

# Western Cave Conservancy

Protecting the West's Last Frontier

Vol 9 No 1 Summer 2015



## The President's Column

August 15, 1889, was a typically hot, breezeless day in the Mother Lode when California State Mineralogist Henry G. Hanks



made his way by stage-coach to the then abandoned gold mining site near Sheep Ranch. Soon he was crawling into the darkness of a newly (re) discovered cavern and shortly thereafter was knee deep in chilly water supervising miners re-

covering fossil bones and such from the several less-than-tepid pools. The little cave was known as Miller's Cave, named after the local rancher who owned the property. A Mr. E. Sexton of New York City had previously explored the cave in 1850, leaving his signature scratched in its silent marble walls, but the cave had fallen from the public's eye in the intervening 40-plus years. The near-mythic Stanford Grotto, researching lost California caves during the early 1950's, discovered the cave and researched its history via no-longer-published newspapers and journals.

named Cave of the Catacombs (CotC), completing most of a year's negotiation. By the time you read this, the cave will be gated and plans afoot to map the cavern to meet current mapping standards. Future work, overseen by Project Manager David Weaver, will include archaeological, biological, and paleontological work.

In late summer of 2015, Chuck Chavdarian, Bruce Rogers, and Pat Helton met in a local restaurant in the San Francisco Bay area with the owners of yet another Mother Lode cave and signed a year-to-year lease for Sink Cave. Negotiations, started in early 2015 by WCC Acquisitions Director Chuck Chavdarian, were completed in a remarkably short time. Again, a modest amount per year was accepted and soon we will be gating this cave as well. It is known for its paleontological values with more than 22 species of mammal remains being present, as well as historical value. Another mapping project will enhance the existing 1994 map of the cave, adding more detail and a profile to the map and thus bringing it up to current standards. As with CotC, Chuck Chavdarian will be the Project Manager for Sink Cave.

Several research trips into the netherworld under a remote part of the San Vicente Redwoods tract has revealed a former world of climate change recorded in speleothems. Researchers at Vanderbilt University have undertaken a multi-year study of the record of past climate locked in stone deep within a major cave. Other trips have started mapping an extensive network of underground mine workings abandoned for more than a half century. These workings and their relics reflect the technology of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and are themselves a treasure trove of information formerly lost about the history of the area.

The work at Windeler Cave project continues providing an opportunity to visit a Central California cave that is amazingly intact when compared with many

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It was a fine January day in Stockton in 2014 when Chuck Chavdarian, David Weaver, and I sat in the comfortable kitchen of the cave's owner. With little flourish, we signed a five-year lease for a cave we've

other, longer known California caves. Future tasks will expand our knowledge of the cave's extent and features and assist in interpreting them to both the caving community and the public.

The 2014-15 interval has been a banner time for the WCC with the signing of the CotC and SiCa leases, a pair of important steps guided by Chuck Chavdarian; restarting the Newsletter with the keen oversight of Mark Bowers; a small bequeathment from WCC Plank Owner Bill Papke; continuing work in the San Vicente Redwoods tract; and, perhaps the most important, the electrification of the Weller Field House. The Weller electrification project, done under the supervision of Marianne Russo and Jerry Johnson, now allows us to hold meetings, classes, and such at the site. This newsletter is a reinvigoration of communication within the WCC and informing the general caving community of our continuing effort to enhance cave conservation attitudes. Continuing work at San Vicente Redwoods now includes exploration and mapping of the extensive underground workings beneath the abandoned quarry, a task that continues to grow in magnitude. And, finally, the leasing of two more California caves allows us to continue with our mission to preserve cave access to Western caves.

The future of the WCC is still looking robust and will continue to build—where will your contribution and skills be aimed?

