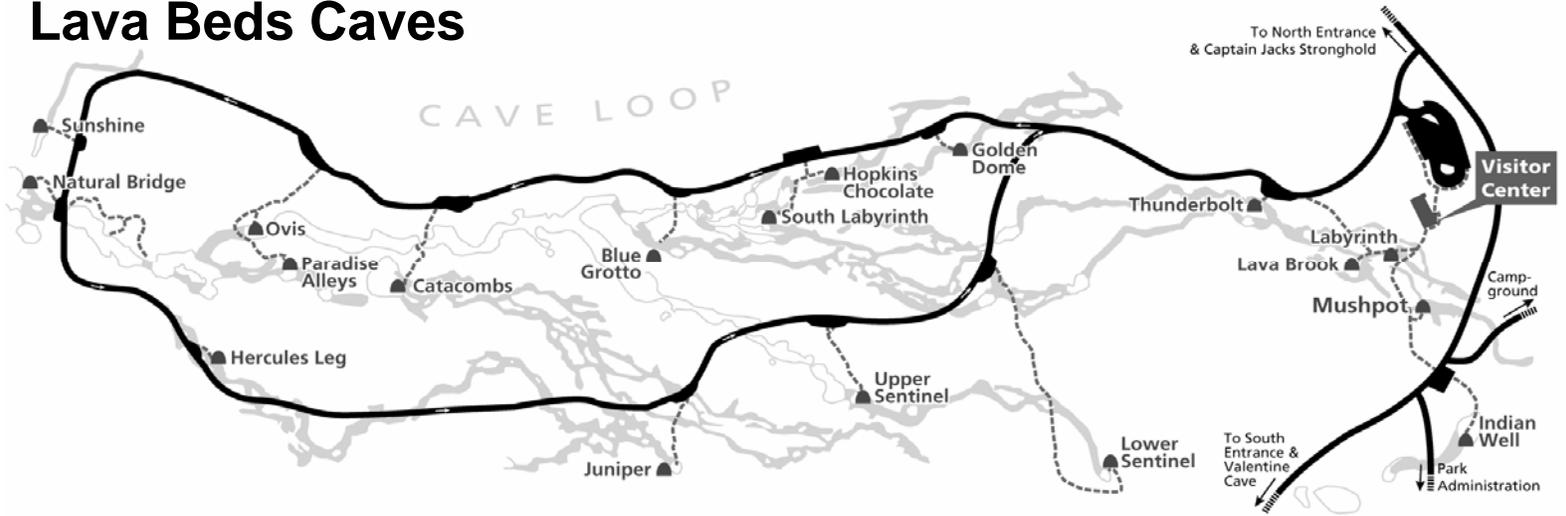




Lava Beds Caves



Cave Softly

Visitors are able to explore dozens of developed caves of varying difficulties on their own at Lava Beds. Guided tours are also available in summer. The caves listed in this brochure were first developed for public access by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's and 40's. Some caves have historic names painted on their entrances by J.D. Howard, who explored here in the early 20th century. Inquire at the Visitor Center about additional caves not listed here.

Please remember that the caves, as well as all life inside them, are protected—humans are only visitors to these unique ecosystems. You can help preserve these amazing resources and ensure future public access for future generations by following these rules during your visit:

- Stay on available trails
- Leave no trace of your visit behind—do not eat, drink, smoke, or leave trash or human waste inside caves or cave entrances
- Formations made of lava, calcite, and ice can be permanently damaged—cave slowly and carefully and do not touch
- Use only electric flashlights, not carbide or gas lamps
- Do not disturb or touch paintings or cultural artifacts
- Observe seasonal closures to protect bats, and do not disturb any life you see in caves
- Pets are not able to observe these rules—they are not permitted inside caves

Cave Safely

Don't Go Alone - Exploring as a group makes caving safer. Stick together and warn other members of your party about hazards and sensitive resources. If you must go alone, choose easy caves and carry multiple light sources. Tell a friend or family member where you are going and when you expect to return.

Protect Your Group - Choose caves that are easy enough for the least capable members of your group. Children and seniors should be able to walk safely on their own. Caves are not appropriate places for infants.

Bring Enough Light - Each member of your group should carry at least one flashlight with extra batteries (and bulbs if available). Flashlights are loaned free of charge daily at the Visitor Center.

Protect Your Head - Cave ceilings can be low and sharp! Use bicycle, construction, or other types of rigid helmets to protect yourself. Bumphats are sold at the Visitor Center.

Prevent Exposure and Injury - Most caves are about 55

degrees F (13 degrees C) all year, and caves containing ice are colder. Wear long sleeves, long pants, and closed-toed shoes or boots to protect against rough lava and cold. Gloves and kneepads reduce injuries in more difficult caves.

Be Observant - Pay attention to your route, and make mental notes by looking back at junctions and landmarks. You can also purchase a book of cave maps in the Visitor Center—learn to read map symbols before you go.

Know Yourself - Monitor your level of fatigue and don't push beyond your limits. Injuries, exhaustion, and disorientation have a greater chance of occurring when you're tired. Save some caves for your next visit to Lava Beds!

Help Protect Bats

Lava Beds caves provide critical habitat throughout the year for large and stable populations of at least fourteen species of insect-eating bats.

During the summer months, some caves are closed to protect maternal bat colonies where mothers raise thousands of tiny, vulnerable bat pups on the ceiling. These caves reopen in the autumn when the colonies migrate. Other caves may contain small groups of hibernating bats in winter which could die if awakened too often.

