

# *Lehman Caves*

NATIONAL MONUMENT • NEVADA

# Lehman Caves



## NATIONAL MONUMENT

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

J. A. Krug, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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*A vast, intricate, and beautiful cavern system underlying the flank of 13,058-foot Wheeler Peak in the heart of the high desert country of eastern Nevada.*

SET in the heart of a region of wide basins and towering mountain ranges lies Lehman Caves National Monument, 5 miles west of Baker, Nev. The mighty Snake Range, on the eastern edge of Nevada, is topped by Wheeler Peak (13,058 feet), one of the highest mountains in the Great Basin. The monument, 1 square mile in area, is on the eastern flank of this majestic peak, in the piñon pine and juniper belt, at an average elevation of 7,000 feet. Eastward, beyond the flats of Snake Valley, rise range after range of mountains, fading into the hazy distance, far into Utah. On either side of the monument are the perennial streams of Baker and Lehman Creeks, stocked with trout and heading in the glaciated canyons to the north and south of majestic Wheeler Peak.

In the spring and early summer, numerous varieties of wild flowers, including lupines, yellow aster, larkspur, locoweed, desert-mallow, columbine, thistle-poppy, cacti, and many others abound. As the season advances, blossoms are found at higher and higher levels; and even in late summer flowers bloom in profusion in the high country and along the streams. After the first frosts of the fall, the moun-

tain slopes are streaked with the blazing gold of aspen, and for fully half the year the higher peaks are clothed in glistening white.

Mule deer feed in the meadows or bound away through the higher forests of pine, spruce, fir, and mountain-mahogany. Mountain lions are not unknown, and an occasional coyote may be seen. Owls, bluebirds, water ouzels, and many other birds are seen in the monument and along the nearby streams.

### History

The caves were discovered in the 1870's by Ab (Absalom) Lehman, a pioneer homesteader, for whom Lehman Creek was also named. While driving his cattle, in the vicinity, the horse on which Lehman was riding fell into an opening in the ground, which proved to be the natural entrance to the vast underground cavern system. The date "1878" found in one of the side chambers, near the entrance, is the first definite evidence of exploration within the caves. Further exploration occurred in 1881 and later years by various parties. However, from archaeological material, particularly human skeletal remains uncovered from a

deep deposit adjacent to the natural entrance, it is evident that the prehistoric Indians of this region utilized the caves as a burial chamber several thousand years before Ab Lehman accidentally discovered it.

Before the turn of the century, the caves were locally well known, as attested by the numerous names and dates left by thoughtless visitors. In 1922, it was recognized that the caves should be protected by the Federal Government, and the national monument was established under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture. By Executive Order of 1933 it was transferred to the National Park Service.

### Geology

Wheeler Peak is the highest point on a vast arch of ancient quartzite layers, totaling thousands of feet in thickness. The peak has been shaped and carved by the gnawings of mountain glaciers that once occupied the heads of Baker and Lehman Creeks, and by the rushing waters of the streams themselves. Underlying the quartzite, and cutting across the base of its dipping strata, is a younger granite which has little affected the quartzite itself, but has changed and metamorphosed an overlying limestone at the eastern foot

of the mountain. In this metamorphic limestone, probably middle Cambrian in age, the Lehman Caves have been cut.

Tens of thousands of years ago, when the Snake Range was lower and less rugged and the climate was much more humid, the first stage in the formation of the caves began. Water, charged with carbon dioxide, percolated down through cracks and joint-planes in the limestone, widening and enlarging them, and carrying away the dissolved material. More soluble rock was dissolved, leaving large vaulted rooms, and faults and joint-planes were widened into connecting passageways until they eventually formed a labyrinth of straight corridors and smaller winding tunnels connecting larger chambers. As lower channels drained the water from the upper levels, the second stage in the process of cave formation began. The lime-laden water, seeping down through the overlying rock, gathered as drops or spread out in thin films on the roofs and sides of the caverns. Evaporating and losing carbon dioxide, the moisture precipitated some of its dissolved load as "dripstone." Myriads of stalactites festooned the roofs, growing longer and thicker at their bases and dropping excess water to build up stubby stalagmites from

the floor. Some stalactites grew laterally in one plane, forming graceful draperies of dripstone, or the translucent, ribbon-like septae, or "bacon strips." Thin round disks of dripstone were deposited on the flat bed-rock ceilings, and, as the lengthening stalactites that hung from them grew heavier, these plates were slowly peeled away. These peculiar structures, called "tom-toms," because they resound like a drum, are abundant in varied forms throughout the caves.

Pools of water on the floors have built tiny, beautifully terraced dikes, or dams, around their edges, and have deposited a white spongy, nodular growth in the pool itself. Huge fluted columns reach from floor to ceiling, and their oft-repeated nodes, or terraces, seen again in the individual stalagmites, are the underlying architectural motif of all the formations in the caves. Tiny needle crystals, peculiar mushroom-like nodules, frosty incrustations in infinitely varied form, grow on the larger formations or cover the walls and ceiling where the others do not occur. Some of the formations are delicate shades of buff or chocolate, while others are a creamy white.

