

4-H CHALLENGE CAVING TRIP WRAP UP 2009

Even though it takes eight hours to get to the caving site, everyone enjoyed the travel time because it gave each of us a chance to get to know the other people on the trip. We had two cars, one pick up and one van and all of the kids had a chance to ride in each one as we rotated at each stop and continually mixed up the group. For many of the kids this was one of the highlights of the trip.

Once we arrived we remembered why we don't like to go caving in August, it was super hot and super humid. But, we all knew that it would be comfortable in the cave. Once we unloaded a huge amount of gear we set up our camp. Everyone made sure each bucket was tightly closed then we thought we were going to go to the pool for a refreshing swim. We were sorely disappointed when we found out that in Indiana school had already started and all of the lifeguards had gone back to college so the pool was only open on the weekends. How SAD! So, to plan be, let's go see if the caves within the park were open to explore. Instead of swimming we were hiking. It was really a nice walk through the woods to the entrance of Twin Cave and Bronson Cave. Once there we saw that we would not be able to go through the caves because of a precaution against the spread of the White Nose Bat Fungus. The fungus is only at this time on the east coast. It has not been detected in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois or Kentucky, but they want to be very careful. So we did not go through the cave in full gear. We did show the kids the entrance to Bronson Cave so they could get an idea of the coldness of the cave. We wanted them to be prepared the next day for an extreme change in temperature. Just inside the entrance the kids did see some blind fish in the stream that runs through the cave. It is a pure white fish that is translucent in the light with no eyes. This little taste of a cave really got the kids pumped up for exploring Mill Cave the next day.

Once back at camp it was time for dinner, processing, showers and off to bed. We knew it would be an exhausting day tomorrow. Everyone was definitely excited to get up the next day, don their coveralls over the top of long johns even on a hot August day. It always takes awhile to get everyone organized. Each person had to eat breakfast, pack his or her lunch, get a dry set of clothes for after the cave, make sure to have snacks, water and extra batteries for in the cave along with kneepads, gloves and a helmet. Mr. Whitenight took a few kids and headed for the town of Salem to get the key from the police station. The clerk working at the police station was surprised to see him walk in with a bunch of kids dressed and ready for the cave. I don't think that is something she sees everyday. Then for some reason the kids could not keep up with Mr. Whitenight on the way back to the truck. It is hard to believe they had to run to catch up with him. He really isn't that fast, but they had to hustle. What a sight they must have been in that little town running around in their coveralls and kneepads. The kids said that some workers up on some scaffolding were looking at them pretty funny. We heard all about this adventure at the end of the day.

Finally the key arrived and we could unlock the gate to the entrance of Henderson Park where the cave is located. The kids that had been waiting there with Mrs. Whitenight picked up all the trash they could find around the gate area. So waiting wasn't a big

waste of time. We drove down a very washed out two track, then parked and walked down to the entrance of the cave. We couldn't wait to get into that cool cave. It was so hot in all of our caving gear. We took the time to take a picture before entering the cave, it is so different from the one we took after spending hours exploring the cave.

We walked into the stream of water and immediately were struck by the coldness of that water. After about 100' of walking it was time for our first crawl. This crawling tunnel is fairly large but because it is the first one it always seems cramped to new cavers. This is where each person knew if he or she was going to struggle with claustrophobia. Luckily it didn't seem to be too big of a problem even though some of the kids had to overcome this fear. Once we all got through this first crawl it was time to decide what direction the second crawl would be. Each person could choose whether to take the tight way or the larger crawl to get back to the stream. Then we walked through the decapitating dolomite layers on the way to the underground waterfall. All of the kids had their picture taken at the waterfall. Now it was time for the real fun to begin, it was time to climb up to the second level of the cave. Climbing up a track of slippery clay up through a hole in the ceiling then walking in the footsteps carved out in the clay. Once we all worked together to get everyone up to the upper level safely we were able to get into some really tight spaces. Almost everyone decided to take the crawl through the gauntlet rather than taking the easier way that goes high. That gauntlet can be pretty tight and pretty tricky. I told Christina to look for the exit at the end of the crawl, but without her glasses she couldn't even see it. Finally, I had to show her where to crawl out, it is quite tricky, you really have to get down low and look under the rock wall to see the exit. She is not the only one who has had a hard time finding the way out. No too long after this the kids had to decide again, high and dry or low and wet...the kids who took the low and wet arrived at the lunchroom just dripping with mud and water. It was time for a break. It took a lot of baby wipes to clean our hands enough to eat lunch. Then we lit our candles, enjoyed our candlelight lunch with a few bats hanging around the wall and ceiling. Several times during the day a bat flew past us as we crawled or walked through the cave. We saw many bats just hanging around and a couple of cave salamanders as well.

