

Groaning Cave, Colorado: Summary of caver visitation, 2017-2018

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I summarize here caver visitation to Groaning Cave during the years 2017 and 2018, based on the log entries in the cave register filled out by every caver group. There were 31 trips registered in 2017 and 38 trips in 2018. There were a total of 112 cavers on all trips in 2017, and 135 cavers in 2018. Many cavers did multiple trips in a given year, especially trip leaders taking different groups to the cave.

Party size and trip purpose:

The most common party size for Groaning Cave trips was 3. This is probably expected, as this is a good size for safety, for moving through the cave, and also for surveying. There were also a number of trips with 6 people. Many of these appeared to be novice introductory groups. However, at least one of these appeared to probably just be two survey teams of 3 persons each traveling together. In both years, these two party sizes (3 and 6) together accounted for about 60% of the total trips, and about 64% of the total number of cavers visiting the cave.

Party size	2	3	4	5	6
2017 # of trips	5	14	5	2	5
2018 # of trips	8	15	6	2	7

There were 10 identifiable survey trips in 2017, and 7 survey trips in 2018. Most of the rest of the trips were probably recreational or exploration, although I believe that a few of them were for photography, and one trip actually was largely dedicated to fixing problems with the cave entrance gate. Two of the 2018 trips were leading groups of Forest Service personnel around the CSU loop to introduce them to the cave. However, most trips did not record particular trip purposes in the register.

Monthly usage:

Groaning is closed between August 15 and April 15 to protect the bats that live there. In 2017, late snow made it hard to reach the cave until mid-June, so visits were heavily concentrated in the month of July. In contrast, 2018 was a warm dry spring, so people could get to the cave by the start of May. This was probably a significant reason there were more trips in 2018 than in 2017, as can be seen in the following table:

Month	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.
2017 # of trips	0	6	19	2	2	2
2018 # of trips	6	17	11	2	0	1

In both 2017 and 2018, exception permits were granted to NSS cavers to allow survey trips to continue between August 15 and October 15. There were 4 trips made under the exception permits in 2017, but only 1 in 2018. A major factor in that difference was that 2018 was a severe fire year on the White River National Forest, so the exception permit for Groaning was not approved until September 20 because relevant Forest Service people were away on fire assignments.

Trip destinations:

Most trips list an area of the cave that they intend to visit. This is potentially important in case of accidents or overdue parties. For this analysis, I divided the cave into 5 main areas: “Front” for trips to the front part of the cave, including the CSU passages and extending roughly as far as Tranquility Hall; “F+G” for trips to the F and G surveys, including Serenity Hall, Hard to Get Hall, Spiders’ Den, and Lost Horizons; “J+K” for White Forest, Black Cathedral, and Submarine Boulevard; “M” for Mushrooms and the Madhouse; and “L+N” for the rest of the back part of the cave, including Lakes, Shattered Hall, the Overlook, and Far Away Places.

Destination	Front	F+G	J+K	M	L+N	Unknown
2017 # of trips	5	8	10	6	1	1
2018 # of trips	11	8	7	4	6	2

Bat observations:

The Forest Service has requested that we start recording observations of bats, whether asleep or flying, and where in the cave we see them. “No bats seen” can also be a useful observation. 3 trips in 2017 entered bat observation comments, and 7 trips in 2018 did likewise. I would strongly encourage other cavers to include bat observations in the future.

Aug. 9 2017	About a dozen bats from J’s to exit on way out
Sept. 23 2017	No bats seen
Oct. 7 2017	No bats seen
June 10 2018	1 active bat in Ds
June 18 2018	One bat sleeping in CSU junction
June 24 2018	No bats seen
June 30 2018	No bats seen
July 15 2018	One sleeping bat in CSU
Aug. 10 2018	8 bats seen between CSU and Serenity
Oct. 13 2018	1 bat crawling at entrance, 1 bat sleeping in CSU, 1 flying in Serenity