

# THE MANAGEMENT OF BEROME MOORE CAVE, PERRY COUNTY, MISSOURI

*Donald G. Dunham  
Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto  
147 Ron de Lee  
Arnold, Missouri 63010  
don\_g\_dunham@yahoo.com  
402-203-3191*

## Abstract

Berome Moore Cave is connected to Tom Moore Cave, forming the Moore Cave System, Perry County, Missouri. The cave contains many important natural resources. This paper is a brief history of the evolution of the Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto's management of the cave over 40 years. The grotto's management, by means of a lease from the landowner, changed over time because of changes in focus, landowner relations and refinements in caving culture. After 20 years of survey and exploration, many groups were allowed into the cave, which eventually caused problems, and the owner threatened to fill the entrance. A policy was adopted to admit fewer but more experienced people, with a purpose of low-impact exploration, science and mapping.

Key words: cave management, landowner relations, Berome Moore Cave, Perry County, Missouri

## Introduction

Berome Moore Cave was discovered in the 1960s by Tex Yokum in a cornfield sinkhole in southeastern Missouri (Figure 1). The first priority of the Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto was establishing an agreement with the landowner that would allow Middle Mississippi Valley Grot-

to long-term access to the cave. With the help of a lawyer we agreed upon a lease that was renewable every two years and gave Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto access to the sinkhole entrance. A verbal agreement allowed Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto to park their cars in the lanes around the farm buildings close to the site.

To protect the cave from unauthorized entry, a barrel gate was constructed at the entrance, which originally had been dug open by the discoverers.

## Surveying

The next and obvious phase was surveying. Because early survey trips involved working the whole weekend, a base camp in the cave was established at a convenient point about 365 m (1,200 feet) from the



Figure 1 The sinkhole entrance to Berome Moore Cave lies in a cornfield.

entrance. In addition to the base camp, wires were hung and hooked up to local utilities (Figure 2). By the 1980s Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto had surveyed >26 km (16 miles) of passage.

## Recreation

Sometime later Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto decided to provide an educational experience for groups of Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, church groups etc., in which the members of these groups were given a sound cave conservation message, while enjoying camping overnight in the cave. At the same time, Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto benefitted by earning funds from donations from the groups. The money received was then plowed back into the cave in the form of base camp improvements, purchase of surveying equipment, and the like.

As time passed and most of the known cave had been surveyed, the cave was primarily used for the group trips. Unfortunately, as might be expected when taking groups in over a period of many years, occasionally one event or another would irritate the landowner. Although groups had been escorted into the cave over a period of 30 years, and there were only a few instances where something occurred to upset the landowners, it was enough that eventually the landowners threatened to close

the cave.

Prior to this, Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto itself had debated the pros and cons of continuing to lead noncavers into Berome, especially as we realized that the landowner was becoming more concerned over liability issues, whether above or below the ground.

## Landowner Relations

As it turned out the landowner made our mind up for us in the late 1990s. In an initial meeting with the landowner he had decided that he would close the cave—literally, by filling in the sinkhole. After some discussion, we were able to come to a compromise. We agreed that we would no longer bring noncaver groups into the cave. From this point forward, Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto would visit the cave, on average, only once per month, the size of the group would be limited, the group would consist primarily of cavers, and our trips would serve some purpose other than recreation—primarily surveying, biology studies (Figure 3), exploration of leads etc. In addition, we would no longer park in the farmyard, but on the side of the road next to a gate that is always open, and limit ourselves to no more than four or five cars. In a sense, we had come nearly full circle, concentrating

our efforts on surveying. Although the “big” passages were already mapped, we continue to discover new, usually uncomfortably tight passage, and so the cave “grows.”

## Discussion

Because of the long span of time of our cave management, the board has had to make frequent alterations in our policies, sometimes even in the face of opposition from the general membership of Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto. It is important that the grotto



*Figure 2 Left to right: Don Dunham and biologists David Ashley (standing), Horton H. Hobbs III, Bill Elliott (standing) and Mike Slay at the base camp in Berome Moore Cave, May 2003.*





Figure 3 David C. Ashley's cave biology students from Missouri Western State University conduct a stream census in Berome Moore Cave, February 16, 2003.

remain proactive in its management and attempt to foresee potential problems under present policies. We have to place ourselves in the position of the landowners, and try to understand how we would react to certain activities of cavers if we owned the land. Underground, we also need to police ourselves, altering any behaviors or activities that no longer seem appropriate, both in relation to caving safety and to the conservation of the cave.

Since Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto adopted this new low-impact visitation in our management of the cave, our relationship with the landowner, over time, has been repaired, and we feel fortunate that we have been able to maintain access to the cave. Berome Moore Cave

is a precious resource to be studied and enjoyed (Figure 4), and it is Middle Mississippi Valley Grotto's goal to preserve access to this underground gem into the indefinite future.

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## Literature Cited

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Figure 4 Paw print, probably of a Pleistocene jaguar, *Panthera onca augusta*, in Berome Moore Cave. The print is about 80–90 mm wide. A track of this large cat is protected by flagging. A partial mandible of this species was also found in the cave by Oesch (1969).