Mandy had learned that the cave near Ansel's was called Little Bear Cave, and Ansel's Real Cave was in another part of the park. A stop at the visitor center revealed that Little Bear Cave is open to the public to explore anytime. I also secured permission to check out Ansel's Real Cave.

Little Bear Cave is a single narrow fissure typical of the Sharon Conglomerate. The crack curves back in just under twenty feet with no light reaching the far end. Ansel's Real Cave has a low entrance with a constant flow of water coming out. There are two other side-by-side entrances, one of which I used to avoid getting wet. Inside, the stream entrance intersects a perpendicular passage. At one end are the two dry entrances, and the other end extends into darkness. Twenty-eight feet long, the cave used to be a bat hibernaculum prior to White Nose Syndrome. I checked all the crevices and reported to the park naturalist that I saw no bats. The only biota I did see were some spiders. I took GPS readings for both caves, and sure enough, Ansel's Real Cave matched our database. Talking to the naturalist, I took the opportunity to set up a trip to another park to check on another obscure lead we have to a possible cave before heading back down the road to the Roaring Springs lead.

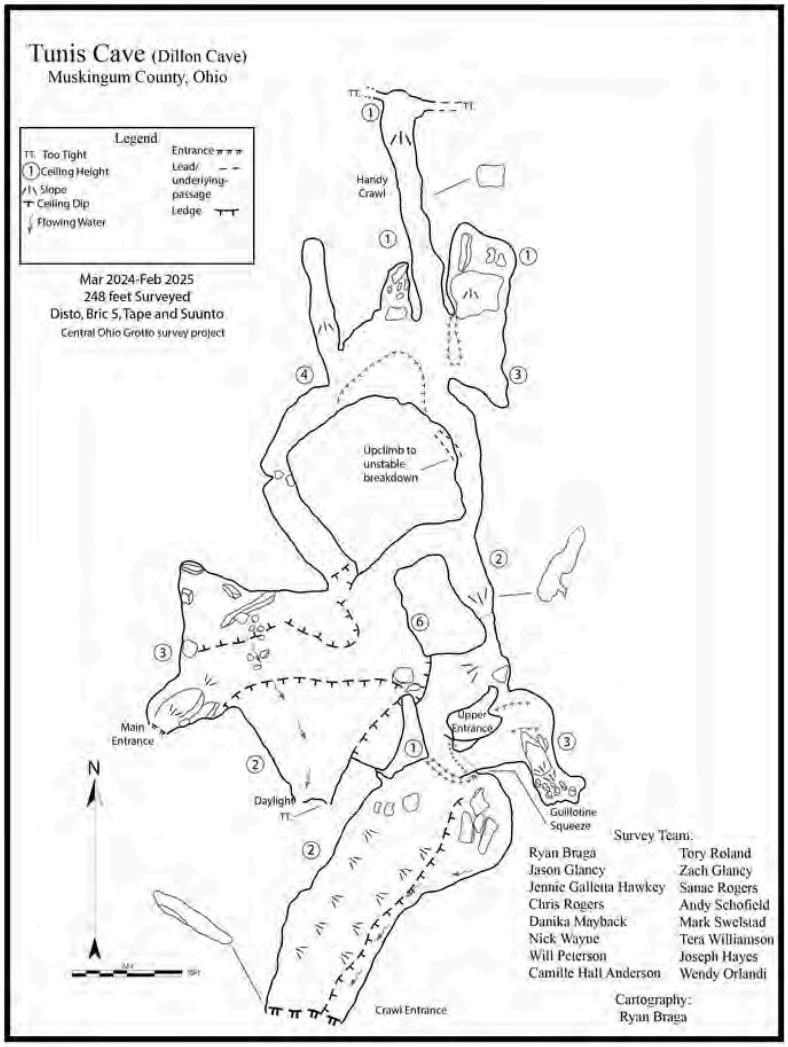
This time, the landowner was home. They were friendly, interested, and receptive to my checking out their cave. I left them the intro letter and landowner sheet and invited them to contact us with any questions. As soon as I got close to the cave, I knew it was indeed Roaring Springs Cave, as it matched the historical description we have from Warren Luther in the 1950s. The cave is a rock shelter approximately 12' wide, 12' deep, with an 8' ceiling. In the northwest corner, a stream flows from a low passage too small for me to fit without digging out the floor. One can only see back seven feet, but there is the sound of a probable waterfall, which is not visible. Not exactly a roar, but I'm sure that is where its name comes from. Interestingly, there is an inlet pipe in the spring that the cave owner says supplements the well of his neighbor across the street. It was a successful afternoon crossing another lost cave off our list and adding a new cave.

I know I've said it before but the caves are out there waiting for you to find them.

Central Ohio Grotto Survey Project: Tunis Cave

Ryan Braga NSS 72371

Back in January of 2024, I wanted our grotto to hone in on survey and grow our skills. While taking a project on in our home away from home (Rockcastle County, KY) would be nice, the 4.5 hour drive down made it harder for members to commit to. That's why Tunis Cave was chosen. Being 1 hour east of Columbus, Tunis would serve as a great learning opportunity for anyone and everyone to get involved in surveying in our backyard.



