

# Mammoth Cave Restoration Field Camp, Aug. 6-11, 2012

by Gary Gibula

Finally, it was that time of year again! After participating in last year's week-long Mammoth Cave Restoration Field Camp (my first one), I'd been anxiously looking forward to this year's effort for several reasons: to assist with the upkeep of one of America's National Parks, to be underground in Mammoth Cave five days in a row and to be with caver-friends who all shared the same values of caring about the health of the world's longest cave.

I arrived at the Maple Springs area **on Sunday** (Aug. 5), got settled and reacquainted with old friends.



Our registration fee paid for meals throughout the week, beginning with dinner Sunday evening. The camp had secured the services of a professional chef, but he wasn't yet 'on duty.' Dinner, therefore, was skillfully prepared by cavers Ken DeJonge and John Durall. Granted, it's debatable how much skill truly is needed to grill hot dogs. Nevertheless, the enhanced flavor of the American frankfurter certainly is enhanced when the barbeque cooking is applied. Add to that a little potato salad and caver! In addition to making sure the entire crew of activity, had arrived safely for the week, the Sunday dinner also was a chance for address the group with standard boilerplate advisories, like 'be careful', 'don't twist your ankle' and 'be safe'. It also was a chance for our group's National Park Service liaison, Mammoth Cave Park Ecologist (and NSS caver) Rick Olson, to present us with a few reminders, like 'wait for tourist groups to pass, but don't step off the trail because they might get the idea that's okay for them to do.'



Right about that time, my friend and Cave Research Foundation caver Pete Zabrok stopped by the camp. Although we'd received some sporadic light rain throughout the afternoon and evening, Pete and I still decided to play some musical instruments out on the patio, with Preston Forsythe doing his best to accompany on the egg-shaker.

**On Monday**, we geared-up and went into the cave in three teams: lint removal, electrical wire removal and 'river rats'. I was on the team of seven River Rats, whose job it was to hike to the River Styx and remove old pieces of creosote-soaked wood from the water. We got most of it at last summer's camp, but there still was some left in the far reaches.

Several of us, while sherpa-ing debris a half-mile to an off-trail area called the Chop Shop, encountered tourist groups (four times throughout the day). We were told to pass quietly if we were hauling debris, but if our hands were empty we were to wait in the shadows for the tour to pass.



The three work gangs exited the cave for a sack lunch eaten while lounging around the Historic Entrance. Everyone then returned to the dark and gloomy depths for more of the same tasks.

Before we exited for lunch, I happened to spot in the river a 12-foot piece of lumber that hadn't previously been noticed. On our return, we climbed over a 3-foot chain link fence and scrambled down a steep clay/mud bank to the water's edge. But instead of just the one piece of wood, upon closer inspection we found a dozen pieces of lumber and plywood of varying dimensions. We placed them on the bank because there was not enough manpower to get the heavy, waterlogged wood up the steep 25-foot bank.



Monday evening, Chef Mark had prepared taco lasagna for dinner and a homemade cheesecake for dessert. Following the meal, caver/musician (and ACCA founder) Dave Foster joined me and Pete for some evening music.

Chef Mark Hilary Williams is Chuck Schubert's longtime friend and whitewater rafting partner from St. Louis, who agreed at a late date to be

the camp cook for the week.

Mark is an amazing guy. After receiving a 2-yr Associate degree in Culinary Arts (earning him the title Certified Culinarian), he studied Baking and Hotel Operations for a **fourth** year. --All this as a Monsanto biochemist. Wow!

"I went to school just for fun, and to be a Mark said modestly.

Mark currently teaches Adult Education classes at his local community college and teens to cook for other volunteers doing at Sherwood Forest Camp (a long-term for economically-disadvantaged children).

