

# Lehman Caves

A black and white photograph of the interior of Lehman Caves. The image shows large, rounded rock formations, likely flowstones, and numerous stalactites hanging from the ceiling. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the rock.

NATIONAL MONUMENT

NEVADA

# LEHMAN CAVES

## NATIONAL MONUMENT

OPEN ALL YEAR

In the heart of a region of wide basins and high mountain ranges lies Lehman Caves National Monument. The impressive Snake Range, on the eastern edge of Nevada, is topped by Wheeler Peak (13,061 feet), one of the highest mountains in the Great Basin. And the monument, containing 640 acres, is on the eastern flank of this peak, in the pinyon 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, many kinds of wildflowers bloom, including lupine, yellow aster, larkspur, locoweed, globemallow, columbine, pricklepoppy, and cactus. As the season advances, the blossoms appear higher up the sides of the mountains. Even in late summer, flowers bloom in profusion in the high country and along the streams. In autumn, the mountain slopes are streaked with the blazing gold of aspen. For fully half the year the higher peaks are clothed in a glistening mantle of snow.

Mule deer may be seen feeding in the meadows or bounding away through the 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 found in the monument and along nearby streams.

### *HISTORY*

The caves were discovered in the 1870's by Ab (Absalom) Lehman, a pioneer homesteader, for whom Lehman Creek also was named. The date "1878," found in one of the side chambers near the entrance, is the earliest definite evidence of exploration within the caves. Further exploration occurred in 1881 and in later years. However, from arche-

The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.

ological material, particularly human skeletal remains uncovered from a deep deposit adjacent to the natural entrance, it is clear that the Indians of this region utilized the caves as a burial chamber several hundred years before Ab Lehman discovered them.

Before the turn of the century, the caves were locally well known, as attested by the numerous names and dates left by early visitors. On January 24, 1922, the National Monument was established under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture, thus assuring future protection of the rare and delicate cave formations. By Executive order, the area was transferred to the National Park Service in 1933.

### GEOLOGY

Wheeler Peak has been carved into its present shape by mountain glaciers that once existed at the heads of Baker and Lehman Creeks and by the rushing waters of these streams. This peak is the highest point on a vast arch of thick quartzite, originally a sandstone. On the east flank of the peak is limestone of Cambrian age. A granite intrusion at the contact of the quartzite and limestone had little effect on the quartzite but did change some of the limestone

to marble. It is in this limestone that the Lehman Caves have been formed.

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, filled the cracks and joint planes in the limestone, widening and enlarging them as the process of solution continued. The more soluble rock was dissolved, leaving large vaulted rooms, and fault 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 water deposited some of its dissolved load as dripstone. As a result, myriads of stalactites developed from the roofs, growing longer and thicker. Water dripping from the stalactites built up stubby stalagmites from the floor. In places, water seeping through the walls built graceful draperies and the translucent, ribbonlike

### *The "Cypress Swamp."*





*Watching fish in Lehman Creek near monument headquarters.*

“bacon strips” of calcium carbonate.

Thin round disks of lime dripstone form the very rare speleothems (cave formations) called shields or pallettes, which are found in abundance throughout Lehman Caves. Usually occurring in angular positions on the walls and floors, these formations remain a geological puzzle and seem to defy explanation.

Pools of water on the floors have built beautifully terraced miniature dams around their edges and have deposited white, spongy, nodular growths in the pools themselves. Huge fluted columns reach from floor to ceiling. These columns, with their oft-repeated “nodes,” or terraces, seen also in stalagmites, are characteristic of all the formations in Lehman Caves. Tiny needle crystals, peculiar mushroom-like lumps, and frosty incrustations grow on the larger formations and cover walls and ceilings where other forms of decorations 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 and color-splashed ceilings, is an emotional experience not soon forgotten. Gracefully tapered stalactites carry jewel-like 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 elements that have resulted in dripstone forms of infinite variety which defy cataloging.

## TRIPS THROUGH THE CAVES

Trips are conducted by uniformed personnel of the National Park Service over a paved trail and stairways. About 1 hour is required for the tour.

A modern electrical system provides indirect lighting throughout the caves.

Temperature in the caves is a chilly 48°; and so, warm clothes are suggested.

There is a nominal fee for guide service, but no charge is made for children under 12 years of age or for groups of schoolchildren 18 years of age or under when they are accompanied by adults who assume responsibility for their safety and orderly conduct.

