

# Central Ohio Grotto Squeaks

## March 2023



**Breaking News!!...Mothman discovered in West Virginia Cave!!**

## THE CENTRAL OHIO GROTTO (COG)

The Central Ohio Grotto (COG) of the National Speleological Society meets at 7:00 p.m. the fourth Tuesday of most months at the Presbyterian Church on the Square in Worthington, Ohio. Please contact a grotto officer to confirm meeting time and place or better subscribe to the COG list server at cog@ontosystems.com by sending an email to cog@ontosystems.com with the subject "subscribe." The meeting site will be announced there and on the Grotto Facebook page.

**Check out our Facebook group:**

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/centralohiogrotto/>

**Check out our website:**

<http://www.centralohiogrotto.com/>

**Grotto Mailing Address:**

C/O Pat Gibson, 4211 Caswell Rd  
Johnstown, OH 43031 614-496-5345  
Email: kd8ion@gmail.com

**Grotto Membership Dues:**

\$15 per individual or \$20 per family.

**The C.O.G. Squeaks**

The C.O.G. Squeaks is emailed to dues paying members and to grottoes with which the COG exchanges newsletters. Please send trip reports, caving articles, cave fiction, cave poetry, and cave photos to Mark Swelstad for publication: mswelstad@gmail.com

NSS organizations have permission to reprint material from the C.O.G. Squeaks so long as the author and Squeaks are given credit, unless otherwise stated.

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## Upcoming COG Events:

See the Facebook events page for more information about these events or email a board member.

Note: All COG Monthly meetings (except December) are at the Worthington Presbyterian Church.

March 28	COG Monthly Meeting
April 25	COG Monthly Meeting
May 20-21	Open House – GSP
May 23	COG Monthly Meeting
June 26-30	<a href="#">NSS Convention</a>
July 14-16	<a href="#">Karst-O-Rama</a> – GSP
August 4-6	<a href="#">Cave Capers</a> – Indiana

### CENTRAL OHIO GROTTO 5-YEAR MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

## 75 MEMBERS ON OUR 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY IN 2027

#### Why

More members mean a larger pool of volunteers, leaders, and trip planners. Younger members mean that we can continue our grotto into the future.

#### How can you help?


If every current member brings in just 1 new member over the next 5 years, we will be close to meeting our goal.

Recommendations from active members is the best way to build a solid group of cavers. But showing up to a meeting or two isn't enough! We are looking for people committed to maintaining ACTIVE membership within the grotto.

#### Additional recruitment ideas (we NEED volunteers to make these happen!)

- Lead **trips** intentionally geared toward recruitment
- **Sponsor local events** or participate as vendors in events that get exposure
- Put together a **guest information packet**
- Teach **classes** at REI
- Hold **joint meetings** with related groups in the community
- Work with students who need **volunteer opportunities**
- Ask me about caving **stickers**

## COG Shopping List



COG is in the process of adding wetsuits to our equipment library. We are planning a wet trip in the Spring and would like everyone to prepare for it ahead of time.

#### Buying Tips:

- Buy second hand. They can be found for as little as 5 bucks.
- Buy big. You will need room to flex your cave moves.
- Buy thick, 3-5 mm will be warmer if you tend to run cold.
- Buy ANYTHING. Farmer John's, shorties, it's all good!
- Buy extra. I'd like to build a library, so donate an extra if you find a good deal!

#### From the Chair – Aaron Deal

Making summer plans? Don't forget to put May 20th to 21st on your calendar as GSP welcomes 4000 guests to the cave preserve over the weekend. There are plenty of volunteering opportunities including serving soup beans and cornbread, greeting guests at the entrance, leading/tailgunning tours, and helping park guests. Don't know which one fits you? Pull a Kim Deal and try them all!

We have a lot of exciting events upcoming, so make sure to check our calendar that can be found at [centralohiogrotto.com](http://centralohiogrotto.com). Click on "COG Calendar" to see all of the events and sync them to your calendar.

