

## Moving into Mole Manor

by Tony Stephens

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I recently acquired an elderly roll-off observatory building on the TAS Dark Site in Atoka County. The building had been unopened for about eighteen months. When I opened it up, I found a large pile of dirt in the northwest corner, as shown in Photo 1. The balled-up nature of the dirt clods indicated that it was probably put there by some animal. But at the time, I could not imagine what kind of animal it could be. By the end of the day, I had hauled away all the dirt from the corner. The wood in the corner had deteriorated above the concrete slab and there were several places where a small animal could have gotten in.

The next morning I arrived to find a new pile of dirt in the corner, as shown in Photo 2. While removing this second pile of dirt, I discovered that there was a two inch tunnel going through the interior of the dirt pile, under the wall panel, and into the ground outside. At this point it was clear that this industrious little animal must be a mole. I nailed pieces of plywood over the walls on the inside and the outside and went home.



**Photo 1:** This pile of dirt was found in the corner when the observatory building was first opened up.



**Photo 2:** This second pile of dirt showed up overnight.

The following week I returned and took down the plywood pieces. Sure enough, Mr. Mole had brought dirt under the outside plywood, through a hole in the wall panel, and into the chamber formed by the wall panel and the inside plywood. This is shown in Photo 3.

That day I set about patching the wood in this corner, and the result is shown in Photo 4. This patch and other patches around the bottoms of the walls have relegated Mr. Mole to the world outside. I know he is still out there, because I later saw a new hole in the ground adjacent to the slab. He can live under the slab if he wants to, but I am determined to be the Lord of Mole Manor above.



**Photo 3: This third pile of dirt was smaller because plywood had been nailed to the studs.**



**Photo 4: Since these patches were applied, Mr. Mole has not brought any more dirt into Mole Manor.**