



# Central Ohio Grotto Squeaks

## May 2025



Cover photo by Mark Swelstad – Jeff Schebek in John Griffin Cave

## THE CENTRAL OHIO GROTTO (COG)

The Central Ohio Grotto (COG) of the National Speleological Society meets at 7:00 p.m. the fourth Thursday 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:**

\$20 per individual or \$25 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** – Note: Details of our events can be found on [our Facebook page](#). You do not have to be a member to be in our Facebook group.

<b>May 3-4</b>	GSP Work Weekend	GSP
<b>May 17-18</b>	Open House	GSP
<b>May 28</b>	COG Regular Meeting	Worthington Presbyterian Church
<b>June 6-8</b>	Karst-o-Rama	GSP
<b>July 3-6</b>	Bear Heaven Vertical Wknd	Bear Heaven Campground – see Wendy Orlandi for details

Contact Info for Questions regarding trips or meetings: [exec@centralohiogrotto.com](mailto:exec@centralohiogrotto.com)

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Join us for our next monthly meeting in the Worthington Presbyterian Church Youth Room on WEDNESDAY, May 28th at 7 PM in person or online. To join virtually, find Google Meet on COG's Google Calendar or facebook. You do NOT have to be a member to attend, everyone is welcome. After the meeting, we'll head over to Villa Nova Ristorante for pizza and drinks. Please bring cash to cover your share.

COG Monthly Meeting

Wednesday, April 23 · 7:00 – 8:30pm

Time zone: America/New\_York

Google Meet joining info

Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/zfc-wktg-wzz>

Or dial: (US) +1 662-674-1233 PIN: 431 213 899#

More phone numbers: <https://tel.meet/zfc-wktg-wzz?pin=8923801100058>

Our May speaker will be the legendary Bill Balfour IN PERSON! Bill is a geologist and an active speleologist in the southern Appalachians. Bill has led the West Virginia Speleological Survey, the Virginia Speleological Survey, and has served as President, Chairman of the Board, and a Director of WVACS. He has been repeatedly recognized by the National Speleological Society where he is Fellow (1978) and recipient of Certificate of Merit (1994) and the Lew Bicking Award (2012). A prolific surveyor, he has collaborated on hundreds of cave maps.



One of Bill's favorite locations is the Culverson Creek Cave System. The historic entrance to this cavern is located near the tiny community of Unus, West Virginia. Balfour jokes that he became so enchanted with Unus that he bought the town. In fact, Bill does own a beautiful farm in the area and, each year, many cavers park on his property while visiting Culverson Creek. A short walk from his house is what is now known as the Balfour-Hinkle-Unus Entrance to the cave, and Bill owns that too. And,

across the way is the Wild Cat Entrance to Culverson Creek.

## Odds and Ends:

### Open House

This year GSP Open House is May 17-18 and we are having a grotto blender! It's a great weekend to mingle with others who love GSP. To participate at the GSP Open House, please fill in the GSP Open House interest form at

<https://tinyurl.com/GSPcave>

KOR is happening June 6-8. You can select volunteer shifts at

<https://tinyurl.com/KOR2025volunteering>

***Thank you for volunteering at GSP!!!***

### Grotto History

The May 1975 issue of the Squeaks had a variety of trips from many different places including Cleveland (some urban caving/climbing), West Virginia, Western Kentucky, and Wayne County, KY. There was also some discussion around dye tracing Post Office Cave and discovering it connected hydrologically with the Fountain of Youth. Interesting that at this point, they had not yet connected Post Office to Sloans!

