



The Great Saltpetre Cave Management Plan

To Protect and Preserve through Education

Changes made to the Management Plan since January 2012 appear in blue text.

I. Policy and Statement of the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy, Inc

The Rockcastle Karst Conservancy (RKC) encourages projects such as: establishing cave preserves; placing entrance gates where appropriate; opposing the sale of speleothems; supporting effective protective measures; cleaning and restoring over-used caves; cooperating with private cave owners by providing them knowledge about their cave and assisting them in protecting their cave and property from damage during cave visits; and encouraging commercial cave owners to make use of their opportunity to aid the public in understanding caves and the importance of their conservation. As part of this effort, RKC has acquired and holds the deed to the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve and is committed to its careful and long term management. It is the duty of every RKC member to take personal responsibility for spreading a consciousness of the cave conservation ethic to each potential user of caves.

II. HISTORY OF THE CAVE

Great Saltpetre Cave is located in eastern Rockcastle County, Kentucky. The cave is located in a spur of the Big Hill Range and runs directly through the mountain with Crooked Creek passing near both the north and south entrances of the cave.

The first written account of the cave states that it was discovered in 1798 by [Robert](#) Baker and his family. The early years of our country's birth demonstrated the need for a domestic supply of gunpowder. Great Saltpetre Cave was found to contain vast quantities of calcium nitrate, a critical ingredient in manufacturing gunpowder. The War of 1812 saw the peak production in saltpetre mining at Great Saltpetre Cave. Employing 70 or more miners during this period made it the largest employer in eastern Kentucky. Mammoth Cave was better known as a saltpetre mining operation, but it in no way compared to the production generated at Great Saltpetre Cave. It is because of this mining that the first survey [by John James DuFour](#) was made of the cave and its prominence in the region has endured. After the War of 1812 the mining production slowed down and completely came to an end [by 1865](#).

John Lair of Renfro Valley fame was instrumental in the commercialization of the cave with the radio broadcasting of the "Renfro Valley Barn Dance" from inside the cave in the early 1940's. A dance floor was constructed in the Echo Auditorium. A museum section was established to display the mining operations. During the next three decades the cave was opened for tours with various degrees of success. Later, Richard Mullins lived on the property and managed the campground and gave tours. Public visitation dwindled and eventually by 1985 the operation ceased altogether.

In 1989 the Felburn Foundation purchased Great Saltpetre Cave and leased it and the surrounding property to the Greater Cincinnati Grotto, a chapter of the National Speleological Society. [The management committee, with help of cavers, maintained the Preserve and steadily improved the infrastructure inside and outside the Cave with an eye toward enhancing the natural setting. This work was so successful that in 2003, the Felburn Foundation offered to give the cavers the Preserve if they would continue the same level of care and establish new Preserves. This was the impetus to form Rockcastle Karst Conservancy, a 501\(c\)\(3\) organization. In 2006, RKC accepted ownership of the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve. In 2013 the cave was listed on the National Register of Historic Places due to the efforts of Neena Jud.](#)

III. THE GREAT SALTPETRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

[Great Saltpeter Preserve \(GSP\) is managed by the Great Saltpetre Cave Committee \(GSPC\) with representatives from Greater Cincinnati Grotto \(GCG\), Dayton Underground Grotto \(DUG\), Blue Grass Grotto \(BGG\), and Central Ohio Grotto \(COG\). Each year the chair of the GCG appoints the chairperson of GSPC who then chooses three additional GCG delegates. DUG, BGG, and COG select their own delegates for a total of eight committee members. Monthly meetings are held at locations determined by the GSPC chairperson. All GSPC members shall have full voting privileges. The GSPC members who are present at each meeting, whether in person or virtually, will vote on all projects and expenditures. Four members constitute a quorum, but must include either the Chair or the Secretary. All monies donated to GSP will be managed by and used specifically for The Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve. The GSPC will give a financial statement and a report on ongoing projects and plans to the RKC board at least once a year, or at their request.](#)

IV. ACCESS TO THE GREAT SALTPETRE CAVE PRESERVE

Because the GSPC is composed of [four](#) grottos (GCG, DUG, BGG, COG), any member in good standing of those grottos may have access to the cave preserve and must abide by all rules and regulations. A special agreement between GCG and RKC further spells out access privileges between these two parties. All other persons must be sponsored by one of the aforementioned grottos. Sponsorship is a serious matter. Each sponsor must be willing to do the following:

- A. Be in attendance at all times with their guest while on the property.
- B. Be accountable for all of their guests' actions [and advise them of campground and cave rules](#).
- C. Be responsible for collecting camping donations, registering guests at the kiosk, and advising of liability waiver requirement.
- D. Be responsible for keeping the front gate locked. [See section VII](#)

E. Sponsoring Large Groups

This may be defined as over 12 people and carries additional responsibility. Sponsors of organized youth groups (e.g. Scouts) or other special interest groups must coordinate plans to visit GSP with the GCG youth group coordinator or, other designated sponsor(s) and provide schedules to the GSP committee. Enough prior notice shall be given to avoid problems and potential conflicts with cave access. Also, any other special needs or requests must be cleared with GSPC. In some circumstances where the visiting groups are especially large, arrangements should be made to have additional sponsors or help by Grotto members when touring the cave.

