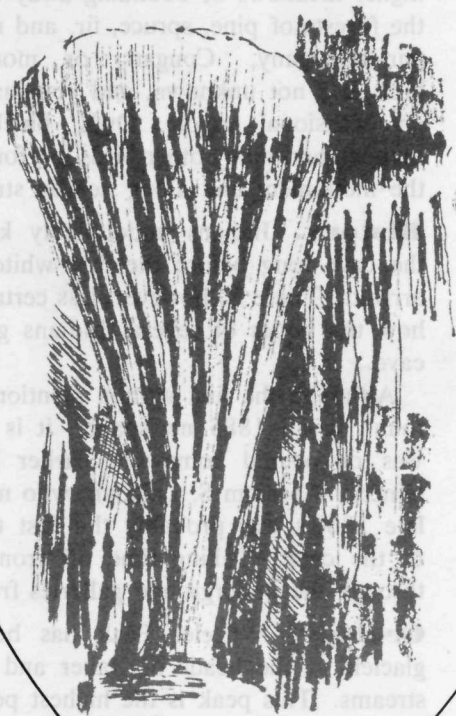


# Lehman Caves

NATIONAL MONUMENT • Nevada



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**i**n the heart of a region of wide basins and high mountain ranges lies Lehman Caves National Monument. It is on the eastern flank of Wheeler Peak (13,063 feet), one of the highest mountains in the Great Basin and the pinnacle of the impressive Snake Range, on the eastern edge of Nevada. Eastward, beyond the flats of Snake Valley, rise range after range of mountains, fading into the hazy distance, far into Utah.

The monument, containing 640 acres, is in the pinyon pine and juniper belt, at an average elevation of 7,000 feet. On opposite sides of the monument are Baker and Lehman Creeks. These perennial streams flow out of 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.

In late summer, flowers bloom in profusion in the high country and along 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.

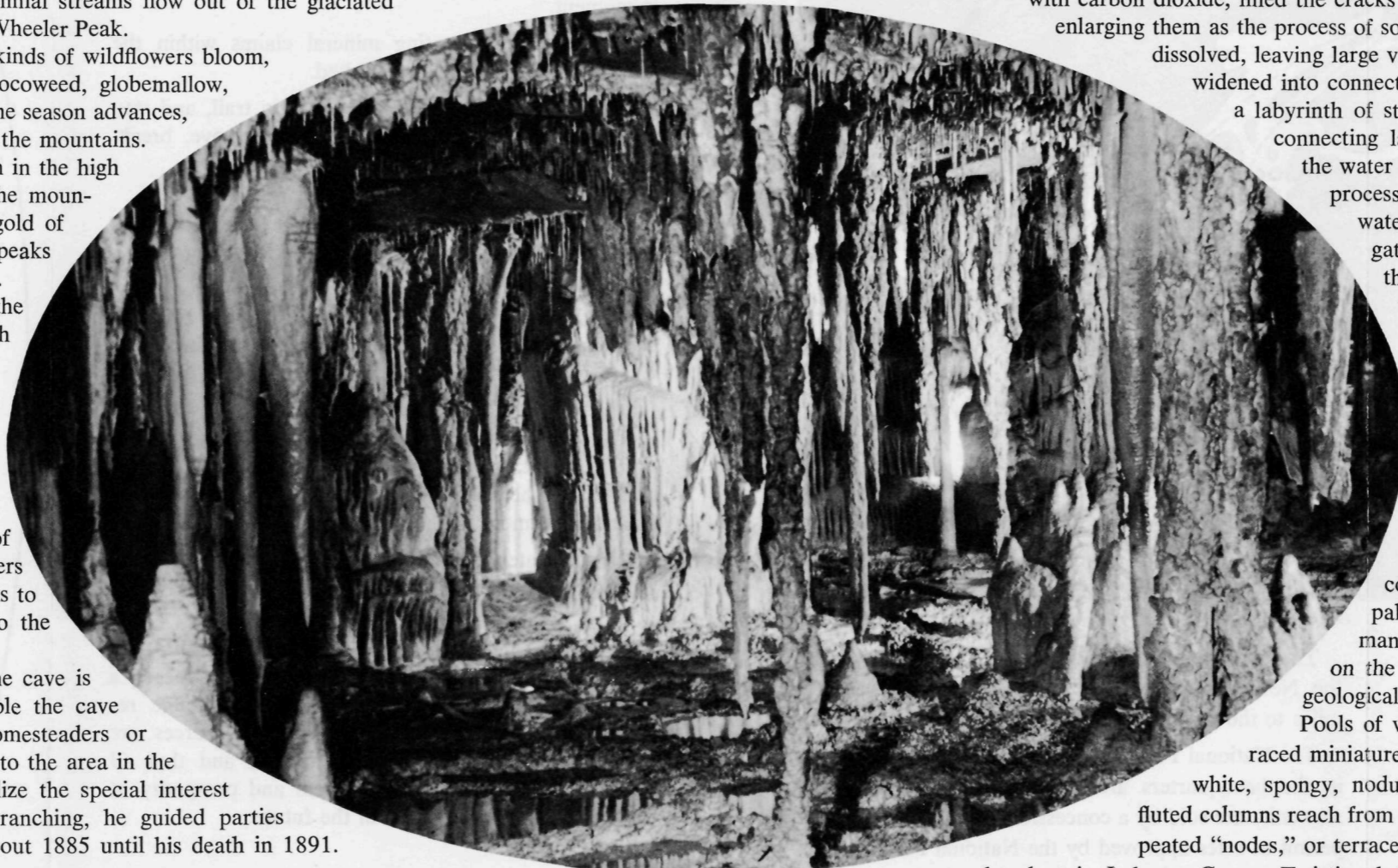
Mule deer may be seen feeding in the higher meadows or bounding away through the forests of pine, spruce, fir, and mountain-mahogany. Cougars, or mountain lions, are not unknown, and you may see an occasional coyote. Owls, bluebirds, dippers, and many other birds are found in the monument and along nearby streams.