### San Vicente Redwoods

Bruce Rogers, Project Manager

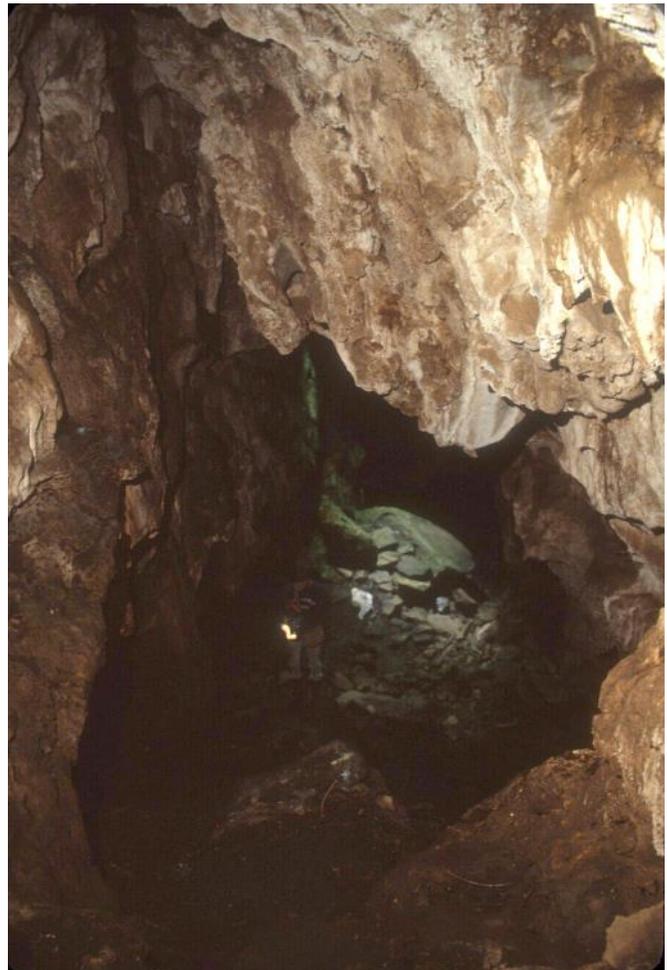
Now that we have official sanction from Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) and the Sempervirens Fund (SVF), owners of the area, to work within the San Vicente Redwoods tract, itself newly renamed from the CEMEX tract, we are starting to make trips into the area for specific tasks. Among those tasks are extending mapping in the caves present and supporting geochemical and paleoclimate work as well as bat research.

On February first of 2014, Drs. Jessica Oster, Arron Covey (both from Vanderbilt University), and Cory Lawrence (U.S. Geological Survey) met Mark Conover and me for a trip to White Moon Cave. A small Black Box was installed about 700 feet within the cave to sample temperature, relative humidity, and CO<sub>2</sub> pressure as part of data gathering to calibrate the dating of broken speleothems we'd collected for Jessica's paleoclimate project. Several glass plates were

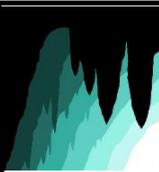
also placed under drip water sites to collect information about current calcite deposition. The gates on the several cave entrances in the area were inspected and seen to be in fine shape. Unfortunately, the small Townsend's Big-eared bat colony seen the previous summer had vacated its location, but it is assumed that their presence was probably a seasonal overflow from some other site.

A caver finds their way across the main room of SiCa Cave in the Mother Lode. Note the large breakdown block that formerly was the ceiling of the room and now lies under the large skylight entrance in the background of this photo. 1982 photo by Bruce Rogers.

In mid-August of 2014, Chuck Chavdarian, Jim Laker, Nick Schmalenberger, and I visited the haulage/drain tunnel under the quarry. The tunnel is in good structural shape with low water discharge, not unexpected with the current drought. The purpose was to assess the feasibility of surveying the tunnel for POST and SVF. Highlights of the trip were observing a mature Pacific Giant salamander nearly



1200 feet inside the tunnel portal and finding nearly 6-inch-long iron oxide (goethite?) stalactites growing on assorted rusting pieces of abandoned machinery. We found a fair amount of mining machinery still in place within the tunnel and began photo document-



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ing it. We plan on photographing and cataloging it for POST/SVF as part of an attempt to reconstruct the mining history of the area, something lost during their purchase of the property in 2010.