If that's not enough, Mark is webmaster editor of his local chapter of the Ameri-eration, a "non-profit organization of culi-dedicated to furthering the education, camaraderie within our culinary commu-

ing to the social and nutritional needs of our com-often volunteers to cook at their



raisers. Mark deserves our gratitude, and indirectly also that of Mammoth Cave and the NPS, for his efforts at Restoration Field Camp are 100-percent volunteer. Thanks Mark! ("*...one of us, one of us...*")

**On Tuesday**, we River Rats returned to the River Styx area to work on removing the waterlogged lumber that we'd left on the bank of the steep clay hill. Steve Gentry expertly rigged a haul system to the chain link fence, while Zack Copeland and I slid down to the water's edge to attach the wood to a rope and sling that was dropped to us.

But while making a final 'dummy check', I happened to notice four or five more pieces of wood in about one foot of water. I jumped across to a breakdown slab that was in the water for a better grab at it. And while glancing at that angle, I also noticed a dark, round object in the water. It turned out to be a very old tin cup, the size of a coffee cup, formerly painted white with a blue rim.

Rick Olson was doing some recon-work in the stream passage and happened to come upon us. He exclaimed that he knew exactly what it was. The cup had hardened, black tar crusted over most of its



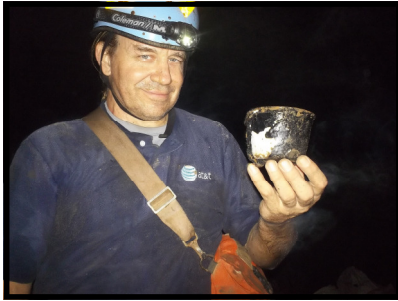
better cook,"

cooking annually volun-  
restoration work  
summer camp

and newsletter  
can Culinary Fed-  
nary professionals  
certification and  
nity, and respond-  
community at large". He  
occasional fund-



surface, and Rick said it was used for scooping tar from a larger bucket to repair and seal the seams of the boats that were used on the old river tour. Tar was scooped, and then a blowtorch was used to heat the cupful before pouring it on the boat.



Whereas we'd been told to leave any historic artifacts we happened to

come upon right where they were found in the cave, Rick stated that this was 'a significant archeological artifact' and that he needed to deliver the cup to the Park Archaeologist. I was awarded a 'gold star' for the day, and we playfully named the area where the cup was recovered "Gibula's Grotto". Yeah, I like the sound of that!

But it was a team effort. Zack worked his butt off recovering waterlogged wood and helping hoist it up the slope. John



Durall had the risky position at the top of the slope, helping bring the

hailed wood over the fence. But big props go to Steve, who rigged the haul system, pulled rope and made it all happen. Nice job, Steve!

Following another sack lunch just outside the Historic Entrance, we returned to the River Styx area. But this time it was for the purpose of removing old electrical wire. Now that the wood remaining in the Echo River had been removed, the River Rats crew was repurposed.

The problem with this particular area was that

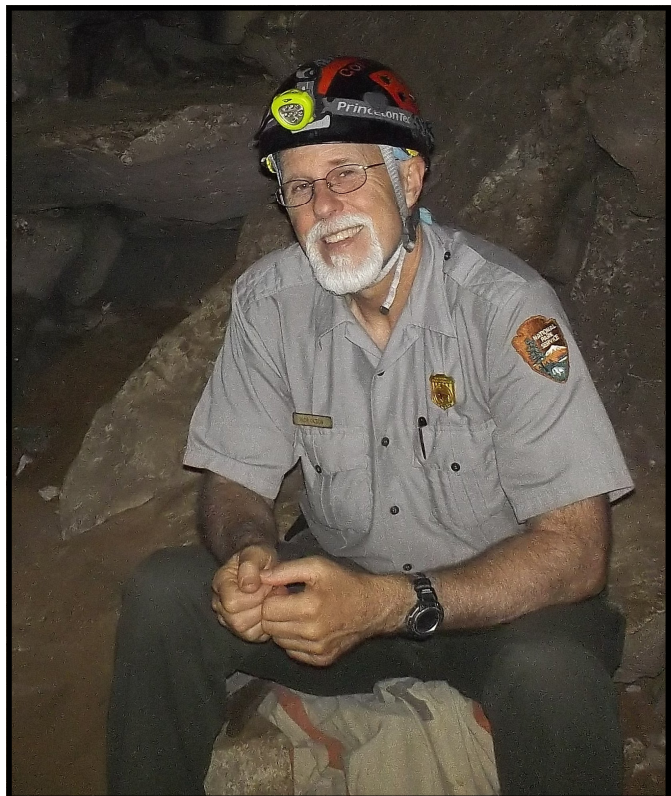
the wire had been buried in a huge bank of sand that had flowed in with spring rains and floods.