After everyone was done eating we all turned our lights off and blew out the candles to see how dark the cave truly was. We tried hard to be quiet as well, but the giggles started and we never really got all that quiet. Everyone was just too excited and having too much fun to get quiet for more than a couple of seconds. The kids were impressed at how dark the cave was.

Then it was time to go through the gun barrel. This is a tight crawl to say the least. But, it doesn't last too long so that's a bonus. Kathy was the first to go through. She said it was so cool to watch each person's face as they emerged from the gun barrel into the room at the end. This was one of her highs for the day! Once through the gun barrel it is pure mud....slippery, boot grabbing mud. We made our way through until we came to a wall of mud. We couldn't go around it or under it, so we had to go over it. With a lot of teamwork and help from each other we got everyone over the wall. Then the kids traveled on a little further and came to a dead end. This is where they thought the "exit"

should be because the map said, “end.” What they didn’t know was that the end meant “dead end.” So...back over the wall of mud, through the slippery, boot grabbing mud and back through the gun barrel.

We carefully made our way back through the entire cave, back down to the lower level and out to hot, muggy daylight. We took a group picture and you never saw a muddier looking group. The only thing to do with a group this muddy is take them into another cave. This second cave has a nice waist deep pool of water at the bottom of a waterfall. We made our way into this cave to get cleaned off. Sophia and Alyssa truly enjoyed the cold water. They were completely submerged. The rest of us did the best we could getting wet and Mr. Whitenight made sure he splashed everyone! Well we weren’t clean, but we were cleaner when we emerged from this cave at about 5:45 p.m. It had been a long day and it was time to change into dry clothes and head back to camp. The walk up that hill back to the car in those soaking wet coveralls seemed to take forever. That hill hadn’t seemed so long that morning when we came down to the cave.

Mr. Whitenight and his crew returned the key to the police station in Salem, while the rest of us went back to Spring Mill State Park to start taking showers. Once Joe arrived with the truck full of wet clothes we made a clothes line and hung all our wet muddy clothes up to dry. Unfortunately it rained pretty hard during the night and into the morning so drying was out of the question.

We had fun talking about the day while sitting around the campfire. The kids told all the stories about the tight spots in the cave and how much fun they had helping each other through the mud. Finally, it was time for bed and a much needed rest.

The rain woke everyone up before dawn, just pouring. So we all stayed in bed a little longer than normal. A couple more showers after we got up then finally it cleared up and the sun came out. Once everyone was up we decided to take a hike to the Pioneer Village that was at the other side of Spring Mill State Park. With Ashley and Kathy reading the map and leading the way we headed out. It was probably about a two to three mile walk one-way. By the time we got to the Village it was nearly noon and we wanted to be on the road by 1 p.m. so we didn’t actually take the time to explore the village. We turned around and headed back to camp. We decided to take the road instead of the trail, we thought it would be faster. It probably would be except for the very, very long up hill section. Everyone was happy when we were finally going downhill.

Packing up camp was a big job. The tents had dried nicely, but all the wet clothes had to be collected put back into garbage bags and into Joe’s pickup for the ride home. Then we had to break down camp and manage to get it all into the Challenge trailer. It was a group effort and we did a wonderful job. We even had a little room to spare in the trailer.

We didn’t get on the road until nearly 2 p.m. But the ride home was a ton of fun and the time passed quickly. We arrived back home at 10 p.m. safe and sound.

Maddie was awarded the club amulet for Rimrock on this trip. She was a lot of fun, always willing to help cook, set up camp, haul gear, help people through the cave. She was careful not to give away all the cave secrets to the others who had never been there before. She has a smile on her face the entire trip and had a great Challenge attitude. Good job, Maddie.

Chris was awarded the amulet for TNT. Chris was new to this trip so he didn't have the experience that Maddie did. But he did his best to help when needed. He was encouraging to the younger kids in the group and had a great Challenge attitude. Congratulations, Chris.

Both of these young people have lots of leadership potential that can continue to develop. What all the Challenge members have found out is that being a leader is a lot of work, but it can be very rewarding.