I originally went into this cave thinking it would be a one-and-done survey trip; I greatly underestimated that. Five visits later and we finally have a finished map! There were many obstacles we had to overcome to get this project to completion; from the cave being 75% flooded to forgetting to bring whiteout. Each visit ensured we would have to come back for that last survey shot that kept on going. While I am sad that our survey project is getting closed out (as I would like to continue teaching surveying locally forever), I am also excited at the fact that this year-long project - that I thought would take a month - can finally be put to rest!

This cave saw 17 different members learning surveying and led to myself growing skills in cartography (I still have a LONG way to go!) and also realizing that managing multiple teams isn't as easy as I thought. While this was a small project measuring only 248 feet, the windy passage and complicated breakdown led to 27 stations set and 14 pages of survey data! While I don't have any larger caves on the agenda for local survey, (would love for this to change!) I do have a project down in Rockcastle County, KY that is shaping up to be a great survey cave for the grotto and anyone looking to get involved with us. I hope to announce this and get it rolling once summer hits. Thanks to each and everyone involved in the grotto survey and I hope to see each of you surveying soon!

Interested in survey or cartography?
Reach out to me on Facebook or email: ryanbraga1007@gmail.com

Westward Ho

by Frank Vlchek

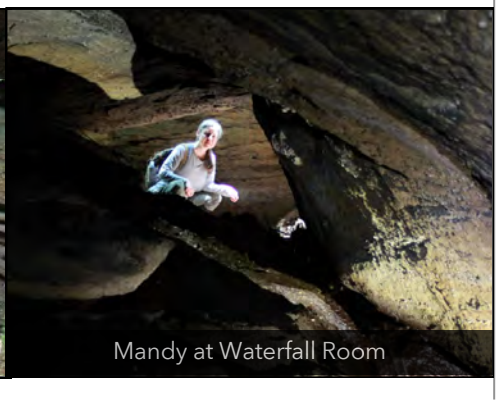
In our search to locate lost caves for the Ohio Cave Survey, we had made several trips to Little Mountain. Little Mountain is on the border of Geauga and Lake Counties and is the home of the 430-foot-long Little Mountain Caverns, which was an attraction for tourists as part of the Little Mountain resort that featured hotels, cabins, and horse stables among its amenities back in the early 20th century. The resort, including the cave, was on the north side of the mountain and that is where we did all of our cave searching on the property (now owned by the Holden Arboretum). That was, until Arboretum policeman Tony Piowtrowski, who had guided us on the Holden property, secured permission to look around the southwest side of the mountain. The southwest side is all private property, much of it developed into subdivisions. On our initial hike around the area we found several caves, three of which I suspected might be connected.

Dan Peter, Mandy Mooter, and I returned to do a real survey of the caves in early July. The first cave has a 24' vertical entrance with an intersecting steep-sloping entrance, which we discovered had an extension ladder buried under the leaves and debris. At this intersection, water fills the passage to chest-deep. Working your way through this flooded passage you encounter two brick dams which impound the water. We assume this reservoir was historically used for drinking water. Below the surface, Dan and I discovered a network of pipes and even a valve where two of those pipes intersect. At some point we were joined in the cave by one of the owner's dogs who enjoyed running and swimming about, but eventually got itself into trouble in some deep water. Dan pulled the canine over and out and assisted it to the entrance with the extension ladder so it could make its way back to the surface. After crossing the second dam, Dan and I found ourselves in the second of the caves I thought were connected, the waterfall cave. As we continued surveying, we also linked with the third cave. With time running out, we reported to the owner what we found. He was genuinely excited to learn that the cave was well over 200' long. We arranged to come back the next week to finish surveying.

After finishing work the following week, I was surprised that the total survey length was 566'. The actual length of the cave is about 544'. This makes it one of the longest caves in northeast Ohio. As we surveyed we saw the usual spiders and flies. We also saw hundreds of amphipods, a two-lined salamander, crickets, harvestmen, and a few Log Lurker millipedes. After viewing some of the pictures I took of them, the owner decided an appropriate name would be Log Lurker Cave. We returned one more time on August 18th to finish recording some details. On this last trip we discovered that one of the entrances is actually connected to more cave by a very large skylight. I'm reluctant to say this is part of Log Lurker Cave but it is certainly part of a system of which Log Lurker is a member. We plan to return for more surveying and see where this new area leads.

Log Lurker millipede

Dan surveying in one of the skylights. Photo by Mandy Mooter.

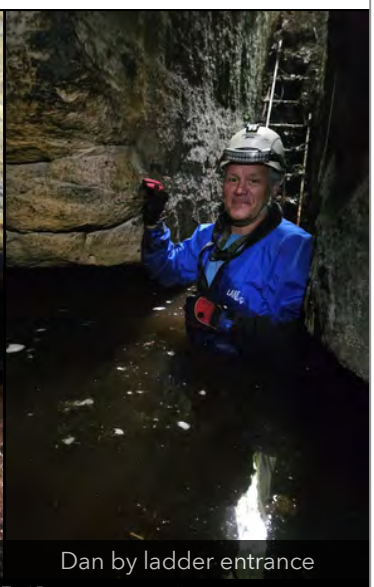


Mandy at Waterfall Room

Dan in typical passage

Looking down into vertical entrance to water below

Waterfall



Dan by ladder entrance