V. Banishment from Great Saltpetre Preserve.

- A. Cavers or visitors may be banned from visiting GSP for any of the following reasons:
 - 1. Willful misuse of GSP property or facilities.
 - 2. Willful disregard of the safety of themselves and/or others while visiting GSP property.
 - 3. Conduct detrimental to the GCG, BGG, DUG, [COG](#), NSS, caves, and/or landowner relations.
- B. Disciplinary action shall be initiated only upon presentation to the GSP Committee of a written petition for disciplinary action by a member of GCG, BGG, DUG, [or COG](#). Upon receiving such a petition, the GSP Committee shall take such actions as are deemed necessary to notify the accused person, in writing, of the petition, and of the place, date, and time at which the petition will be considered by the GSP Committee. The accused person shall have the right to speak on their behalf. Such consideration shall take place no sooner than twenty-one days or no later than seventy days after the petition is received by the GSP Committee.
- C. Disciplinary action under this provision shall be taken only upon three-fourths vote of the GSP committee by a secret ballot in Executive session.
- D. For serious violations observed on site, the offending visitor or caver may be asked to leave immediately by the GSP caretaker or any board member of GCG, BGG, DUG, [COG](#) or any GSP committee member. Refusal to comply may result in local authorities being called and trespassing charges being filed. For these serious on site violations, the disciplinary process can skip step (B) and go directly to step (C).

E. Banishment from GSP will be for a period of five years. The banished party will be eligible for early reinstatement upon request after a period of one year. A written request for reinstatement must be submitted to the committee for consideration of early reinstatement. If the request is denied then the banished party must wait a period of one year to request reinstatement again. Only one request will be considered annually. If no request for early reinstatement is approved, the banished party shall be banned for the full term of the banishment. The committee must approve early reinstatement by a three-fourths majority by secret ballot. A caver banned from GSP is not necessarily banned from their grotto, but their grotto will be notified of the nature of the violation and the action taken by the GSP Committee.

VI. GSP CARETAKER

Since November 1999, the property has had an onsite resident located a few hundred feet past the main gate. This person is the GSP caretaker whose primary duty is to watch over the property to the best of his/her ability. Residency is granted by the RKC Board through a separate lease arrangement. Do not expect the caretaker to grant access or give out keys to cave or property. The responsibilities of the caretaker and other specific terms of residency are spelled out in the separate lease agreement.

VII. SECURITY

This is extremely important for the protection of the campground and the caretaker who resides there. The front [drive](#) gate has a combination lock. The combination can be obtained by calling either a GCG board member or anyone from the GSPC. The combination will only be given to [RKC board members and members of GCG, DUG, BGG or COG](#). Under normal circumstances, sponsors with guests are [not](#) to give out the front gate combination. [This](#) front gate must be locked at all times. The chairperson of the GSPC will have the responsibility of changing the lock combination as deemed necessary and keeping all appropriate [people](#) notified. Remember the combination could change at any time. Call [or email](#) first to ensure that the combination number you know is correct.

[Various property structures also require security and therefore have keyed locks. These access keys are held by GCG board members and GSPC members and RKC Board members. When access to a structure is via a key in a lockbox, the combination shall be given to all GCG Board, GSPC, and RKC Board members. "Specialty keys" for maintenance and security purposes may be held by selected GSPC members and are not included with the access keys. The GSPC will ensure that there are no fewer than two copies of specialty keys available for Committee members' use.](#)

The Kitchen will be open whenever possible by a GSPC member or GCG Board member.

VIII. CAMPING AT THE GREAT SALTPETRE CAVE PRESERVE

Camping, including the use of the two sleeping cabins (mondos), is on a first-come, first-serve basis. The first person occupying a cabin has sole discretion of allowing additional occupants. No pets are allowed in the sleeping cabins. Sleeping Cabins are not for use by Youth Organizations. Youth Groups should stay in the area reserved for them at the far end of the main camping field where the Scout Shelter is available for use.

Electric sites are available in the middle campground. The lower mondo is also considered an electric site.

Showers will be opened whenever possible by a GSPC member.

Please remember that your camping donations are used for the upkeep of the property. Suggested donations for nightly camping plus use of electric are described in section X.

IX. SPECIAL EVENTS

The GSP property typically hosts various events during the course of a year. These are, but may not be limited to:

New Years Eve Party

Open House

Karst-O-Rama

Caver Appreciation Weekend

Halloween party

Work Weekend(s)

These events are held for the benefit of cavers and, in the case of Open House, the community. Each such event shall be arranged and managed by its own subcommittee and will report to the GSP committee.