**History.** Indians undoubtedly knew of the cave long before the first white settlers arrived. There is, however, less certainty as to how the bones of several Indians got into the cave.

Although the first written mention of the cave is found in an 1885 newspaper, it is possible the cave was discovered somewhat earlier by homesteaders or miners. Absalom S. Lehman, who moved to the area in the late 1860's was probably the first to realize the special interest of the cave. Taking time off from his ranching, he guided parties through the underground galleries from about 1885 until his death in 1891.

**Geology.** Wheeler Peak has been carved into its present shape by mountain glaciers 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 former but did change some of the limestone to marble. It is in this marble 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



*The Cypress Swamp.*

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 marble, 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 calcium-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, the water deposited some of its dissolved load as dripstone. As a result, myriads of stalactites developed from the roofs, and kept growing longer and thicker. Water dripping from stalactites built up stubby stalagmites from the floor. In places, water seeping through the walls built graceful draperies and translucent, ribbon-like "bacon strips" of calcium carbonate.

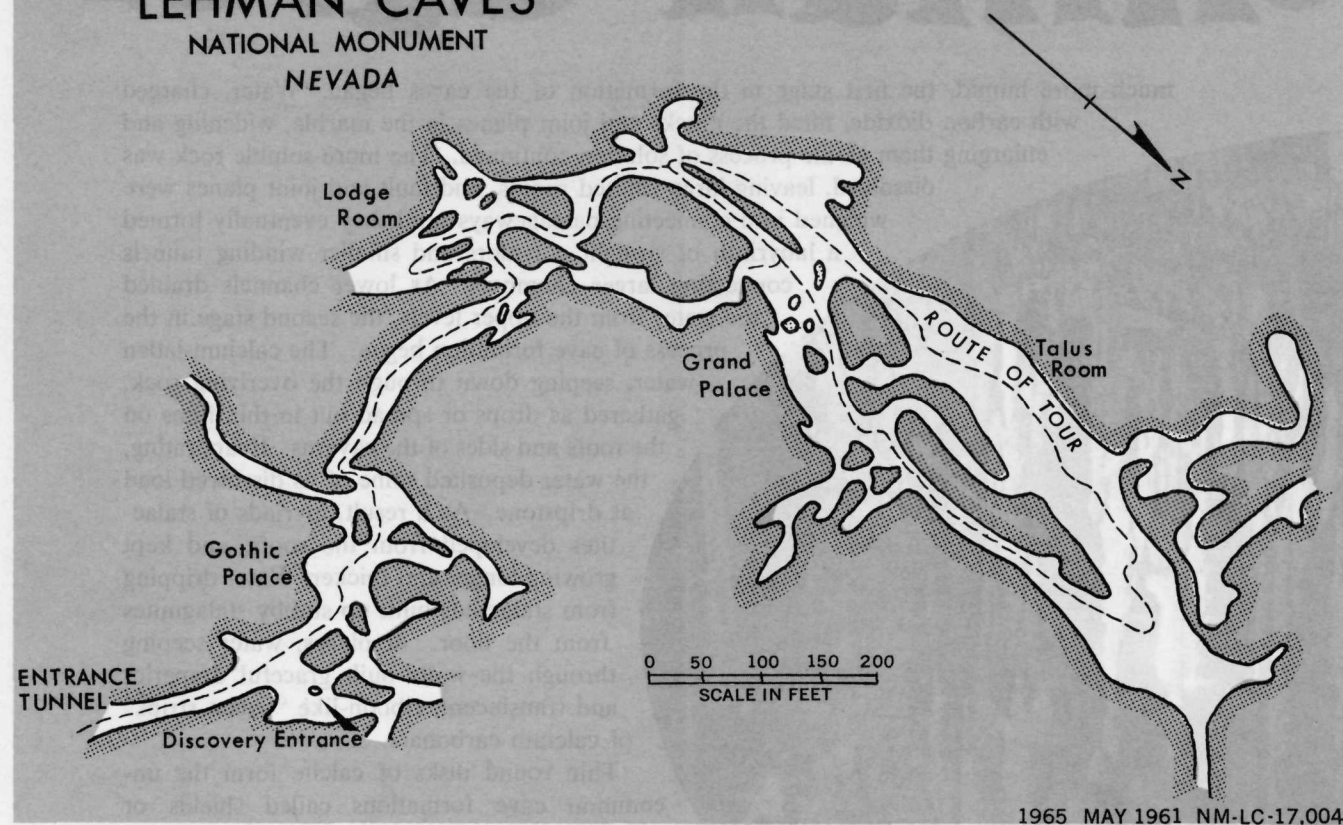
Thin round disks of calcite form the uncommon cave formations called shields or pallettes, which are abundant throughout Lehman Caves. Usually occurring in angular positions on the walls and floors, these formations remain a geological puzzle.

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. High fluted columns reach from floor to ceiling. These columns, with their repeated "nodes," or terraces, seen also in stalagmites and stalactites, are

abundant in Lehman Caves. Twisting helictites, peculiar, mushroom-like lumps, and frosty incrustations grow on many of the formations and cover walls and ceilings where other forms of decorations do not occur. Some are buff or chocolate, others creamy white, orange, or red.

