

Preserving Balance



Photos by Jason Lenhart / DN-R

ABOVE: Meghan Moss (left) and Ihab Sadoon, members of James Madison University's Student Grotto caving club, clean algae off formations in Grand Caverns on Saturday as part of an annual three-day cleanup of the cave. Sponsored by the Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society, volunteers helped clean the cave as well as re-gravel the pathway that snakes through the formation.

RIGHT: Sadoon scrubs algae off formations during the annual Grand Caverns Eastern Restoration Camp.



'Little Piece Of Heaven'

Cavers Put In Community Service At Grand Caverns

By JEREMY HUNT
Daily News-Record

GROTTOES — Caves are inherently dirty places, so it may seem an odd concept to some that they need cleaning up from time to time. But formations in Grand Caverns in Grottoes develop algae from the lights that make the oldest show cave in the United States accessible to the public.

About 30 cavers took on that and other projects at the attraction and surrounding park over the

weekend as part of the annual Grand Caverns Eastern Restoration Camp.

"Some people say we ought to get a life," chuckled volunteer Craig Hindman, who has been participating in the event since 1983. "It's just our way of giving back to the community."

The National Speleological Society's Virginia Region — known as VAR — sponsors the event, which has been going on in some form or another for more than three decades. Hindman serves as chairman of VAR.

Many of those who participated this weekend camped out at Grand Caverns Park from Friday to Sun-

day, with Saturday being the big workday.

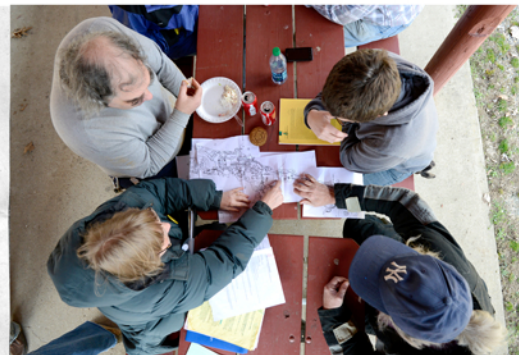
"This is like a little piece of heaven, and that's why I love it here," said Meredith Weberg, co-chair of VAR's conservation committee.

In addition to scrubbing algae off formations, the group lined the cave floor with new gravel, picked up garbage and did maintenance work on the park's grounds.

A Work In Progress

In years past, cavers have repaired formations in Fountain Cave, one of 22 cave systems that

Daily News-Record



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Caving enthusiasts and volunteers mull over a cave map on their lunch break Saturday during a three-day Grand Caverns cleanup event sponsored by the Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society.

More Than 500 Repaired

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make up the Cave Hill area of Grottoes. Grand Caverns is the only guided-tour commercial system on the property.

"In the old days, people would break formations and take them because they didn't know any better," explained Weberg, of Woodbridge.

Volunteers have repaired more than 500 formations in Fountain since the restoration effort began. The process includes matching up broken formations with their counterparts and holding them together with epoxy until they're reconnected, which takes quite a bit of time.

"I never liked jigsaw puzzles much, but some people do," Hindman said.

The project was not included in this year's event because Fountain Cave is

still closed for the season to protect the bat population.

But there was still no shortage of work to do.

Scott Davis of Grottoes spent time reconfiguring lights inside the cave so visitors could get the most out of the experience.

"It's a continuing thing," he said of the volunteer efforts.

The work at Grand Caverns is just one way in which the caving community tries to make a difference.

In fact, Weberg said, every trip underground involves some kind of conservation work, like picking up trash.

"If you're a caver, you're a conservationist," she said, "because caves are such delicate ecosystems."

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