## Sloans Trip – Dana Sutherland

On March 4, 2023, after surviving Friday's storms and high wind at GSP, Coy and Marshal Ainsley, Danny Klecker, Caleb Heimlich, and I made our way down to Sloan's where we met Mike Goltzene and a few other people for the DUG trip. Eleven people in total. Eight had never been to Sloan's, and I believe two of them had not been underground. Due to the recent heavy rain, according to Mike, the lake came up 10' in the past day.

Using the Crocket's Entrance, we visited the Oasis (which was flowing a lot of water), Crayfish Sanctuary and the first Lake Room. After taking a group survey, the decision was made to start heading toward the exit. On the way out we made a stop at the Music Room where Mike played us a little tune.



*Photo courtesy – Dana Sutherland*

Once on the surface, four of the folks thanked Mike for guiding and called it a day. Having time to kill, Mike and the van load of hooligans from GSP went in the Scowling Tom's entrance. Mike showed us the connection to ST Junction, but no one really felt like doing much crawling. We sat there for a while and enjoyed the conversation while passing a flask of bourbon. On the way out, Mike took us to a little side passage full of cave crickets. It was NUTS! They were everywhere. Literally hundreds, maybe thousands of them!

We returned to GSP and met up with the rest of our group who had the fire going. The storm knocked out the power around 7:00pm on Friday and it was still not back on. As we found out during our trip, the storm was widespread, and a large section of southern Kentucky was without power. When I left Sunday, it had not been restored.



*Photo courtesy – Dana Sutherland*



*Photo courtesy – Dana Sutherland*

## Scout Trip – Aaron Deal

Peering out from my sleeping bag all I could see was frozen droplets of water, which verified that even though I was nice and cozy it was COLD! Changing into the caving clothes for the day was a quick process and required some extra layers. Kim made an excellent egg, cheese, and bacon sandwich to help prepare for the eager scouts. After some deliberation we broke into two trips with one heading to Sinks of the Roundstone and the other heading to Pine Hill.

Josh and I led a small group of 5 scouts and 1 leader into Pine Hill with Kyle and Bella (from GCG) tail gunning. Along the main stream passage we stopped at several side passages to explore. The first stop was where you encountered the first breakdown pile in the stream with the left passage leading to dead ends and the right leading to a small dome room. There was a nice flowstone with flowing water and small ripples over the ceiling. The second stop was in the bypass that just had some mud slopes and was a quick stop. Next instead of crossing over the stream we continued straight with a passage off to the left that led to a series of rimstone dams. At the end there were many nice draperies, columns, and other formations. The last stop before continuing on the normal route was to test the scouts with a fun squeeze. All of the scouts and Bella made it, but Kyle and the scout leader couldn't quite figure out how to squeeze through.

The rest of the trip hit the common spots of Skylight Dome and the waterfall. At Skylight Dome, the sun was in a good position that was lighting up most of the dome especially when we turned the lights off. In the birth canal, the air flow was moving due to the cold temperatures outside.

On the way to the waterfall, we had one scout fall into the water up to her shoulders trying to skirt around the bathtub. Then waiting to step over the waterfall another scout lost his balance and fell into the pool in front of the waterfall. In general, the waterfall and stream

passage had an increased flow which was cool to see and hear. The area above the waterfall was quite loud.