Walking down the easy trail that winds among weird stalagmites taller than a man, past the "tom-toms" and beneath rippled curtains of stone, through rooms with high-arched and color-splashed ceilings, is an experience. Rock forms, 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.

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**ABOUT YOUR VISIT**—Trips through the cave are conducted over a 2/3-mile paved trail with stairways. About 1½ hours are required for the tour. A modern electrical system provides indirect lighting. Temperature averages a chilly 50°; warm clothing is suggested.

There is a nominal fee for guide service, but no charge is made for children under 16 years, or for groups from educational institutions and persons in charge of such groups.

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

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.

The National Park Service maintains picnic facilities in the headquarters area. Refreshments, meals, and souvenirs are sold by a concessioner under Government permit at rates approved by the National Park Service. They are available from April through October, depending on weather conditions. There are no overnight accommodations within the monument and camping is not allowed. Humboldt National Forest, adjacent to the monument, has campsites.

**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 other natural features may not be marred, destroyed, or removed.

Do not disturb, injure, or kill the 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, or deface the walls or any formation.

**ADMINISTRATION**—Lehman Caves National Monument is administered by the National Park Service. U.S. Department of the Interior.

On January 24, 1922, Lehman Caves National Monument was established under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service. It was transferred to the National Park Service in 1933 by Executive order.

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 the people.

A superintendent, whose address is Baker, Nev. 89311, is in immediate charge of the monument.

**THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—bears a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



National Park Service

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