On November 14, 2014, Barb Maeso-Ruble, Steve Ruble, David Weaver, and I returned to start a survey of the haulage/drain tunnels beneath the quarry proper. POST volunteers had removed a great deal of invasive vegetation along the access route, but someone had spray painted the now abandoned concrete loading structure at the tunnel portal. About six hours later we had surveyed approximately 700 feet of tunnel, made geologic notes, found several small caves and grottos (some of which were lined with inch-long dog tooth spar), and revisited the Pacific Giant salamander, who was doing just fine, thank you.

Yet another trip was made to the tract on March 4, 2015. On this trip, Oster, Covey, Lawrence and I were accompanied by several members of the Santa Cruz Sheriff's Search and Rescue Group. The SAR folks were eager to learn the location of these caves so if called out on an incident (the tract is within unincorporated land in the county), they would have some idea where they were. The Black Box was found to have failed just three days into its year-long sojourn in the cave, a great disappointment. Several possible cave entrances were also spotted in the steep slopes in the area, but will require rope work to enter.

Yet another trip to the quarry area was taken on June 24, 2015, with a crew of biologists headed by Ms. Leila Harris. They are conducting a resampling of Townsend's big-eared bat locations done in the 1980's and 90's. The results were very encouraging. While no Townsend's Big-eared bats were observed in

the haulage/drain tunnel underlying the quarry, there was a small group roosting within the gated entrance to Marrs Cave. When "White Moon Cave" was visited, the trip was called short because of a maternity colony of more than 20 bats just inside the gated entrance. That night an extended period of night observations and listening via various electronic gear showed not only were there Townsend's Big-eared bats present, but also Big Brown bats, Red bats, Mexican free-tail bats, Pallid bats, and other Myotis species (the latter requiring detailed examination of the acoustic logs collected for final identification).

In addition, an immature Pacific Giant salamander upwards of eight inches long, but still with gills, was seen in the stream that was coursing its way along the floor of the tunnel. It was also noted that the POST volunteers were continuing with removing invasive species plants within the general quarry area and had removed the graffiti present in November of 2014.

We are continuing to collect materials, photographs, and accounts of past explorations in the San Vicente Quarry area so if any of you WCC members have materials about this area, we would be delighted to borrow them and make copies for the record. Current WCC members who would like to participate in field trips are also encouraged to let us know your interests and skills. The POST-SVF requirement for a million dollars personal liability coverage for working in the area is taken care of by our insurance policy covering WCC members on official WCC trips.

## **A Word from Our New Public**

### **Relations Director**

**By Mark Bowers**

I would like to take a few words to let everyone know that the conservancy is very much alive and thriving. Yes, as with other organizations, finding people to help with tasks like writing newsletters has been difficult. It is not a trivial task and does not get much acknowledgement. I would like to thank Heather McDonald and Bill Papke for all the work they did in the past for the Western Cave Conservancy including their many years as the newsletter editors. This newsletter, and newsletters to follow, are the work of a newsletter editing group consisting of Bruce Rogers, Pat Helton, Marianne Russo, and myself. However, it should be noted that the WCC would like to extend the opportunity for someone in need of some extra cash to be the editor of the newsletter, including encouraging the writing of articles by others, for a stipend of \$250 per issue. Feel free to contact me if you are interested at [mbowers@westerncaves.org](mailto:mbowers@westerncaves.org)

We have several projects that are starting to ramp up that I would like to let you know about. We have updated our brochure and made it available for circulation. The brochure now contains up-to-date information as well as a tag to scan which will take you to our website as well as allow for convenient donations. Contact me if you would like a few copies for your organization. The next project includes an informational movie and a short clip including a tour of the inside of Windeler cave and some information about its history. This movie will be made available to grottos upon request to share with their membership at meetings or other events. The short movie clip will be about 5 minutes and is intended for YouTube. We hope to start getting the younger generation excited about caving and conservation. If you are interested in contributing to either of those projects, again contact me.