For the next three hours, we used two shovels and a pickaxe to dig sand away from the underside of a metal grate walkway that was elevated a few feet off the ground.

Dinner was an excellent fettuccine bolognese entrée. The sauce was made with three kinds of meat, heavy cream and white wine. Delicious! Dessert was lemon cake with lemon frosting.

**On Wednesday**, we again split into groups. One crew continued what they'd been doing all week: removing lint, and doing a very good job of it, from the results. Another crew of heartier cavers continued work on electrical wire, cutting and removing it from the area.

And the River Rats contingent now was tasked with continuing to remove wire that was buried in sand along the Echo River where we'd been working the previous day.



It was three of us, digging in sand underneath a metal grate walkway. Upon further investigation, it was decided to attack the bundle of five wires from further down the passage. We ended up removing a good 50-feet of wire before we headed back to the Historic Entrance for lunch.

After we'd all consumed a couple sandwiches and mini-bags of Doritos, we picked up a few more crew members for more wire removal down by the Echo River.

The evening meal consisted of cheese, pepperoni and supreme pizzas from a restaurant in town, served at a very nice, enclosed, one-room pavilion in the picnic area on the Mammoth grounds. It was there that Ken set up a tripod and shot our official group photo.

Chef Mark brought along an excellent berry cobbler, which was served with ice cream.

Although there was a Wednesday evening cave trip offered, I chose not to go because of extremely sore leg muscles. About 15 people were allowed to stroll down some of the main passage of Mammoth Cave (the route of the Lantern Tour), except your caver lighting was used and all tourist lights were left off. Neat.

**On Thursday**, my aches and pains were starting to get worse. After the usual soreness in my calf muscles, which started two days prior, I was now getting some mild ache in my quadriceps (right above my knee, on the front of the thigh). Guess I'll need to truly "train" for the week-long restoration in the future... not just perform some stretching exercises before entering the cave each morning!

Following breakfast of thick-sliced French toast, the crew was to begin the day at the Elevator Entrance to Mammoth Cave. But there was a good half-hour delay at the Green River ferry due to workers doing some maintenance on the boat (replacing a solenoid switch on the motor that turns the main propeller-paddle at the side of the boat).

We brought our lunches with us this day because we were hiking some 45-minutes from the Snowball Dining Room, down the El Ghor passage all the way to the Echo River. It was there that we came across the large concrete pad we also worked on the previous summer. The concrete slab formerly was used to moor the flat-bottomed boats used on the old river tour so they wouldn't wash away when the passage took on spring floodwaters. We'd destroyed about half of it last year, and this time we were determined to finish the job.

Several of us took turns hefting two sledgehammers, and before long, the slab was reduced down to rubble and smaller pieces. The detritus was placed in burlap sacks and transported down the passage-way. It looked like there would be more of the same to do on Friday.

Dinner that evening was an excellent spaghetti with asparagus, followed by apple pie with caramel apple topping. Mmmmm. After dinner, commemorative t-shirts for the event were distributed to those who paid (\$10) for one.

**On Friday**, we woke up and enjoyed scrambled eggs with biscuits and gravy. After driving over to the Elevator entrance, we descended and hiked Silman Avenue back down towards Echo River. When we reached Cascade Hall, we found the scant remnants of the concrete pad, now broken into chunks.

