

Groaning Cave, Colorado: Summary of caver visitation, 2019

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I summarize here caver visitation to Groaning Cave during the year 2019, based on the log entries in the cave register filled out by every caver group. There were 20 trips in 2019, down from 31 trips in 2017 and 38 trips in 2018. There were a total of 79 cavers on all trips in 2019, again down substantially from 2017 and 2018. As in previous years, some cavers did multiple trips in a given year, especially trip leaders taking different groups to the cave.

Party size:

The most common party size for Groaning Cave trips was three, as in previous years.

Party size	3	4	5	6
2019 # of trips	9	6	2	3

Monthly usage:

Groaning is closed between August 15 and April 15 to protect the bats that live there. In 2019, heavy late spring snow made it hard to reach the cave until the end of June, so visits were heavily concentrated in the month of July and early August, a span of only about six weeks, which was probably why the number of trips was down significantly this year.

Month	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.
2019 # of trips	0	1	8	9	0	2

In 2019, as in 2017 and 2018, exception permits were granted to NSS cavers to allow work trips to continue between August 15 and October 15. There were three trips made under the exception permits in 2019, one in August and two in October.

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 five 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
2019 # of trips	3	2	9	4	0	2

Bat observations:

The Forest Service has requested that we record observations of bats, whether asleep or flying, and where in the cave we see them. "No bats seen" can also be a useful observation. 13 of the 20 trips in 2019 recorded some bat information. I encourage all cavers to include bat observations in the future.

June 29 2019	No bats seen
July 9 2019	No bats seen
July 11 2019	No bats seen
July 14 2019	No live bats seen; one dead bat with yellow mold near F8
July 16 2019	No bats seen
July 20 2019	No bats seen
July 23 2019	No bats seen
July 23 2019	No bats seen
July 31 2019	12 or more bats seen actively flying from J survey on out to entrance
August 13 2019	10-15 active bats seen from G survey out to entrance
August 17 2019	Recovered bat corpse from F survey, also soil samples
October 5 2019	3 bats seen actively flying G survey to entrance; 3 more flying around entrance. Another dead bat with green mold seen in G survey near Hard to Get Hall.
October 12 2019	In total we saw a total of 8 bats in the cave. Bat 1 was found on the ceiling right before the sign in the entrance to the cave and was not active. Bat 2 was found in a pocket right by the gate entrance and was not active. Bats 3,4, and 5 were found on the ceiling right by CSU Lake and there is some serious concern that they may be dead. They were not clustered and were dispersed around the room. Bat 6 was seen in the D survey between D9 junction and the windows. Bat 7 was seen flying in Serenity Hall. Bat 8 was seen flying in the G survey between hard to get hall and Serenity Hall.

Two moldy, recently dead bats were noted this year, one in the F survey and another in the G survey. The one in the F survey was recovered, along with soil samples, and turned over to Colorado Parks and Wildlife for analysis. The good news is that the tests for Pd came back negative; at the time of writing, we still have not had any positive tests for Pd or WNS yet in Colorado. The second moldy bat corpse in the G's was photographed and also reported to CPW, but was sufficiently deteriorated that it was deemed not worth recovering.

The four trips that reported a significant number of actively flying bats were all longer trips, and exited the cave after dark, later than most other trips, so most of the flying bats were seen during the night

hours. All four trips reporting active bats were also all later in the season, so that might also be an explanation.