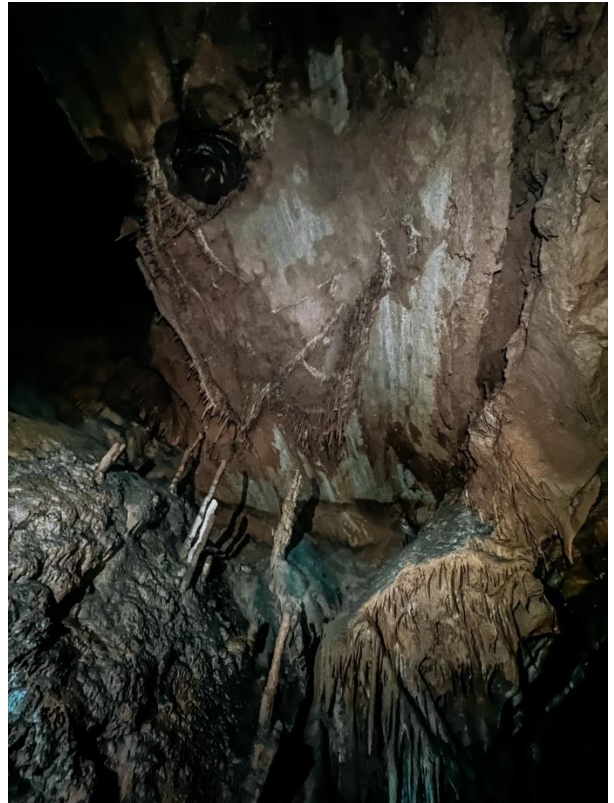
On the way out, Josh showed us the bypass around the waterfall which is a helpful tool if folks are struggling with the traditional waterfall swing and climb up.

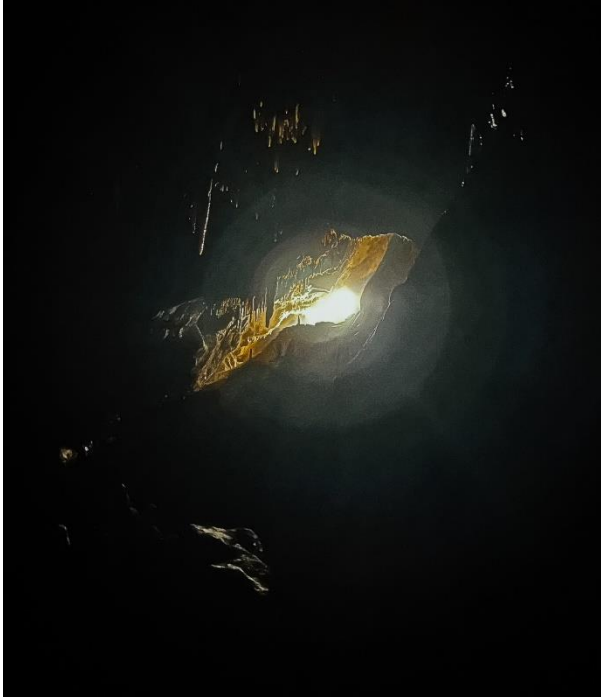
The trek back to the entrance was uneventful, but the cold air reminded us that we had traveled through a stream for most of the cave. Overall, it was a great trip!

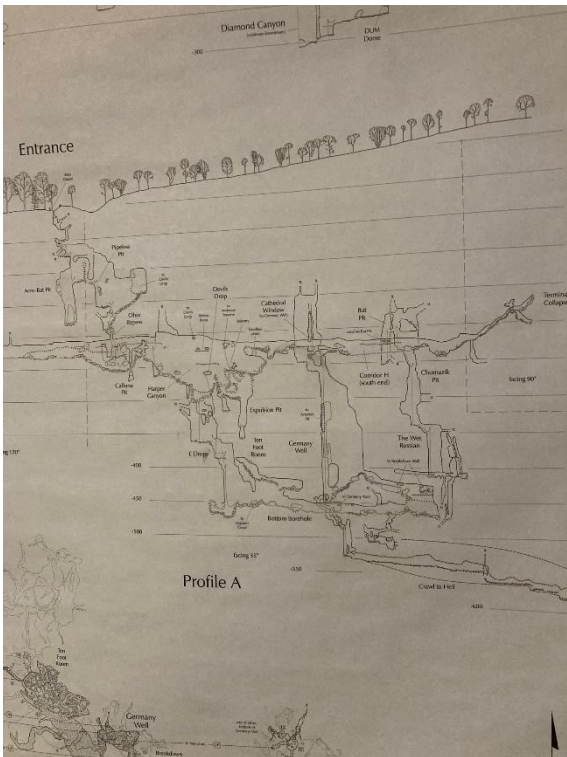
After getting back to GSP, Kim and I headed up to Limestone Grill for a farm place to hang out for the evening. Eventually we were joined by Wendy, Aaron, Tera, and Dale and almost closed the place out as we weren't excited to head back to our tent in the cold.



