

THE NEED FOR CAVE PRESERVATION

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Why is there a need for cave preservation? This simple question is enough to initiate a lecture on cave damage by any experienced spelunker or speleologist. Anyone who has visited many caves has seen the destruction caused by thoughtless previous visitors. It is the purpose of this article to dissuade the reader from becoming a thoughtless, or perhaps an unconscious vandal.

The caves of California are of three main types: sea caves, limestone caves, and lava tubes. Preservation problems are concerned mainly with the limestone caves, and to a lesser degree with the lava tubes and sea caves. The main thing subject to vandalism in the lava caves is the ice that is at times found in some of them. An example of what was probably unconscious vandalism was noted in Crystal Ice Cave, where people had been using gasoline lanterns, and had set them on some of the beautiful ice floors. The result of this was to melt circles in the ice, and these rings will remain for many years. Yet this is minute damage as compared to the damage that can occur in limestone caves. The time it takes to form some of the delicate formations in limestone caves is infinitely longer than the time necessary to obscure the circles on the ice of Crystal Ice Cave.

How does vandalism occur, and exactly what is meant by the term "vandalism"? A broad definition would be that vandalism is partly accidental, and partly purposeful. I have seen places where rock collectors have broken large formations to obtain a few samples of cave formations. Such thoughtless, destructive acts destroy forever the beauty of the cave. Almost as destructive as the rock collector is the "name scrawler", who cannot seem to go any place without leaving dates and names. Any writing on cave walls is unnecessary, and greatly damages the beauty of the cave. Even the practice of marking arrows on the walls is uncalled for. If you are afraid of getting lost, then mark arrows in the dirt on the floor, or make a pile of rocks, or leave a small piece of cloth that you can pick up on your return trip. No cave is so complex that these methods will not work at least as well as arrows on the wall. In fact, few California caves are so complex as to call for even these measures.

Many people who start visiting caves do so with at least a small desire to collect a piece of stalactite. When such a specimen is collected, it usually ends up in the trash can after being moved from place to place for awhile. The most

beautiful way to see a stalactite is to see it in its natural surroundings in a cave. If you take a formation from a cave, you not only destroy most of the beauty of the piece itself, but you also destroy the potential enjoyment of future visitors of the cave.

In many of the caves you will visit, you will find evidence that other people have been there before you. Often broken formations can be seen on the floor, and it is a temptation to collect these, justifying it by saying that it was already broken. But, if you did not collect this specimen, then some other persons might very well find it, and take it rather than to break a new formation. If you leave all formations in the cave, then you will find you have aided in the preservation of the cave.

So far purposeful vandalism has been all that I have discussed. Accidental damage to the cave can occur due to carelessness. The best way to prevent this is to be careful, and to pass up exploration of some leads if they would involve damage of the formations. There are several beautiful caves in California that have been badly damaged by "experienced" cavers because of some cavers' apparent disregard for the beauty of the formations. Accidental breakage will occur, but try to keep it to a minimum.

Sometimes archeological and biological material is found in caves. Collection of the former is illegal under the Federal Antiquities Act. Caves have the potential of offering valuable archeological evidence, but this evidence is of value only if material is not removed before its associations with other things can be determined by trained archeologists. If you should happen to find archeological material in a cave, the following practices should be carried out: 1. Do not damage or move it, 2. Do not let others damage or move it, and 3. Inform the Chairman of the Cave Section of your discovery--he should know of a reputable archeologist who could examine the discovery.

As for biological material, it is very limited and rather rare, and in some cases, by collecting in only one cave you might destroy a species. Therefore, biological collecting in caves is energetically discouraged within the Cave Section.

Cave listings are another very severe problem in cave conservation. The disadvantage of cave lists, or anything else which publicizes the location of caves, is that it draws inexperienced people to caves where extreme amounts of vandalism can occur within a short time. Also, some dangerous caves exist, and if these caves are publicized, ill-equipped novices stand a good chance of being hurt in the caves. It is for these reasons that the Cave Section does not have a cave list,

and the files of members of the Section are not exposed to anyone except experienced cavers. The exact cave that a trip may go to is dictated by the group that signs up for the trip. Thus as you gain experience, you will find that you are visiting better and better caves. When you have visited a cave, do not divulge its location unless you are sure that the people you send there will not damage the cave or be injured. You should also impress other people to act similarly in giving out locational data.

There are two forms of collecting which are looked upon with favor: the collecting of litter and the collecting of pictures. Most caves do not have so much trash in them that it cannot be quickly collected. Also, the reputation of the group as a whole is greatly enhanced if the members collect trash which they find in the cave.

Caves are finite in number, and caves once destroyed can never be replaced. The battle for cave preservation is a losing fight. The only glimmer of hope is shown in the degree to which we can extend the cave's life. At the present rate of destruction, our children will know only very few major caves, lighted and painted, and replete with gates and guides, hot dog stands and people from Los Angeles. Caves are a totally unique natural feature--one that is in great peril. Cavers, such as you aspire to be, are both caves greatest hope for preservation, and unfortunately, also their greatest enemy.

I wrote "The Need for Cave Conservation" [sic] in about 1958 or 1959 when the UCHC formed the Cave Section [1958]. The paper was given to people before they went on their first Cave Section trip. It was separate from the Bear Track and was not sent out to general club membership.

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