X. CAMPGROUND RULES AND REGULATIONS

Everyone must register at the kiosk. Camping requests are \$6.00 per night per person. Electrical sites are an additional \$6.00 per night at designated campsites & the lower mondo cabin, and are restricted to members' use during heavy visitation. Camping donations are payable upon arrival and may be deposited in the pipe next to kiosk. Use the payment envelope and fill in your name, date, and any affiliation. Please print legibly. If a receipt is required, indicate so and give an address. Contact a GSPC person for approval of extended stays, for example over four nights. Whether camping or not, donations are always gladly accepted and appreciated.

Property insurance requires that all Grotto members and their guests, must have a GSP liability waiver signed and on file. Waivers are available at registration kiosk or may be downloaded and printed off the RKC and GSP website. Waivers will be valid until the end of the calendar year and must be renewed annually. They are filed with the GSPC Secretary. All youth group visitors under the age of 18 are required to have a signed liability waiver for

each visit to the Preserve whether they camp or not. No exceptions. Parents must sign for minor children. These waivers are to be collected and retained by the sponsoring Grotto member.

The speed limit is 5 MPH. Drive on designated roads and in campground area.

All trash must be removed from camping area when leaving. Dispose of [or recycle](#) properly.

Use only designated fire rings. All fires must be extinguished before departure. No timber is to be cut on the premises.

Quiet hours are between 11:00 PM to 6:00 AM. Please be especially mindful of this when campground is occupied.

No discharging of firearms, fireworks, carbide cannons, or explosives on the preserve.

Hunting is not permitted anywhere on GSP property.

Pets must be kept on a leash [or well controlled](#) at all times, or otherwise restrained. All pets must have current inoculations for rabies as prescribed by the camper's state of residence. **(Kentucky Administrative Regulations 304 KAR 1:040)**

The [main](#) shelter house [and scout shelter](#) are to be used as eating areas or gathering places. Please be considerate of other people using the shelters. For example, keep pets at a distance during times of heavy use. There is to be no camping, or parking of vehicles under the shelters. All persons using the shelters must clean [them](#) before leaving, even if [they were](#) found in poor condition.

Motorized vehicles are prohibited for off-road use at GSP, with the exception of pre-approved GSP Maintenance vehicles. Nuisance behavior with these vehicles is also prohibited.

Horses are prohibited at GSP.

XI. POLICY FOR CAVE ACCESS

Access to the Great Saltpetre Cave is a privilege. Officers of RKC, GCG and the GSPC hold the keys to the cave. To [borrow](#) a key to the cave you must be a member of GCG, DUG, BGG, [or COG](#). Permission to visit the cave must be made in advance with a GSPC member or GCG board member in order to obtain a key. [Authorized key holders](#) are highly encouraged to use the "Cave Visitation Rules" form when loaning their key to others. While visiting the cave the gate must be locked at all times and should be unlocked and re-locked as you enter and leave. Key to cave must be returned as soon as possible.

XII. THE GREAT SALTPETRE CAVE STATUTES

RKC and the GSPC actively promote the conservation of caves. All visitors pledge to protect the historical, geological and biological treasures found underground. The management committee stresses that nothing shall be done to deface or spoil the natural beauty and life forms found in the cave.

[No marking on the cave walls or ceilings.](#)

No camping is allowed in the cave.

No vehicles or bikes are allowed in the cave.

No fires are allowed in the cave.

No rock climbing or rappelling from the cliffs above the cave.

No children permitted in cave without adult supervision.

No using cave as a restroom.

No dogs are allowed in the cave.

Scientific study and research involving the exploration of Great Saltpetre Cave is encouraged and shall be approved by the GSPC upon review. Archeological excavations must also obtain a State of KY permit in accordance with **Kentucky Revised Statutes 433.871 thru .885**. A written report of any findings must be filed with the committee. The cave may be used for the teaching of conservation and safe caving techniques. Any groups proposing to use the cave for these purposes must be covered by insurance and individual release forms properly signed and submitted to the GSPC secretary.

Because of the colorful history of the cave and its accessibility, the media may publicize it in magazines and newspapers, without disclosing the precise location, with permission from the GSP committee.

XIII. Mission Statement

Our long term mission is to preserve and protect the natural resources of the Great Saltpeter Preserve, maintain and restore those buildings and structures that are important and/or historically significant to the campground area, and in so doing, continue to provide a pleasant and convenient haven for cavers while protecting a vital part of Kentucky history and landscape. Each idea, project, and plan shall be measured against this.

Our stewardship of the land means not developing the property or creating high impact improvements. GSP is not a scouting jamboree site, a commercial campground, nor are we a public park. GSP is a karst preserve.

Visible and permanent changes on or to the property, or in the cave, must be thoroughly evaluated so as not to clash with our mission. Low impact and low visibility improvements such as running water, telephone, cave lighting, inconspicuous outhouses, are usually acceptable since they enhance comfort and security without compromising our mission. Any such improvement or restoration project shall be evaluated to keep long term (life-cycle) costs down and minimize ecological impact. Think "Green".

Updated by Werner G. Jud NSS #15377FE

Approved April 2016 by GSP Management committee