In addition to those projects, we could use some help at the NSS convention in Ely in 2016. We would like the WCC to have a good presence at the convention. In order to do that we will need a few volunteers to help. Please contact me if you will be willing to help

before and/or during the convention.

If you are interested in joining the Public Relations Committee to help with developing new ideas to help get the word out about what we do and why it is so important you may contact me at

[mbowers@westerncaves.org](mailto:mbowers@westerncaves.org)

## **Windeler Update**

**By Mark Bowers**

Windeler cave, as you may know, has a rich history leading up to its coming under the management of the WCC. Currently the WCC leads five trips per year through the cave for the members of California grottos and one trip per year for those not affiliated with a California grotto. We are now finding that many of the people that were interested in visiting the cave have now had the opportunity to do so. The cave has a vertical entrance and many delicate formations and is thus only for cavers with more advanced caving skills. If you have not had the opportunity to visit the cave and would like to be on the list to go you may email Mark Bowers [mbowers@westerncaves.org](mailto:mbowers@westerncaves.org)

## **NEWS FROM THE WELLER PRESERVE**

**Marianne Russo, Preserve Manager**

The Weller Preserve, home to Rippled Cave, has been the scene of quite a bit of construction activity over the last couple of years and it will still be a while yet before everything is finished, at least for a while... until we think of something else to do. All of this work has been generously financed by several cavers who have envisioned the Weller Preserve as a great location for cave related classes, meetings and research projects. The current improvements to the Fieldhouse and our outbuildings are beginning to make this vision possible.

The projects we have undertaken over the last year or so include the electrification of the Fieldhouse with the subsequent installation of ceiling and wall insulation and sheetrock, construction of a roomy tool shed

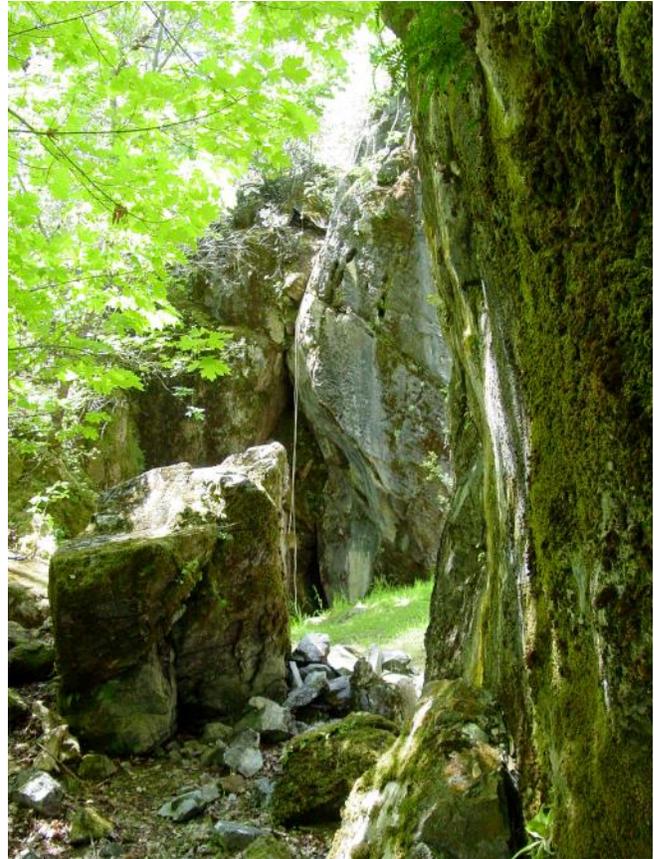
to accommodate all the property management tools and supplies (and get them out of the Fieldhouse) and finally, some upgrades to the “Stool Shed” (home of the porta-potty) using left over sheetrock and other building supplies. All this work would not have been possible without the very generous monetary contributions of Steve and Barb Ruble, Jim and Clare Lakner, Ray and Gale Beach, Mark and Sharon Bowers, Jerry Johnson, Martin Haye, Dan Snyder, Preston Addison and John Ferrari . Contributions of labor were as follows: Wiring the Fieldhouse was done by Steve Ruble and Marianne Russo assisting expert electrician, John Ferrari. Terry Silva, Bruce Rogers and Konrad Allert assisted Jerry Johnson and me with the Tool Shed construction, the wall insulation and other prep work in the Fieldhouse. Finally, Preston Addison supervised the installation of ceiling insulation and sheetrock, assisted by the labor of Mark Linn, Roberts, Bruce Rogers, Urs Mader, Dave Mosely, Finn and Rowan Addison, Pat Helton and Marianne Russo.