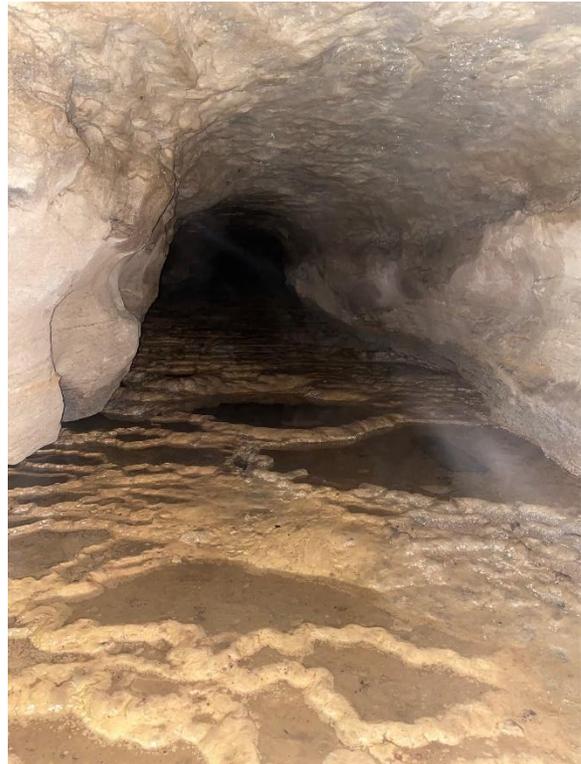
Our grotto has always been active in many caving locations, a trend that continues to this day!

### Karst-o-Rama Update!

From the Karst-o-Rama committee: We are happy to announce that KOR 2025 will be multi-grotto managed. If you are interested in volunteering, please reach out to [Matt Sumner](#) or [Meg Lee](#). More info to follow! Note: you don't have to sign up for an official position to help out. There will be plenty of opportunities to take a 2-hour shift at registration, in the kitchen, helping with garbage, security, cave trips, and so on. Many hands make light work!



**Miscellaneous Picture so we don't have white space ☺**



*Some rimstone dams in John Griffin Cave. Photo by Mark Swelstad*

## Sullivan & More, Day 1

April 5, 2025

Wendy Orlandi

“Flooded area reported ahead. Proceed with caution.” My drive early Saturday morning from Columbus, Ohio to the Sullivan Cave Preserve in Springville, Indiana was punctuated with several of these google alerts along with the constant companion of precipitation ranging in intensity from the gentlest drizzle to the blinding deluge. Yet, I drove on and questioned my commitment (as well as my sanity) to the trip which I had planned with our guide, Scott Frosch (CIG), back in December. For at least a week leading up to the trip our group had shared ominous forecasts and radar maps which threatened thunderstorms and even a possible tornado. Scott responded by switching up our original game plan and promised dry caves on a weekend when much of the Ohio Valley was experiencing heavy rains and life-threatening flooding.

Jonna Cartwright, Joe Cartwright and I met the Indiana cavers around noon at the Preserve, but as we expected the lower passages were flooded, which would have curtailed the trip in our original itinerary. Instead we departed for a dry, private cave in the area. Well, *mostly* dry. A stone’s throw from the crest of a ridge, we spied our target. However, as we approached, the entrance was blocked by an ephemeral waterfall which created a stream passage angling downward into the cave. This was NOT reassuring. I kept my raincoat on as I dodged underneath the flow. The impact of the water on my Swaygo was reminiscent of the roar of distant thunder. After a short crawl through the torrent and a couple of squeezes, we were standing upright in dry walking passage. The first leg of the trip was pleasant but otherwise unremarkable - climb

over some breakdown, climb under some breakdown, repeat.



*Wendy Orlandi, Scott Frosch, Joe and Jonna Cartwright and our Indiana friends prepare to enter the first cave of the weekend. Photo by Rhonda Matteson*