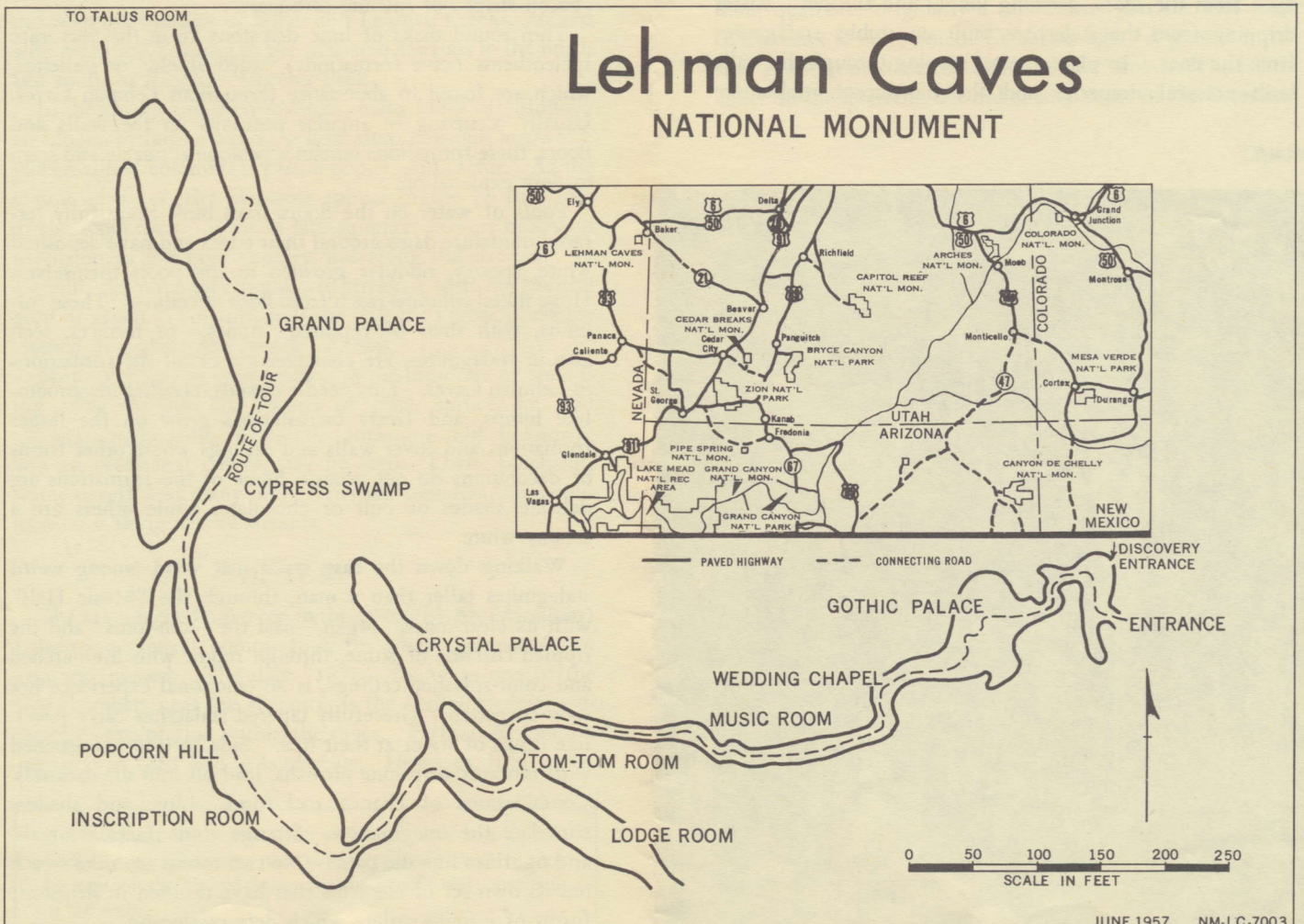
Flash photography is permitted along some stretches of the regular tours, which will be indicated by the guide. But, no tripods, please!

## LOCATION

The monument is 5 miles west of Baker, Nev., near the Nevada-Utah boundary. U.S. 6 and 50 are 10 miles to the north, and U.S. 93 is 40 miles to the west.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

In the headquarters area, the National Park Service maintains picnic facilities which are available without charge. Refreshments, meals, souvenirs, and modern overnight cabins are maintained under Government permit with Service-approved rates. They are located in the headquarters area and are available from March through October, depending on weather conditions. For reservations write to the Concessioner, Lehman Caves National Monument, Baker, Nev. There are also good campsites in Humboldt National Forest adjacent to the monument.



## PLEASE HELP PROTECT YOUR MONUMENT

Keep your pets on leash or in your car; they are not permitted in the buildings or in the caves.

Fires are allowed only in the picnic area.

Flowers, trees, rocks, and mineral specimens are part of the natural scene and may not be destroyed or removed.

Do not disturb, injure, or kill the animals and other wildlife of the monument.

Prospecting or locating mineral claims within the monument boundaries is prohibited.

### *While in the Caves:*

Stay on the main trail and stay with your party at all times.

Do not remove, break, mark on, or deface the walls or any formation within the caves.

## ADMINISTRATION

Lehman Caves National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Baker, Nev., is in immediate charge.

## MISSION 66

Mission 66 is a program designed to be completed by 1966 which will assure the maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, wilderness, and historic resources of the National Park System in such ways and by such means as will make them available for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



Fred A. Seaton, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*



Cover: *The "Parachute"*—an example of a palette.