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August 26, 1992

Dear |

I received your inquiry about the Colorado Cave Survey. Enclosed is some material that might be of interest. Our focus is somewhat different than what you seem to be considering. Our political focus was not the original intent, though. It just happened. Having virtually all our caves on Federal lands is certainly a factor.

The letter to Evelyn Bradshaw gives some of the history of the Survey. Also gives a sample of some of the petty political posturing that can happen.

Basically the Survey is a coalition of the organized caving groups in the state, who all are Internal Organizations of the NSS. I don't know if that is suited to your situation in Illinois. Getting everyone to agree that the effort is worthwhile and providing reassurance that they will be involved is a good foundation and provides access to existing resources.

I know of at least a half dozen Colorado cavers who have "secret" caves. "Secret" in the sense that they have not been written up yet. I don't think this is any real criticism of the Survey. The need to have a secret is often a basic human thing, as is the need to share a secret. If things there are like here, you will have to address the question of confidentiality. It is not an issue that has been pushed here. I don't feel that the goal of having complete files is sufficient justification to cause divisions and generate bad feelings among cavers. Frankly if there is no trust, there will be no reports.

I don't think rechecking the same ground is necessarily a bad thing. It is real easy to miss something, especially a crack or blowhole that may be susceptible to pick and shovel. While caves are fairly stable, entrances can come and go in a season from erosion and fill. We have lost one cave entrance here in Colorado to a land slide. It had originally been opened by prospectors many years ago. The slope is so altered is not really clear where one would start digging. As we diggers

believe--caves are common, it is entrances that are scarce. I also think you will find caves will be remapped even if maps are not lost. Cave cartography is evolving. Common practices of fifteen years ago are no longer acceptable. Quality control of survey teams in the cave is always a problem. Some errors become obvious only after the map is put to use.

Generally, our policy on access to cave files is that they are open to cavers of good reputation and researchers with a need. Inquiries from Scout troops and such are dealt with by referring them to well known and well used caves suited to their purpose or to the Cave of the Winds which has both regular show cave facilities and a "wild" cave tour. Known mineral collectors are given a lecture and nothing more. We have a Colorado Grotto member who knows who most of them are. Getting a membership list of local gem and mineral clubs is a good defensive strategy. Might be worth the price of joining. If in doubt, I send the matter to the Survey Chairperson. As I noted above, virtually all our caves are on Federal land. The Federal Cave Protection Act is going to force us to face the question of information sharing in a whole new way. There is much apprehension here about that law and its potential for problems.

Costs of the Survey have mainly been trivial and covered by the individual maintaining them. If there were a major need, I imagine it would be referred to the member Grottos.

I hope this is useful. Let me know if we can be of further help.

Sincerely,

Bill Yett, NSS 3604

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August 19, 1991

Evelyn Bradshaw  
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Dear Evelyn,

When we last talked you noted that the Colorado Cave Survey was somewhat different than other state surveys. I made a mental note to write sometime on the peculiar history and function of the Survey. The time has come and it will help me sort out some thoughts of my own.

The Colorado Cave Survey was my suggestion. It was around 1968 or 1969. I had just returned to Colorado after a stint as a Federal employee in D.C. Regional, state, and even county cave surveys were very popular back there at the time. I drafted the Survey charter and served as chair for its first years. The catalyst for the Survey was the discovery of Groaning Cave. Groaning became the state's largest cave by a wide margin. It had shown that promise from the start.

Groaning was found by a student caver from the Colorado School of Mines, John Pollack. The initial exploration was by Student Grotto cavers from there and Colorado State University ~~(now University of Northern Colorado)~~ at Fort Collins. They did bring the find to the attention of selected Colorado Grotto Cavers. As I saw it, the problem was to recognize and encourage the student groups, phase in the greater resources of the "Establishment" Grotto, and do it so no one felt pushed out, threatened or unwelcome.

The Colorado Cave Survey was a structural answer. All three grottos were equal members. The Survey named coordinators for the Groaning area, the cave itself, and an overall Chair. All appointments and major decisions had to be unanimous and decision-making was by consensus. The Survey quickly established relations with the US Forest Service and worked out cooperative management and protection for Groaning Cave.