**Sites Cave – WV – 190' rappel - some pictures from the Out of Bounds Grotto trip. All photos courtesy of Talia Sepoil; sent to me by Jason Glancy. Also on the trip were Nate Barton, Ben Barton, Ben Shank.**







### Eastern Phoebe – A Regular GSP Visitor – Mark Swelstad

GSP has more than caves, it's also a haven for many bird species. Some live here year-round, some stay only for the nesting season, and some migrate through briefly on their way north.

One bird that is a regular summer resident that you've probably seen, even if you weren't aware that you were seeing it, is the Eastern Phoebe. Many people will just say 'Phoebe' and not include the 'Eastern' part but there are several Phoebe species in the US; but this is the only one that is regular to our area.

Phoebes are part of a large group of birds called 'Flycatchers', named for their behavior of perching on a branch and suddenly flying out a few feet to catch insects in the air. This aerial display is fun to watch and is a good way of identifying the Eastern Phoebe. Eastern Phoebe's have a habit of 'bobbing' their tail up and down while they perch.



The other way of identifying them is by song. The Eastern Phoebe makes an angry song that sounds like a raspy 'fee-bee'...they actually sound angry so it's another thing to pay attention to. I don't believe females sing at all so it's likely if you see one singing, it's a male.



*Photo courtesy Mark Swelstad*

I see Phoebe's at GSP all over the place but generally they like to do their flycatching along the edge of woods. That affords them quick cover in case a hawk comes by. Look for them along the main valley near the electric sites or even shower house. They tend to perch about 10' off the ground and then will quickly dart out and sort of do a 'dance' in the air and go back to the same perch.

The other place I see them a lot is inside the entrance to GSP, especially the North entrance. They are the bird that nests just inside the cave entrance. That also explains the occasional presence of the Black Rat Snakes I see inside that entrance as well. They like to nest on other human structures as well and I wouldn't be surprised to see them nesting around the ticket house, tractor barn, etc.

Generally, Eastern Phoebe's arrive in their nesting territory in Central Ohio around mid-March. Males arrive first, who establish their territory, and the females soon follow. They will stay all summer, probably have more than one brood. They will leave in early fall.

For more information, visit:

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern Phoebe/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Phoebe/overview)



*Photo courtesy Mark Swelstad*

### **Sloans Valley Crockett Entrance Clean Up** By Bethany Widmayer



Earth Day is April 22nd and what better way to celebrate than showing a little love to one of our favorite caves. Rockcastle Karst Conservancy is sponsoring a cleanup of the Crockett Entrance of Sloan's Valley on April 22, 2023 from 10am to 2pm. Tackling this project before the thick summer foliage emerges will make it easier to locate trash. Mary Gratsch has volunteered to bring trash bags and Mike Harrington will haul it away. Mick Harrington can lead a trip into Sloans after the work is done. Any questions? Find the event on fb and post in the comments.

## Wildflowers of GSP

### Virginia Bluebells

Wendy Orlandi

Virginia Bluebells or *mertensia virginica* are a perennial favorite of many at GSP. Look for them near the creek down past the boy scout camp to find their greatest concentration. Individually, they have pretty flower clusters with nodding pink/purple buds that open into a lovely light blue, bell shaped flower comprised of five fused petals. Each flower has five white stamens and a white central pistil. En masse, they are absolutely striking and GSP is fortunate to have a small field of them.

The following pictures were taken on March 19th, 2023 when the temperature was a mere 18° F the night before. Some neighboring Hepatica, which we featured last month sustained some frost damage on their sepals, but these delicate looking bluebells were completely unphased by the cold. They start blooming in March in this part of Kentucky and will continue to bloom for about three weeks.