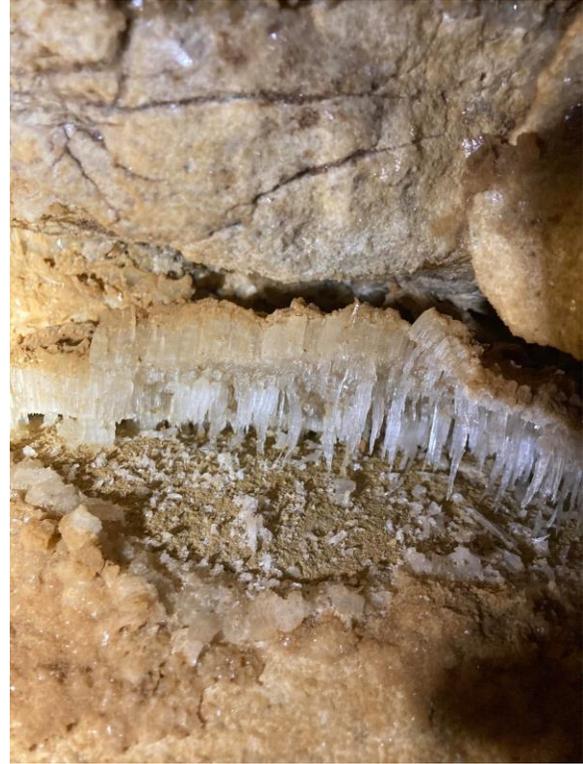
“High and dry” relict caves, like all dissolution caves, were formed by water but the source of that water has long been diverted. These caves are often situated near the ridgeline, far from the flowing water in the valley below. They now remain perfectly arid nestled under their protective caprock while wet, active caves have the dangerous potential to take on water faster than they can drain during flooding conditions like we experienced last weekend. Dry caves also lack active dripstone because of the absence of water but they can be potential breeding ground for elusive gypsum formations, such as flowers, needles, and crusts, which will only form and persist in the driest of caves.



*Wendy tackling the ephemeral waterfall at the entrance, the only water we experienced in this cave. Photo by Scott Frosch*

Calcium sulfate, commonly referred to as gypsum, forms as it precipitates out of sea or groundwater. When water-soluble gypsum is present, a mineral rich solution will extrude through the porous limestone under capillary pressure to create a variety of stunning speleothems.

Gypsum crystals that form plates on cave walls can vary in size and thickness due to the size of the pores in the limestone. Sheets of these crystals that line the walls of caves are called crusts. Crusts may eventually separate from the surface of the limestone in a process called exfoliation due to weight or because new crystal growth behind the crust pushes it away.



*Gypsum crust beginning to exfoliate from underlying limestone. Photo by Scott Frosch*



*Gypsum flowers growing from a seam in the limestone. Photo by Scott Frosch*

Gypsum flowers radiate from a central point and are fibrous or prismatic crystals which grow in a parallel orientation. Their tendency to curve is due to the strength of the gypsum solution and the flow rate. There were thousands of crystals and flowers in this cave. Every wall sparkled.

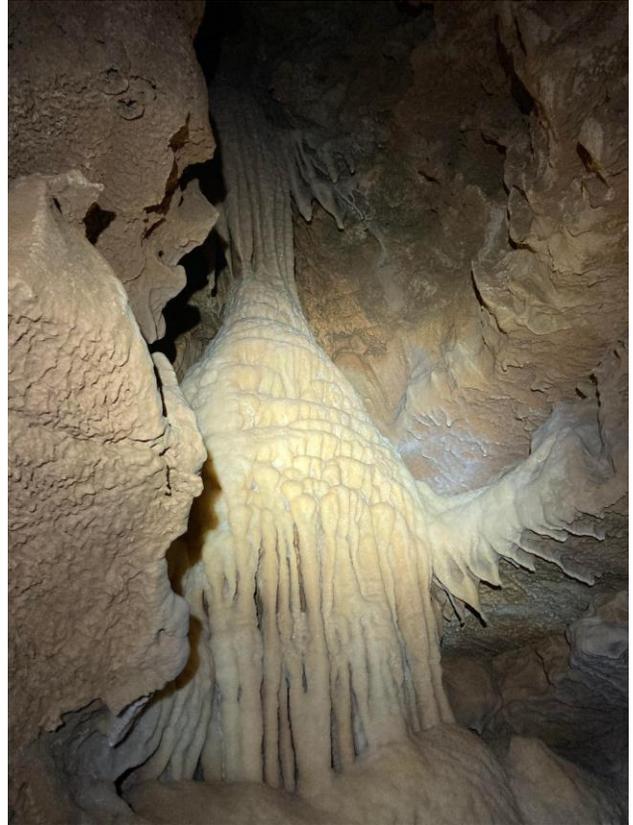


*A close inspection of this photo reveals a gypsum crust growing over gypsum flowers. Photo by Scott Frosch*

After about a mile of walking passage we came to an approximate 50' belly crawl. Evidence suggested that it had been dug, and the reward? More walking passage was present with some gypsum but it also gave way to some impressive dripstone at the end in addition to a 20ish' pit.

Despite my early apprehension of caving on a very wet weekend, this cave exceeded all expectations and was just magical in terms of raw beauty. Scott's care and experience as a guide are always much appreciated. Perhaps on our next trip, we'll actually get into Sullivan, but I'd also love to see "more" of the dry caves we visited this weekend.

*Photos right: Here at the terminus of this part of the cave, we did find some impressive dripstone formation but still completely dry. Photos by Megan Fletcher*



**Sullivan & More, Day 2**

April 6, 2025  
Wendy Orlandi

We woke up warm and dry at the Quality Inn in Bedford, IN and started our second day with breakfast and a jaunt back to Sullivan Preserve to rendezvous with local cavers before heading to another private cave. This time we arrived at nearby Thompson Cave. After a hike and a little bushwhacking we arrived at the entrance.



*Thompson Cave Photo by Scott Frosch*

Scott described family-owned Thompson Cave as a palaeocave, another word for a relict cave, or a cave that is no longer hydrologically active. Like the cave we visited the day before, Thompson Cave also sits high in the valley with no chance of flooding in inclement weather. However, we were surprised to learn that the cave does still take on some water and it was obvious that much of the formation is still active.

This cave is shaped like a chicken foot with three separate passages radiating outward from the entrance. The first passage had some stunning formation before dropping off 20 feet or so into a wide canyon. Some of our party members used a cable ladder to reach the bottom to do more exploring.



*These formations are in the first passage we explored. You can see water coming in from breaches in the caprock above. Without the occasional exposure to carbonic acid from rainwater leaching calcium carbonate from the limestone above these beautiful formations would cease to grow. Photo by Scott Frosch*



The cave has been in the family for generations so while signatures of family members and their friends could be found throughout the cave, the middle passage seemed to contain the most with the earliest

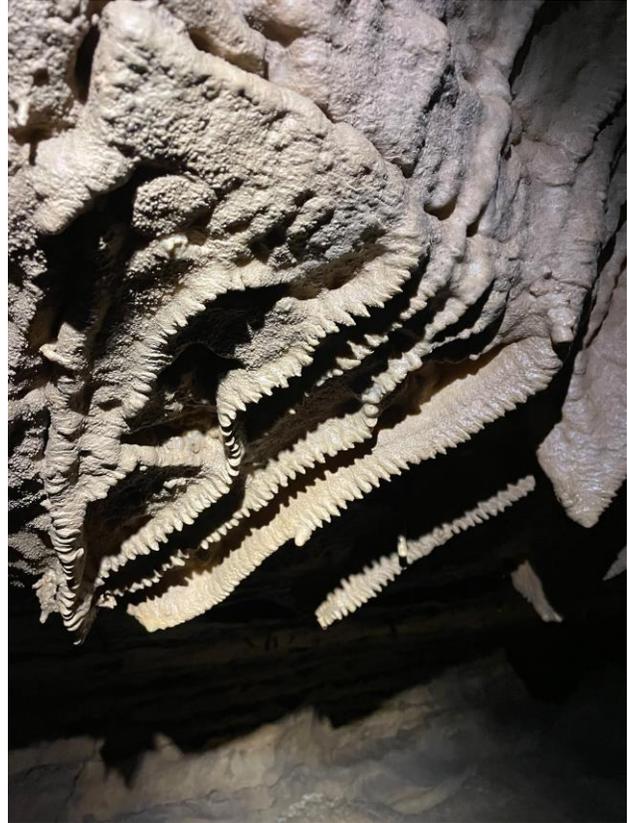
we found dating 1934. There also seemed to be upper passage in this section as well.



*Joe and Jonna checking out the middle passage. I'm sure Joe is devising a plan to get up there. Photo by Scott Frosch*

The third section of the cave was my favorite. First, there was a belly crawl that took you through a section of cave with one of my favorite formations, saw tooth draperies. Saw tooth draperies are formed when water runs down a sloped surface, pausing and moving repeatedly.

This section also contained several bear wallows. There even seem to be some claw marks next to the wallows. Bears use wallows for grooming, relaxing, marking territory and other behaviors. They are made by digging, rolling or trampling the ground below.



*Saw tooth drapes. Photo by Wendy Orlandi*



*The largest and deepest of the bear wallows in this section of the cave. Photo by Scott Frosch*



*Claw marks near the bear wallows. Photo by Megan Fletcher*

After we passed the wallows, we found our way into a canyon with more historic graffiti and a pit near the end of the passage. The historic graffiti caught my eye because it reminded me of something my grandfather would have doodled. I think it's supposed to represent spinach-loving Popeye who debuted on the silver screen in 1933 with Betty Boop in *Popeye the Sailor*. The timeline squares nicely with the oldest signatures in the cave.

If there's one thing the Thompson family liked to do in their spare time besides caving, it would be scribbling on a cave wall. Next to the pit were the words "Bad Hole." The pit was about 20' deep, but I didn't get too close because of the slope leading to it, but a few carefully traversed the edge to explore on to the terminus of the passage.

I would never recommend caving in inclement weather to a novice caver, but with the experience of a competent guide and a thorough understanding of karst geology and hydrology, you can not only stay safe but encounter some truly unique caves and their speleothems.



*Near the end of the third passage, with "Bad Hole Pit" to the left. Photo by Wendy*



*An early stylization of Popeye by a Thompson family artist. Photo by Wendy*

## **GSP Wild Caving with Scouts – April 2025**

By Joe Truskowski

Last month I wrote an article about scouting with the GSP Wild Caving Program. Since then, I was thrilled to tailgun for Darryl Marsh with Scout Troop 43 from Mason, Ohio.

On Saturday, 4.12.2025, I had the pleasure of exploring with another great bunch of scouts. They had come down Friday night and camped at the GSP. The weather was on the cold side but was predicted to warm up. Some of the boys had gotten cold tenting during the night, but fortunately I only live 10 miles from the GSP so I was toasty warm. I had an opportunity to talk and joke around with the leaders and got to know them before Darryl and Morgan arrived, having driven down that morning from Cincinnati. It was a lot of fun just talking about our life experiences and the jokes flowed continuously. I was then blessed when Darryl mentioned we would be going to a cave I hadn't been in before – John Griffin. After gearing up the boys – most who had the items they would need and the safety talks, we drove over to the cave. Parking was difficult because of a couple of fallen trees, but we managed to get everyone in. The trail to the cave also had one tree blown down that we bypassed. We reached the cave entrance unscathed.

What followed was a great time with the boys and most the leaders eagerly accepting the challenges of tight passages while others chose not to push the limits. The boys were jubilant and at times the cave was filled with happy screams and laughter. It was amazing (pun intended).

I also was thrilled to finally meet Mark Swelstad from COG, his son Jon, and his friend Jeff inside the cave.

All in all, it was a good time for everyone, building relationships, and enjoying the fellowship of fellow cavers. I believe everyone had a great time and left eager to cave again.

If you believe there is value in sharing your caving knowledge and abilities so the next generation can be like-minded and realize the importance of conservation and protection of the great natural resources we are blessed with, please consider guiding or tailgunning on one of the GSP Wild Caving Outings. Not a lot of experience is needed to tailgun and it affords the opportunity to get to know other cavers and possibly experience caves you aren't familiar with.