It worked out pretty well and the arrangements for Groaning with the Forest Service have endured to the present. A somewhat youthful state wide caving community developed. Loyalties got

blurred and the Forest Service appreciated having a single group to deal with. There was one unfortunate trauma, however, suffered by the Colorado Grotto. Some life style issues arose as a result of the youthful infusion and a number of older cavers withdrew from the Grotto. In spite of that, many of us remember that time as a golden age for Colorado cavers. In addition to Groaning Cave we ranged from Montana to deep into Mexico and did some fine caving.

The Survey does maintain a set of open files. The historic 1950-60's files of the Colorado Grotto were copied and became the core of the Survey files. It was our optimistic conviction back then that the state's cave potential had hardly been scratched. We prepared a cave report form suitable for computer entry and set up files for each Grotto. A number of new caves were found near Groaning but there was no deluge of discoveries. No other comparable cave area was found in the state. In spite of a lot of ridgewalking and recently, digging, new discoveries are few and short. Frankly, between Lloyd Parris's book and back issues of grotto periodicals, there is little of interest in Colorado that is not now in print. Except for Donald Davis, there is little intensity left in the old concern here about secrecy and publishing.

The old student grottos dissolved in time. Other, regular, grottos were chartered in Colorado and became Survey members. The Survey's charter was rewritten in the eighties. The Survey performed its main functions well--being a forum for cooperative action and a central voice to authorities for state-wide caver interests. That is, except for a few episodes.

Several times recently, we have had individuals come to the Survey with proposals for management of a specific cave or area that they wished to have endorsed. By "management," of course, they are asking that access be limited or controlled regarding the cave or area. Not surprising, it was the proponent who was pivotal in deciding access. When they did not get exactly what they wanted, they went off in an effort to make their own arrangements with the land control agency. In at least one case the impression was left they were representing the Survey.

A current problem is about a cave called Lasunder or Wall in the Hole Cave. No need to go into details. Hopefully, again, the Survey may be useful in avoiding a divisive battle. At this point, the factions are trying to gain advantage through the Survey rather than find a generally acceptable settlement. The Bureau of Land Management, the responsible Federal Landlord, seems to prefer to work with the Survey and has sent a draft "Memorandum of Understanding" to the Survey. That probably will be OK with everyone on this side of the Continental Divide. The Timberline Grotto would prefer that custody be awarded to them. But their attitude has consistently been that the West Slope

belongs to them.

I have wondered at times if the existence of the Survey itself has not influencing the political processes here. Every Grotto chartered in Colorado is entitled by the Survey constitution to two votes regardless of size. I know there was more to the founding of the Front Range Grotto than this, but having their own votes was very possibly a consideration for the founding core group. The FRG has since taken a life of its own, though I still wonder if Denver needs two grottos. To a large extent, the attendance at both is the same people.

The recent metamorphosis of the Sangre de Cristo Grotto is interesting and may have some of these elements to it. As I understand the story, Gene Dover basically handed over "his" Grotto to a number of Metro area cavers who have "reorganized" it. It now has no fixed site or scheduled meetings, they "meet on cave trips", have no dues and only two elected officers-Chair and Survey Representative. These are the two officers recognized by the charter of the Cave Survey as the voting representatives of any member grotto. I hear that no one has been able to reach Gene in weeks. I noticed that in the last Members' Manual there was no listing for the Grotto, and only one NSS member in Pueblo--Bruce Costa. I am enclosing a copy of Sangre de Cristo's Membership list I was given. Frankly, going over the list, it looks to me like we now have a a third Denver area Grotto.

I have been told that Colorado cavers have a national reputation for being unusually intense about their political problems. Is this accurate? The reputation, that is? Then too, I hear that such political hassles are not uncommon elsewhere. The fact that we have so many cavers and so few easily accessible caves may be a part of the problem. However, if everyone could just deflate their egos a little, I think we could all fit in the caves available.

I do miss that past "golden age" when we all knew and welcomed each other, caved together, and didn't care who belonged to what.

Pat passed me her copy of the Spring "Social Scientist" and I have found it most useful in sorting out my own response to some of our problems. I intend to join that Section. Speaking of such matters. I received from you a copy of Spelean History. Was that a glitch in you computer, did I join and forget, or do you want to exchange for The Diggers Gazette? I am enclosing the first two issues of the Gazette and hope it is of interest.

Thanks for listening.

yott