The foliage emerges as a deep shade of purple but then the oval shaped leaves quickly turn into a pleasant shade of grayish green. They will eventually grow to be about 1 to 2 feet tall. As you may have guessed by their location at GSP, bluebells prefer a moist, woodland habitat with rich soil. They can be found all over the eastern United States and Canada, although they are listed as endangered in some areas, especially in the northern border states and Ontario. Habitat loss and human modification to rivers to prevent flooding have greatly contributed to their demise. At GSP they can be found all along the creek in early spring.

Pollinators adore this early blooming perennial, as the flower provides a perfect perch for butterflies. Some humans also use the plant as a food source. A member of the Borage Family, stems, leaves and flowers are all edible. Some describe their taste as oyster-like. Before foraging, make sure bluebells aren't threatened in your area. Here's a link to a recipe, if you're adventurous. <https://foragerchef.com/virginia-bluebells/>

Medicinal uses by European settlers were limited as many mistook the plant for a lookalike species from their home countries, but abandoned the plant after it did not produce the desired results. There is some evidence that Native Americans used the plant to treat pulmonary ailments and used to root to treat venereal disease.



The last photo was taken by Mary Gratsch and shows the plants fully grown and almost at the end of their blooming cycle. After pollination, the plant will produce small, wrinkled nuts containing four seeds. When conditions are optimal, bluebells can spread over a wide area through self-seeding and also through underground rhizomes. The foliage will completely die back during the summer months and return the following spring. Feel free to text me, 412 965 7870 with your GSP wildflower pics and I'll be happy to identify them or feature them here.





**Greetings from the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy  
Support the Karst you Love!  
Renew Your Membership Today**

It's going to be a busy year in the Karst region of Kentucky. The five cave properties conserved by RKC are continuing to improve and provide access for you and future generations to enjoy.

The Sloans Valley Cave Preserve is having a work party day on April 22nd starting at 10 am. So much work has been done here, people will wonder why it was ever called the "Garbage Pit" entrance! But a spring cleanup is necessary. There is already a safety fence and parking area, and plans for a kiosk are taking shape. See pictures below of the beautiful entrance and our new SVCP logo.

The Skylight Dome Preserve finally got its driveway road improvements, making it much more accessible for technical caving groups.

The Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve has a busy schedule hosting school and scout troops to introduce young folks to caving. The new on-site GSP caretaker Josh Heinbuch has moved in to what was previously Bill Carr's house, which is now owned by GSP as a permanent building improvement to the GSP property. The GSP Open House is scheduled for May 20-21, 2023, and Karst-O-Rama for July 14-16.

The Misty Cave hibernaculum survey this winter found no White Nose Syndrome. Welcome news!

A spring above the Cornhole Cave has been very active, and is eroding the cave entrance. Future attention will be needed here to assess the situation.

Please renew your membership for 2023 and stay involved. **If you are reading this, your annual membership is expired or expiring this month, on March 31st.**

Membership Options:

- Annual @ \$15
- Sustaining (see below)
- Life (one time @ \$300)

The Sustaining membership is a simple way to support Rockcastle Karst Conservancy. A small monthly amount (\$5, \$10, or more) charged to your credit card keeps RKC moving forward in its efforts to protect significant cave and karst resources. See [www.rkci.org](http://www.rkci.org) to set up your Sustaining Member Option and you won't have to remember next year to renew.

Renew your annual membership today at [www.rkci.org](http://www.rkci.org) or mail a check payable to:

Rockcastle Karst Conservancy  
% Werner Jud, Treasurer  
1044 Vacationland Drive  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45231

Are you interested in a more long term approach to permanently fund the RKC mission? The RKC Legacy Endowment Fund has been established in conjunction with the Blue Grass Community Foundation to do just that. More details are on the [www.rkci.org](http://www.rkci.org) website.

Please help keep RKC growing. Cavers are losing access every day to the caves we love. The future of karst lands, its wise stewardship and ownership, are directly influenced by your renewal and donations.

Thank You for all you do,  
The Board and Members of the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy



A preserve of the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy