

Peppersauce Cave Conservation Project – 2002/2003

Peppersauce Cave is north of Tucson and contains approximately 1 mile of mapped passages and has been receiving about 23,000 visitors each year. There are no tours. There are no lights. The cave has been subject to over 50 years of vandalism and graffiti.

The Peppersauce Cave Conservation Project (PCCP) is a private Conservation Project Started by Phoenix area cavers and funds are made possible by a grant from the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ). The federal grant monies came from the Environmental Protection agency (EPA). Cave volunteers from all over the state are helping in the project. The project leaders and a large portion of the volunteers are members of the CAG. Additional volunteers are from Escabrosa Grotto, SAG and the Boy Scouts.

Cavers in Phoenix and Tucson have applied for and recieved a federal grant administered through the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) to clean up the cave of graffiti, solid waste, water pollution and change the vandalism mode to one of conservation. In addition we will be adding in-cave reflective signs so spelunkers do not need string. The Kiosk and water sampling and water cleanup will start in the spring of 2002.

We have purchased over \$9,500 (so far) of sandblasting equipment, blast media, compressor, helmets, lights, goggles, dust masks and respirators, drop clothes, etc. and have used the equipment with (as of Feb. 24, 2002) more than 400 volunteer hours. The project is scheduled for over a one year period.

KOLD Tv in Tucson did a page on the cleanup.

The following are letters of updates.

Peppersauce Sandblasting Week #7 – February 22-23, 2003

Ray Keeler, NSS 23245

The saga continues. We had 20 on Saturday, Feb. 22 with three full teams sandblasting and brushing away graffiti and headed towards the Big Room. No additional tagging had been done in the last two months and only one of the in-cave signs had been removed.

Saturday: Team 1 (Jason Kennedy (CAG), Robert Sliwinski (CAG), Cassidy Raeber (EGI), and Joe Datfi (EGI)) started in the Subway and made quick progress arriving in the Big Room by noon. After lunch they split into high (sandblast) and low (electric brush) groups and completed the entire north wall.

Team 2 (Matt Burkett, Sue and Mark Doty, and Chip Haldane (all CAG)) continued cleaning the climb and crawlway route to the Big Room. By noon they had popped out of the crawl and were working on the Flowstone Crawl. In the afternoon they finished the Flowstone Crawl and were at the south side of the Big Room ... a major effort.

Team 3 (Joe Gallardo (EGI), Ginger Hargett (GDI), Scott King (CAG), and Adam Parker) spent the entire morning cleaning a passage on the north wall bypassed last time. In the afternoon they leaped forward into the Big Room and started on the Entrance side wall.

Taran and Bryan did photo docs of the “before” and “after” and lots of photos of dirty covers wearing respirators and goggles and covered in dust. Dave and Ian Joaquim (CAG) were able to get another excellently placed reflective sign located out of reach via ladder. Stephanie Keeler (CAG) and Walter Pickett (EGI) held down the surface phone, compressor and generator gassing and equipment checkout./ check in.

At 5PM the work whistle blew and only equipment from the Entrance was pulled

back to the cars, by far the easiest Saturday derig so far. Dinner was served and most of the Saturday workers left. Taran, Bryan, Robert and Chip returned to the cave to clean respirators and camp. Dave and Ian Joaquim decided to camp on the surface in their van. I took the trailer to the Peppersauce Campground for safe keeping for the night and then joined the cavers inside for the easiest cave camp I had ever done.

At 5AM a group of 8ish teenagers came loudly but politely through our camp headed for the Big Room. They had been up all night and needed something to do ...

Sunday: We got up. I picked up the trailer. Taran, Bryan and Chip helped reposition the hose, extension chords, generator and phone before heading back north. Workers drove in ... it was thin.

Team 1: Brett Cooke and Dave Getzler from EGI took on the Main Lake Room below the ladder with Robert Sliwinski. It took them all day but they finished.

Team 2: Joe Gallardo had spent the night at the Peppersauce Campground and returned for a second day. Dan Frank from CAMRA joined him and they spent the day removing graffiti in the passage between the Main Lake and the Big Room above the ladder.

Team 3: Jennifer Wolff and Ron Harvey from SAG finished the graffiti from the entrance side of the Big Room.

Dave Joaquim stayed to run surface tasks. Adam Parker returned to help with the equipment retrieval. We started breaking it down at 3PM and it took 2 solid hours. One advantage of having so many spelunkers come through is that they can be asked to help carry equipment to the surface and the surface can be phoned so the equipment does not get lost.

At this point we have most of the back wall in the Big Room to complete and a couple of touch up areas before we start on the Rabbit Hole section. From here on

out the trips will be weekend events with graffiti removal on both Saturday and Sunday. It's just too much work to move the equipment so far in for one day's work.

My sincere thanks to everyone who helped. It was a long weekend and we made significant progress. We are probably 70 percent done.

Solid Waste Removal 03/18/02

We began our 4 hour trip at 5 a.m. When we were within a mile of the cave we saw 3 deer along the side of the road. As we slowly moved closer, they headed over the edge of what seemed to be a sheer cliff and disappeared. We arrived at the cave location at 9 a.m, swiftly suited up and headed into the cave. Greeted by a piece of string left for someone else to follow, we made our way through the first room and entered the second. This is where we sat down and talked about cave conservation and the cleanup projects that were underway. I pointed out areas that were sand blasted to remove graffiti. The sand blasted rooms look much better now. We made it in as far as the rabbit hole. Once there we spread out so we could cover the room better. Pat climbed up on a shelf and collected items tossed up there by previous visitors. Rick was in the muddy remains of a pool pulling out items like wood, bottles and other trash that followed the slowly sinking water levels to that location. I was picking up the hundreds of sunflower seeds that were senselessly spit out all over the ground. I pointed out a couple of cigarette butts that were growing mold. During our search we found a cave cricket which was the only living creature we found inside the cave. On our way out we gathered up the piece of string that stretched through the cave.

I'm sure most people have the best intentions when they explore this and other caves but don't understand that even little bits of paper, cigarette butts or even the tiniest of crumbs disrupt a cave environment while other people just plain show no respect.

Items collected

We found a gallon water bottle almost full of water, cigarette butts, sunflower seeds,

string, batteries, candles, melted wax, match sticks, water bottles / caps, flashlights, beer bottles / cans, glow sticks, a full poncho, various snack bar and gum wrappers, ash from a fire and one cinder block. We collected about 40 to 50 pounds of trash.

-Jim



