

Kirk MacGregor, World-Class Caver

Written & photographed
by Mike Davis

Kirk MacGregor, long-time president of Toronto Caving Group (TCG) commemorated its 50th anniversary by repeating a trip to the very cave where the group had been founded on June 3, 1967. On this trip, the group did not make it into the cave. Kirk had felt ill on the hike and was unable to continue. It was later discovered that he had suffered a mild heart attack at that time.

I knew Kirk since 1985, when I went on a beginner caving trip that the TCG ran at Rattlesnake Point/Mount Nemo on the Niagara Escarpment in Milton. Kirk was recognized as an expert caver in almost all aspects of spelunking including rope climbing, multi-day underground expeditions and exploring in many places of the world. He was an extraordinarily good trip leader. He would go at the pace of the slowest in the group, but could out-cave nearly anyone, meaning he could endure the toughest conditions,

mud-filled corridors, spiky rocks, tight, twisty passages. Although rather awkward socially above ground, he was totally dependable and your best friend below ground, conveying good judgement and minimizing mistakes through his extensive experience.

He had a tremendous respect for the fragility of cave systems where a slight touch would destroy them forever, and a respect for the inherent dangers, where slowing down or stopping the trip prevented injury. Once the TCG was on live television on a segment for Breakfast Television, and Kirk was leading reporter Steve Anthony in a crevasse cave at Rattlesnake Point. Kirk was pointing out a delicate formation called Flowstone. Steve wanted to handle it, but Kirk yelled “Don’t touch that!” which may have been awkward, but was proper cave conservation etiquette.

Kirk was an innovator with caving gear, creating much of his own safety equipment. I recall going to Bridge Day in West Virginia, where one day a year cavers can lower



▼ Kirk MacGregor, left, president of Toronto Caving Group, on a June 3, 2017 day trip to Hope Bay Cave located near Lion’s Head on the Bruce Peninsula.

a rope from the bridge and rappel/climb the roughly 800 feet. Kirk showed his homemade, rather unorthodox seat harness at a pre-event mandatory inspection. The inspector stared in shock at the ball of webbing with strange stitching and said “What the hell is this!” He looked up, saw it was Kirk, knew he was totally competent and let him through. Kirk showed his skill at unconventional rappelling

by going down the entire length of rope head first!

Kirk was the driving force behind TCG and president for most of the time. He spent countless hours organizing trips and meetings, logging equipment and facts, testing lights and batteries and GPS accuracy.

Kirk died suddenly on Dec 5, 2017 of a heart attack. He was 71. He will be missed both above and below ground.