*Photo courtesy of Joe Truskowski*



*Photo courtesy of Joe Truskowski*

## **Another trip report about John Griffin Cave that you didn't know you needed to read!**

By Mark Swelstad

On April 12, I was in Kentucky to do a little caving with my son, Jon, and his friend Jeff Schebek. Since Jon works a lot of weekends, it's harder for him to get underground often,

and I also wanted to cut down some trees that had fallen on the property during the heavy storms they've had all winter and early spring.

We decided to go to John Griffin Cave, one that Jeff hadn't been to yet. John Griffin consists of 2 parallel passages that intersect a few times. The main passage is an intermittent stream passage which is usually dry but has some standing water in places. I have never seen this passage flood but I think it might be an overflow route in heavy rains. The other passage that runs parallel is slightly higher and sometimes involves some quick crawling. You can make a fun loop through the cave this way. In the back of the cave, there is a dome with a small waterfall.



*Photo courtesy of Mark Swelstad*

Near here there is a rock in the ceiling with some really cool coral fossils that are worth seeing. Also here is a tube that blows significant air. There is a room and some passage past this which leads to a LONG crawl in a stream passage. The guys that mapped this cave back in the 1990's I think

surveyed for about 1000 feet of nasty belly crawl in water before running out of people willing to survey!



*Photo courtesy of Mark Swelstad. I believe this is some old wood from when they did Saltpetre mining in this cave. Don't quote me though.*



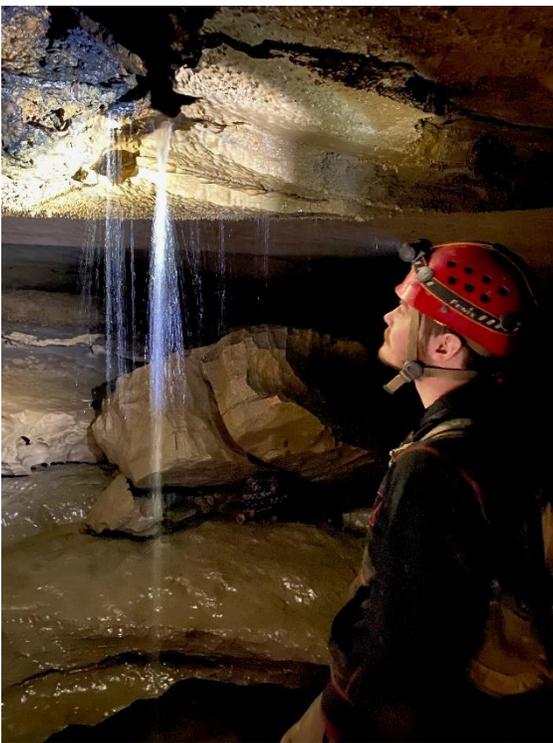
*Jeff walking through the drier upper parallel passage – this area has some interesting formations. Photo courtesy of Mark Swelstad*



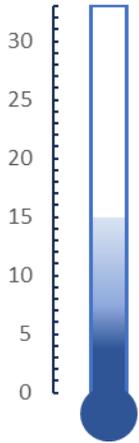
*This picture is of the rock I mentioned that has the coral formations. I am looking straight up here, and the rock is probably 3 feet long and maybe 18 inches wide. You kind of have to know where it is. Photo by Mark S.*

*Jon admiring some water. Photo by Mark S.*

After this easy cave trip, we went back to GSP and cut down a leaning tree near the shed in the upper parking lot. On Sunday, we fired off a few rounds with my pistols and then I headed back home. It was a good weekend.



Be a part of History, Join the GSP 33!  
We Need 18 more people to meet our goal!



Will you be one of the 33 who will commit to supporting GSP with a small \$25 monthly donation over the next 5 years?

Proceeds are used to pay off the loans used to purchase the Caretakers Residence.

Are you interested in a free family camping pass for the next 5 years, a free polo shirt, and a celebration at the end of the commitment period?

Please contact Patrick Gibson for more details!  
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Payment Options:

1. Mail a check Monthly or some other defined period such as quarterly/yearly
2. Pay once in Full
3. Paypal as a recurring payment with GSP 33 in comment

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