

SECTION 1 --- NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY (NSS) is a non-profit organization affiliated with the American Association for the Advancement of Science. It was founded for the purpose of advancing the study, conservation, exploration, and knowledge of caves. In addition, the Society collects and publishes information relating to speleology in this country and in all parts of the world. Membership in the Society encourages protection and conservation of caves and provides contact with thousands of serious explorers and scientists in the United States and foreign countries.

The NSS is administered by a Board of Governors consisting of twelve directors and five officers who meet about three times annually to consider matters of policy. Four directors are elected annually for three year terms. Each year the directors elect the President, Executive Vice-President, Administrative Vice-President, Operations Vice-President and Secretary-Treasurer. These officers are responsible for the management of the Society under the policies adopted by the Board.

There are more than 250 local chapters of the NSS throughout the country. These local groups, usually known as "grottos," conduct regular meetings and serve as a means of organizing speleologists within a geographical area. Members are urged, but not required, to join a local grotto in order to take part in joint explorations and publication work and to enjoy the programs and fellowship of other members.

The purpose of the Society is to promote interest in, and to advance in any and all ways, the study and science of speleology, the protection of caves and their natural contents, and to promote fellowship among those interested therein.

Although some have estimated that 50,000 caves or more exist in the United States, no organized effort was made to study them until 1941 when the National Speleological Society was organized. Its members explore, map, and publish reports about caves. Within the caves are to be found both geological and biological phenomena unlike any above ground. Investigation of these phenomena sometimes requires strenuous trips into areas never before seen by man. Special equipment, as well as the skills to use it, are frequently required to extend man's knowledge of caves. Many of our finest caves are open to the public, with guide service and safe, well-lighted walkways. A visit to one of these caves will show the scenic beauty of the underground. "Wild" caves provide a unique wilderness experience. Some are among the precious few remaining unexplored areas of the earth. For early man, caves were a refuge and shelter; for modern man, they are a challenge to his understanding and talents.

Speleology is the science of the study of caves. New as an organized science, its objective is an understanding of the forces that acted in the origin and development of caves and cave life. Scientific knowledge or training is not necessary for an interest in speleology, as observation and intelligent curiosity have contributed a great deal to the discovery of new areas and phenomena. Professional scientists in the fields of geology, meteorology, biology, and chemistry work in cooperation with interested non-professional cavers to gain knowledge of subterranean areas. In a world without light, cave creatures have become adapted to an environment by fundamental changes of special interest to biologists. The geologist can study the effects of solution, erosion, and earth movements in the surrounding walls of stone. The underground course of water and the hydrology of ancient times can be seen clearly in the meanders and configuration of cave passageways. The underground formations, the dripstones and erratic growths of minerals, draw the attention of mineralogists and also the interest of the photographer, who captures on film the beauty of these scenes. Reports of

observations made on trips to caves are filed with local grottos and with the Society. The caver enjoys the beauty and rigors of the cave and the challenge of exploration. This enjoyment of nature, combined with a deep respect for the conservation of the underground wilderness, can aid the speleologist in expanding our knowledge of caves.

You enter a cave as a guest of the owner and are expected to treat it with respect, avoiding damage of any kind. Before entering any cave, make sure you have permission of the owner. This is essential if good will is to be maintained, and applies even if the owner does not live within sight of the cave. Even when the owner has extended a standing invitation to visit his cave, it is still considered proper to check with him for each visit unless he has specifically indicated that this is unnecessary. Be sure to park your car where it will not be a nuisance to the landowner. Close any gate you may have opened on the way to the cave. Never cross a cultivated field or climb a wire fence. Spent carbide is harmful to cave life and even cattle deaths have been blamed on it. This can be prevented if each caver carries a suitable container in which used carbide can be placed and removed from the cave and premises. Upon leaving a cave, replace any logs or barriers that may have been placed there to keep stock from falling in. Make it a point to see the owner after having visited his cave. Let him know that you are safely out and tell him anything unusual you may have found. Finally, remember caving courtesy paves the way to good caver--cave owner relationships.