Getting power to the Fieldhouse was quite a journey. Fortunately there was already a power pole on the preserve property and it was close enough to the Fieldhouse so that no auxiliary poles were needed to string the wire. PG&E representatives were very helpful in helping me plan this project and make sure everything happened on time. It took just about one year, Oct. 2013 through Oct. 2014, from start to finish. After clearing away all the brush and trees between the building and pole we got serious about raising the money we needed. A real stroke of luck came our way with Steve Ruble and his friend, commercial electrician, John Ferrari. John was able to donate a couple of days during the summer of 2014 to complete the wiring of the building and in addition he donated the majority of wire, boxes, connectors and other materials. After passing our county and PG&E inspections we were finally able to schedule the actual hook-up to power. What a wonderful thing it was to just to turn on the lights for the first time and be able to plug in our tools rather than haul up a generator!

Rippled Cave quarry Easter, 2004. Old written accounts mention a cave approximately where Rippled Cave is located. In the late 1800's, the area was quarried for marble to feed an adjacent limekiln to make quicklime for cement and paint. A part of the cave was quarried away, but apparently most of the passage remains for all of us to enjoy. The site is often used for vertical practices by the WCC. Mother Lode Grotto,

Diablo Grotto, and San Francisco Bay Chapters. April, 2004 photo by Bruce Rogers

During the late summer and fall of 2014 we constructed the new Tool Shed (six by twelve feet) that is located up the hill behind the Fieldhouse and adjacent to



the Stool Shed that has been there for several years. Constructed with similar siding and trim and painted with the same color scheme, it matches the Fieldhouse very nicely. Lighting is provided by a skylight and a variety of shelves and dividers provide places to store all our short and long handled tools, extra fence posts, sprayers, tubs, water containers, ladders, small tools and sundry other supplies.

Late last fall we finished installing insulation in the Fieldhouse walls and nailed up the sheetrock to the cleats we installed. Then in mid-January of this year during a long and frenetic weekend the ceiling insulation and sheetrock were installed. We even got most of the joints taped and screws covered with the first coat of joint compound. I was so impressed with how everyone worked together to get this done and I also want to point out that the entire stock of sheetrock was donated by Preston Addison. The wells they built to

keep our skylights available work perfectly and still allow a great deal of natural light into the building. Over the rest of the winter and through this spring I have worked to finish applying the final four coats of joint compound to smooth out the wall surfaces. Later this year the walls will get primed, we will nicely trim out the windows and door and get to all the other finish details. After a bit of re-engineering the door latches, we have now installed a screen door so that mosquitos and other insects won't be do bothersome inside during the warmer weather.

Future plans include making a small patio at the front the Fieldhouse using a pallet of new pavers donated by Jim and Clare Lakner and a paved path leading to the Tool and Stool sheds using some reclaimed stone pavers (also donated by the Lakners). Slowly but surely we are creating a very useful asset to the WCC and the caving community at large. And all the while, cavers are still enjoying trips to Rippled Cave and having great vertical practices on the lovely cliff faces that surround the cave.