Walking down the easy trails that wind among weird stalagmites, taller than a

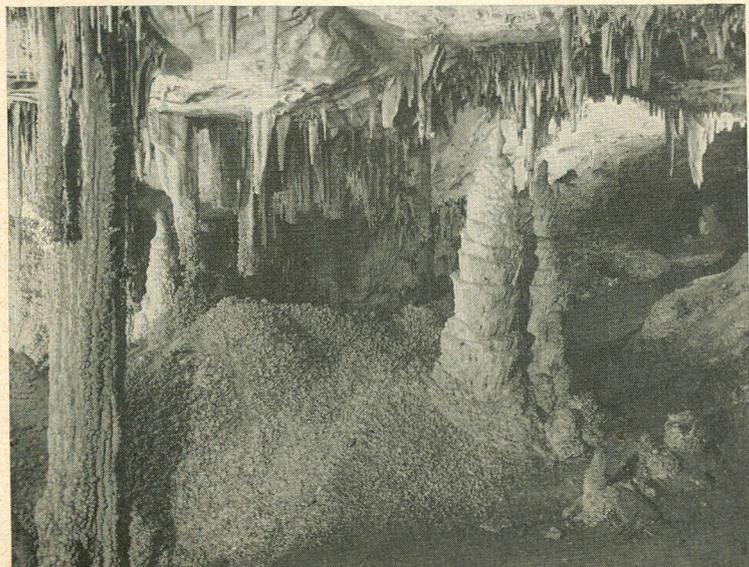
man, through the "Music Hall" with its clear-toned organ, past the "tom-toms" and the rippled curtains of stone, through rooms with high-arched, color-splashed ceilings, is an emotional experience not soon forgotten. Gracefully tapered stalactites carry jeweled drops of water at their tips; side corridors, festooned with fantastic dripstone growths, lead off into the darkness. Combinations of chance rock-form, color, and shadow stimulate the imagination. Strange stone faces, animals, and figurines line the paths. No two rooms are alike. Each has its own set of casual elements that have resulted in dripstone forms of such infinite variety as to prevent their being classified or cataloged.

### How to Reach the Monument

Lehman Caves is located at the end of a newly paved spur road, 5 miles west of Baker, Nev. It is 65 miles from U S 50 at Ely, Nev. U S 6 is 10 miles from the monument. On the east, U S 91 is 135 miles away.

At present the nearest rail, plane, and bus service is at Ely, Nev. A small airstrip is located near Baker, Nev.

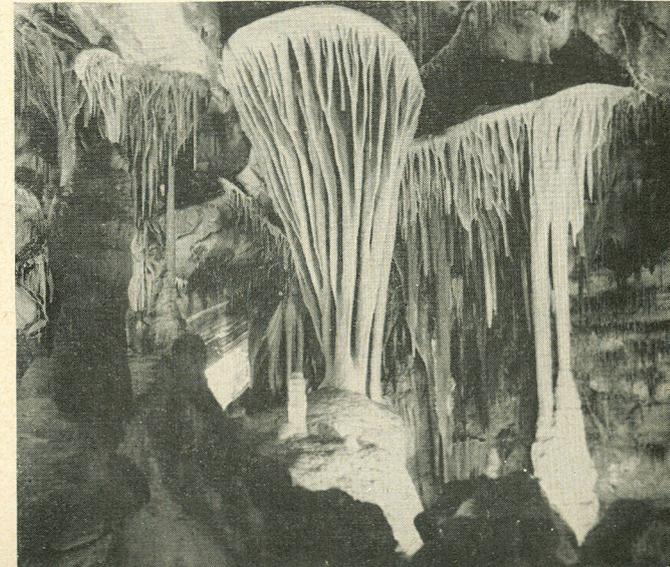
*Popcorn Hill and the Leaning Tower*



*Park Service representative describes Pearly Gates to visitors*



*This formation, called the Parachute, is an example of a "plate" pulled from the ceiling*



## Camp and Picnic Facilities

The National Park Service maintains, in the headquarters area, attractive overnight camp and picnic facilities which are available without charge. There are also many beautifully situated camp sites in the Nevada National Forest, adjacent to the monument.

## Lodge and Cabins

Refreshments, limited meal service, souvenirs, and overnight cabins, with modern toilets and showers adjacent, are maintained in the headquarters area. The services are furnished under contract with the Government and standard prices prevail.