Steve Gentry and Mary Schubert made short work of placing the remaining pieces into burlap bags. The rest of the gang brought the bags of rocks to the base of a tall hill of sand about 50 yards away. The group then formed a bucket brigade to hand the bags, one by one, up the steep 30-foot hill of loose sand. After that, it took no more than 45-minutes to walk all the bags to the halfway point of the passage, the Valley Way Side Cut.





Bill and Rick then informed the group that our workday had ended! Except for seven cavers, the group headed for the exit.

I joined the remaining group for a short in-cave reward trip to the Cathedral Dome feature inside Mammoth.

Larry Matiz, our most experienced caver, led the way. We first went back to the Snowball Dining Room to reorganize, then the group hiked down Boone Avenue.

We cruised down some moderate-level caving passage and eventually left the electric-lighted tourist passages. The group descended a wooden ladder/stair, past the 'lantern room', and came to several tall domes that went as high as 100-feet. After asking Larry two or three times, "is THIS cathedral dome?", we finally (almost anti-climactically) arrived at our destination.

The thing that differentiated Cathedral from other domes was not only its height (about 120-feet) but the beautiful horizontal lines of stratus that went all the way up. We saw horizontal rings and bands that were a dozen shades of brown, going all the way up. Neat!

Near the Cathedral dome was another historic feature. On the wall of the chamber that adjoined the dome were deeply scalloped tongs of rock that jutted-out, about 10-feet up the side wall. Hanging from two of the scallops were two old rusty horse-shoes.

In the old days, Mammoth Cave tour guides would clambor up a rock shelf, about five feet off the floor. They'd then stand up, and begin tapping the scalloped



tongs with the metal horseshoe, producing a deep bell-like "bong".

By special dispensation from trip leader Larry, I was encouraged to climb up and try it!

Omg, I almost didn't want to do it. But I carefully got myself up on the shelf, took one horseshoe in my gloved hand, and *very very* lightly tapped on a scallop. It made an amazing tone! I tapped on another, different-sized tong ...and then another, and another. Although I was being oh, so careful to not overdo it, and although I discerned a pleasing tone (as I tried to tap-out a Santana-based Latin rhythm), the guys below me reported a deep, rich, resounding 'bong' that could be felt in the chest. Amazing!

On the way back through the unimproved passages, we suddenly heard voices. It was the Wild Cave Tour! Our group of seven stepped aside for the 15-or-so cavers, all in their cute, matching green jump-suits, to pass.

After exiting the cave up the elevator, and while munching a sandwich in the waiting area on the surface, I enjoyed a half-hour chat with a couple young Park Service employees who worked in Mammoth replacing lightbulbs, walking the tour routes and emptying in-cave trash cans.

Next stop was an impromptu slide show presentation back at the Ranger Station training room, where we learned about explorations at Quintana Roo in Mexico's Yucutan Peninsula. It was there that NPS officials took the opportunity to thank the many restoration camp volunteers who attended. We were told that the man-hours of work contributed amounted to a value of **\$38,600 in labor**. Amazing!

As a small measure of gratitude, we were given Mammoth Cave 'volunteer' baseball caps. The Director also personally told me that travel-cost stipends for volunteers, which were discontinued over a decade ago, were being considered for reinstatement. Hope that goes through --it would really help!

We came back and enjoyed the best dinner of the week: thick-cut pork chops with a delicious Oreo-peanut butter ice cream pie for dessert.

Following the meal, everyone gathered on the patio for an impromptu awards ceremony.



"Every year, we just get in there and do amazing things," Bill said to the group. "It was outrageous once again. The Lint Crew did a bang-up job. I went in there and saw their accomplishments, they probably did nine football fields of lint. It was impeccable, I'm very impressed."

The entire lint crew, perhaps nine cavers, then came forward for recognition and were given small gifts.

Bill then singled-out caver John Kirk as "my sounding board, someone who I can always talk to about camp issues," and presented him with a recognition award, a jar of cherry preserves.

