

## Trip Report, James Cave Project, Coach Cave Restoration

### August 5-7, 2018

**August 5, 2018.** Charles and Catherine Bishop from the James Cave Project met Dian Osborne from The Nature Conservancy and three members of the Mammoth Cave Restoration Group (MCRG, National Speleological Society) at Park Mammoth Resort just outside of Park City, Kentucky. They entered the historic entrance of Coach Cave about 2:30 PM local time. The purpose of the trip was to familiarize Dian with the cave and to evaluate, with the help of Brian Hunsaker and two other restoration group members, the work tasks that the restoration group would be undertaking in the next two days.

The group toured the old commercial trails including the Moonshiner's Murder Hole area, Kentucky Dome, the balcony staircase and platforms near Kentucky Dome, and passages leading toward the Double Domes area. Ideas were shared as to how to conduct the removal of deteriorated wood in these areas and how to rig ropes in the Murder Hole for access and hauling debris out of the pit. The group left the cave at about 4:30 PM.

As the group entered the cave, one bat was seen flying in the passages near the entrance. This was the only bat seen during the three-day period.

Charlie, Catherine, and Dian were dinner guests at the Maple Springs complex where the Mammoth Cave Restoration Group had its headquarters for their week-long restoration camp. After dinner, Dian made a presentation about the conservation easement and answered questions about The Nature Conservancy's role in the easement on the Park Mammoth property. This easement and its resource management sections comprise an agreement among the James Cave Project, the Fortress Group that owns the property, The Nature Conservancy, and state and federal Fish and Wildlife Services. The document limits, in



perpetuity, use of the caves and overlying surface in order to guarantee protection of endangered gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*) and Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) populations.



**August 6, 2018.** About twenty-seven MCRG members went in the historic Coach Cave entrance at about 9:00 AM and dispersed to work sites. Jim Honaker provided a generator on the surface near the Murder Hole entrance. A power cable was lowered from the surface down the Murder Hole pit to Kentucky Dome so that a recharging station for saw batteries could be set up.

Goals were to remove several sets of stairs and landings in the back of the cave; debris, staircases, and platforms in the Murder Hole; and wiring, light bulbs, and switch boxes from the passage walls. Dry rotted wood disintegrated into small pieces as it was being removed, and the

fragments and short pieces were placed in bags or buckets and carried out of the cave. Large wood pieces were stacked in Kentucky Dome to be cut up later. The group left the cave for a short lunch break and then worked through the afternoon, exiting the cave at about 4:30 PM. Bagged debris was loaded into pickup trucks and put into the dumpsters behind the Park Mammoth lodge.

**August 7, 2018.** Work continued as on the previous day, with groups entering the cave around 8:30 AM. Jim and Nick Noble from the Fortress Group toured in the afternoon to see the work that had been accomplished. Everyone was out of the cave by around 4:00 PM. The two days of work effort took down approximately 35% of the steps and landings needing to be removed. Light fixtures, switches and wiring that could be reached without climbing were also removed, and a limited amount of this material remains.

The MCRG team began working in the Bald Knob caves in 2016. Members plan to return in 2019 to continue efforts in the Murder Hole and other areas of Coach Cave. With two days of work planned each year, it is anticipated that the remaining clean-up in Coach Cave will take a minimum of at least two more years to complete. Decisions made regarding the project in coming years are that all the wood debris will be taken out the main entrance instead of being hauled up the Murder Hole, and that a construction dumpster will not be scheduled until all wood debris is in the entrance room.

Members of the James Cave Project who assisted were Tim Bailey, Catherine Bishop, Charlie Bishop, Jim Honaker, Missy Shields, and John Sias.

*Charlie G. Bishop*