## Trips Through the Caves

Outstanding among the many physical improvements made for the comfort and convenience of the visiting public is the modern electrical system providing indirect illumination throughout the caves. An entrance tunnel, of easy grade, has been driven through the limestone formation, eliminating the climb to the natural entrance, and a system of trails and stairs

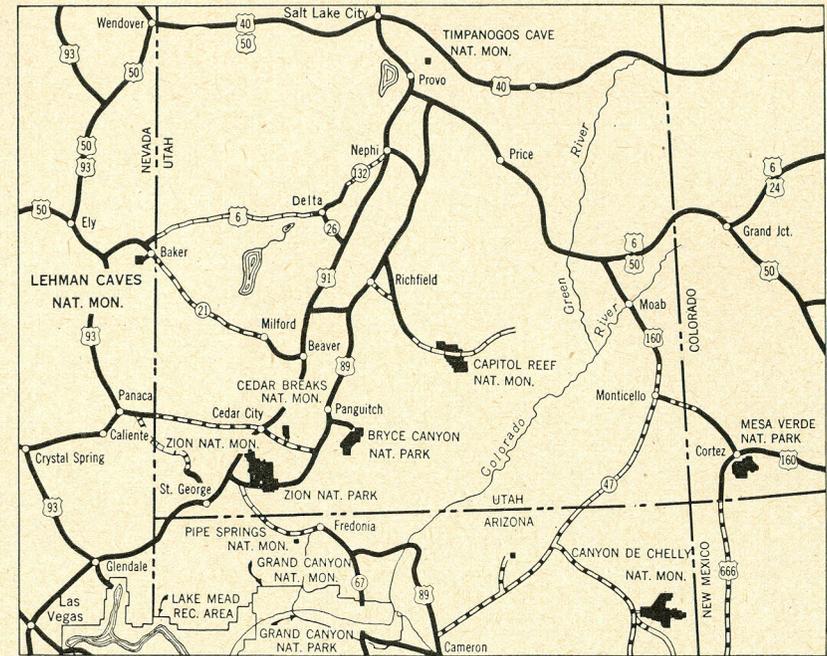
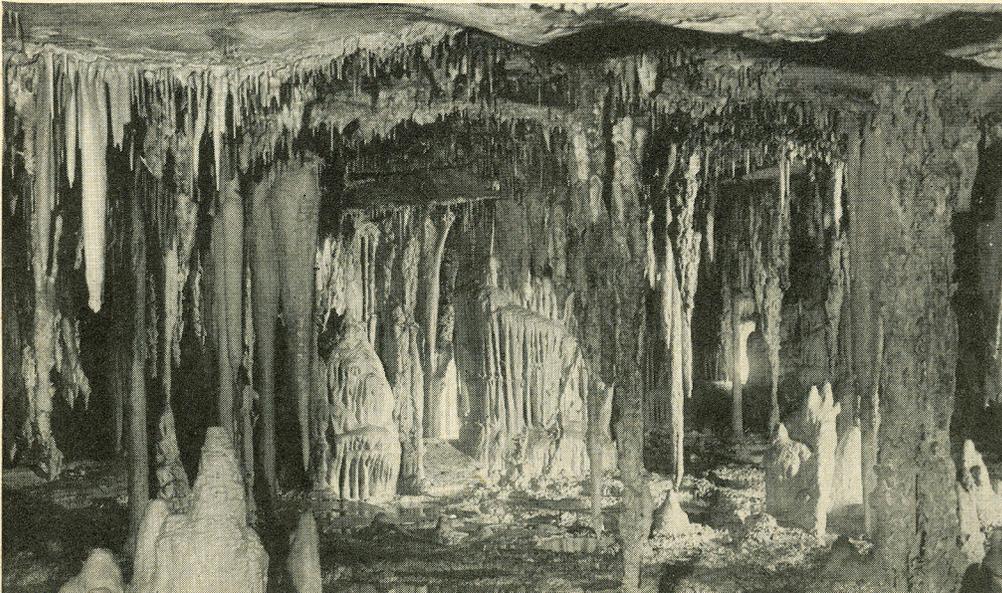
extends throughout. An interesting tour of the caves takes only about an hour.

All trips through Lehman Caves are conducted by a National Park Service representative, whose duty it is to provide safe passage and interpretive service, and to enforce rules and regulations relating to the handling of cave formations, etc. A charge of 50 cents (including tax) is made for all persons 12 years of age or over. Children under 12 accompanied by an adult are admitted free.

## Administration

Lehman Caves National Monument is a part of the National Park System owned by the people of the United States and administered for them by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior. The area is under the general supervision of the superintendent of Lake Mead Recreational Area, Boulder City, Nev. A local superintendent is permanently stationed at the monument to supervise its operation and protection. Inquiries regarding the monument may be addressed to the Superintendent, Lake Mead Recreational Area, Boulder City, Nev., or to the Superintendent, Lehman Caves National Monument, Baker, Nev.

*Small natural dikes have been formed in the Cypress Swamp*



### LEGEND

-  Paved Roads
-  Improved Roads
-  Graded Roads
-  Unimproved Roads

## LEHMAN CAVES NATIONAL MONUMENT

NEVADA

SCALE

0 20 40 60 80 100 Miles

Drawn by E. F. Berry March 1949 NM-LC-7001