Something we didn't know, was that John did a good job chipping-away three old light fixtures that needed to be removed in Black Snake Avenue.

Rick Olson had some nice things to say about John, and gave him a framed photograph that appeared to show John's name etched into the wall inside Mammoth Cave (--hey, that's a Federal offense!).

"That'll teach you to put rocks in my pack!" Bill said, under his breath. (Earlier in the week, Bill had become separated from his cave pack, and fell victim to one of the oldest 'caver pranks'.)

Continuing with recognitions, Bill said: "I don't know if you realize what it takes to put this on, but it's a big thing cooking the food. A hungry caver is a mean caver. and Chuck Schubert came through and somehow talked Mark into doing it."

I learned that in previous years, it had been difficult obtaining quality help in the kitchen. Last year, it was Bonnie and Linda's combined efforts. At one time, the cavers themselves 'took turns' day-by-day with food preparation.

The small crowd applauded as Chef Mark stepped forward.

"I've enjoyed it," he said. "I love to cook, and and it shows. Next year will be a lot better!"

Cavers clapped their enthusiastic approval, knowing we'll have quality cuisine for the 2013 restoration camp.

Steve Gentry received a recognition reward for his valuable and always-humble assistance (he was presented with a commemorative jacket).





Pittsburgh Grotto member Dave Ruth received the "Sack Rat Award" for always being seen carrying something.

First-timer awards went to Ed McDaniel, Joe Jacob and Clarke Scott, who were given the large Max Kaemper map of Mammoth and an archaeology book.

But the Restoration Camp's most sought-after internal accolade, our Stephen Bishop Award, went to Linda Bundy for her 'can-do spirit', as Bill explained.

It should also be mentioned that caver Eric Buckelew also is the artisan who sculpted the Bishop award statue itself. It's a wonderful piece of art, and Eric creates a new one for every camp. Nice job, very creative and

impressive, Eric!

The awards gathering wound-up with Bill thanking "the River Rats, who did a lot, found some wire and set up a project for an upcoming weekend camp. Thanks to Roy Van Hooser (the previous Restoration Camp director) for heading-up the 'wire crew'. We thought they were just going to do some cover up, but they wound up finding another two or three tons of wire."

"Thanks to the 'lint crew' for doing a good job. On real lint, they got about four or five pounds of lint. It was a lot. I think we removed 800-ft of heavy wire --500 of solid copper and 1600 feet of ground wire."

Everyone in the group then received commemorative LED flashlights.

**On Saturday**, the pressure seemed to be turned off. We still awoke, albeit more lazily, at the usual time. Chef Mark prepared a big pot of oatmeal and warmed-up some leftover sausage gravy from previously served biscuits-and-gravy. Most of us enjoyed the gravy served over a slice of toast, which tasted great.

After that, the group split into three contingents. One went to Salts Cave (a 7-hour trip), another to the 'New Discovery' section of Mammoth, and my group of four headed for Great Onyx Cave, on the Mammoth grounds near Floyd Collins Crystal Cave, but not yet connected to Mammoth.

Along with Bill, John Kirk and Roy, we spent about two or three hours in the cave.

My week ended with a shower back at Maple Springs, a leftover pork chop that microwaved nicely and a trip to Bowling Green to hear Dave Foster's live band playing at a biker bar.

But while sitting around the patio picnic table, John Kirk, Dave Ruth and I recapped the experience.

"A great week," John enthused. "It was a lot of fun and we got a lot of work done. It was good food and good company all week long. A splendid outing!"

"If I had to sum up the week in one word? --tiring," Dave said wistfully, eating a cold pork chop, following his 7-1/2 hour trip to the Salts Cave portion of Mammoth. "My favorite part of the week was probably getting wood out of the river, because it's nice to cool off and swim. The worst part is when it ends!"

I guess we'll then see all of you at the next Mammoth Cave Restoration weekend, which will be Saturday, November 3.



Photos from  
Great Onyx Cave