February 26, 1939, was an important date in the prenatal history of the NSS. On that day, a feature story by Jo Chamberlin appeared in the Sunday Washington Star telling about Mammoth Cave and Carlsbad Caverns, and about Floyd Collins, Jim White, and Charles E. Mohr. This article caught the attention of William J. Stephenson and his wife Merle of Washington, D.C., who for some years had been exploring caves in northern Virginia with Stephenson's colleague at the U.S. Patent Office, Elmer W. Harmon, and several other friends. This activity began when Stephenson, who was the leader of a hiking group connected with his church, decided one day to take a trip to a cave. After that, cave exploring became the principal activity of the group.

Stephenson's eye was caught by a key sentence in Chamberlin's article: "In England there is a national organization devoted to caving." Stephenson immediately recognized the many advantages such an organization could have for the United States, and he set himself the task of establishing one. On May 6, 1939, the Speleological Society of the District of Columbia was a reality.

During the next year the group proved to be very successful. Numerous field trips were taken, and by June of 1940, when the first Bulletin was issued, a significant proportion of the members already lived outside of the Washington area. The appearance of Volume 1 of the Bulletin, under the editorship of Don Bloch, in combination with the fortuitous location of the Speleological Society in the nation's capital, caused others interested in caves around the country to begin to look to the young Washington organization as the fountainhead of American speleology.

In the fall of 1940, the officers of the Speleological Society of the District of Columbia drafted a constitution for a proposed National Speleological Society. The constitution followed the plan of the older one and stated that "...charter members of this Society shall be all members of the Speleological Society of the District of Columbia as of January 1, 1941, and all members of any other Society, whose main purpose is the study of speleology or exploration of caves, which gives notice in writing to the Board of Governors of the Speleological Society of the District of Columbia prior to January 1, 1941, that its membership desires to be included in this organization." This draft was sent to several other caving groups that had become active in different parts of the country. On December 1, 1940, a group of 24 people under the leadership of Clay Perry met in Pettibone Falls Cave,

Massachusetts, and ratified the proposed constitution. This action was reported to Washington, so that on January 1, 1941; the founding of the National Speleological Society was complete. The Society soon had two chapters: The New England Grotto and the District of Columbia Grotto.

SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETIES IN OTHER COUNTRIES -- There are speleological societies in many other countries besides the United States. Some countries, like Great Britain, have many separate caving clubs. Other countries have a single organization similar to the NSS. Some have a large confederation composed of many separate clubs within the country. [Table 1A](#) lists some speleological societies in other countries.

OFFICE -- Prior to 1949 the office was on an informal basis at John Petrie's home. At that point, due to the increased membership, more formal office help was needed. A series of secretaries were employed by the Society from 1949 to 1971. In all cases, they were in the Washington, D.C. area. The office was in the home or apartment of the secretaries. At first they were part time, but the work load increased to the point that in the late 1960's the job became full time. In 1971 the office was relocated to Huntsville, Alabama, in the new Society headquarters purchased on Cave Avenue adjacent to the NSS-owned Shelta Cave. [Table 1B](#) lists the office staff.

SERVICES -- The NSS provides numerous services to its members. The principal ones are listed in [Table 1D](#).

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION -- On May 13, 1964 the National Speleological Foundation was chartered in the District of Columbia to insure that the Society's trust funds were always used for the purpose for which they were intended. The purposes for which the Foundation was organized, quoting from the Articles of Incorporation, are exclusively for scientific, literary, or educational purposes, including for such purposes serving the science of speleology and conservation of caves, and also including for such purposes the making of distributions either directly or by contributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1964 (or the corresponding provisions of any future United States Internal Revenue Law); and also in furtherance of such purposes to accept and receive contributions, gifts, grants, bequests, or devises of any property, real or personal, and to invest and keep invested funds of the corporation, whether received by contribution, gift, grant, bequest, or devise, provided such limitations and conditions are not in conflict with the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and to use such funds for this corporation as the Board of Directors deems advisable and in general to do anything and everything necessary, useful, or convenient in connection with the organization, maintenance, and operation of a scientific, literary, or educational corporation. This corporation shall hold its property and assets solely for the purposes as set forth in this certificate and not for the benefit of any private individual, shareholder, member, trustee, director, or manager of this corporation, except that the corporation shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and actual expenditures made in its behalf and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in this certificate. No substantial part of the activities of the corporation shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office. The current directors of the Foundation are listed in [Table 1C](#).