Stop talking, shine your flashlight beam away from the bats, and leave the area as quickly and quietly as possible.

Tell a ranger right away if you see more than a couple of bats in any cave. We will want to know about how many bats there were and where they were located. Your information will help us better protect these important and fascinating animals.

Least Challenging Caves

These caves have relatively high ceilings and smooth floors or trails.

A good choice for groups with young children, or anyone who wants a less strenuous experience.

Mushpot Cave (770 ft/235 m)

Recommended as an introductory cave. This cave has lights and interpretive signs explaining the formations.

Indian Well Cave (300ft/91 m)

This cave has easy access on a wooden walkway, a high ceiling, and unusual ice formations in winter.

Sentinel Cave (3,280 ft/1,000 m)

This cave's easy main trail requires no stooping or ducking, and has lots of interesting features. This is one of the only developed caves with two entrances.

Valentine Cave (1,635 ft/498 m)

This cave was discovered on Valentine's Day in 1933, and has large main passages with very smooth floors and walls. It had a different lava source than the caves on Cave Loop.

Skull Cave (580 ft/177 m)

Named for the bones of antelope and mountain goats, bighorn sheep skulls, and two human skeletons discovered inside. It is a remnant of two very large lava tubes, one on top of the other. This allows cold winter air to be trapped inside and create a year-round ice floor on the lower level, accessible via a smooth trail and down a metal stairway to a platform.

Merrill Cave (650 ft/198 m)

Visitors once ice skated by the lantern light on an enormous ice floor at the bottom of this cave. Changing air flow patterns are the suspected cause of melting, and today

you can see small ice remnants from a viewing platform at the bottom of a stairway.

Heppe Cave (170 ft/52 m)

Walk a short trail to this short twilight-lit cave with a small pool that is frozen most of the year. A spatter cone, huge collapse pit, and several other short cave passages can also be explored nearby.

Big Painted Cave (266 ft/81 m) and Symbol Bridge (148 ft/45 m)

Historic Native American pictographs adorn the entrance areas of these two shallow caves, and many are visible without lights. An easy 0.75 mi (1.21 km) hike is required to reach them.

Ovis Cave (216 ft/66 m)

This large cave contained 36 bighorn skulls when it was discovered in the 1890's. Ceiling heights exceed 25 ft (7.6 m), and some outside light is visible throughout. Ovis and Paradise Alleys are adjacent caves; you can enter in one and return via the other.

Paradise Alleys (1,033 ft/315 m)

Upstream section of the Catacombs tube system, separated into individual caves by a series of collapse trenches. Smooth floors and ceiling heights exceeding 7 ft (2 m) are found throughout this cave.

Moderately Challenging Caves

These caves may involve some stooping through low sections, and/or have areas of rough floor to negotiate. Additional protective gear is recommended for the more difficult spots.

Golden Dome Cave (2,229 ft/679 m)

Beware of "headache rock" when entering and exiting the cave via the ladder. The downstream portion of this cave (heading north) requires some stooping. The back section where the "Golden Dome" is located is a figure-8; take note of your location so you don't go around in circles. The golden ceiling in this and many other Lava Beds caves is the result of light reflecting off water droplets that bead up on a coating of hydrophobic bacteria. The bacteria are not harmful to humans but are protected, so please do not touch. The upstream portions of this cave require more stooping and some crawling.

Sunshine Cave (466 ft/142 m)

Two collapses allow sunlight to enter the cave and abundant vegetation grows. Stooping is required in the main passage, and the back section has floors that are steep and sometimes wet, or very rough. There is beautiful hydrophobic bacteria coating the ceiling at the

back of this cave, and icicles adorn cracks in the ceiling in winter.

Balcony Cave (2,903 ft/885 m) and Boulevard Cave (759 ft/231 m)

Short trails lead to these caves from the parking lot. They have sections of low ceilings, and an optional crawl up onto a balcony created by changing lava flow levels. The "boulevard" was named for the smooth floor created by a lava cascade.

Blue Grotto Cave (1,541 ft/470 m)

Named for the pale blue-gray portions of the ceiling inside the "Blue Grotto". The ceilings are high throughout this cave but the floors are rough.

Most Challenging Caves

These caves have some portions that require duck-walking or crawling. Helmets, kneepads, and gloves are a must in these areas to protect yourself from sharp lava. Other sections may be easier.

These caves are also more complicated in some places— purchase maps in the Visitor Center to find your way if you intend to explore them completely.

Labyrinth Cave (1,239 ft/378 m) and Lava Brook Cave (859 ft/262 m)

These caves near the Visitor Center are connected by way of a segment requiring crawling and twisting. Ceiling heights vary but tend to be low throughout. Pay attention to your route, as the name Labyrinth suggests! The "Lava Brook" is an interesting pattern left on the floor of one passage by the last lava flow.

Hopkins Chocolate Cave (1,405 ft/428 m)

Named for the rich brown color of lava coating the ceiling and walls. Stooping is required in a couple places, and there is one passage with a ceiling height of 3 ft (0.9 m) that requires duck-walking.

Hercules Leg Cave (1,948 ft/594 m) and Juniper Cave (2,362 ft/720 m)

These two caves were connected by the removal of debris in a collapse pit, and together make one long excursion with an entrance and exit. The Hercules Leg portion has generally high ceilings and smooth floors. The connection to the Juniper branch involves crossing a breakdown with a passage height of 2.5 ft (0.8 m), and

several low sections thereafter.

Catacombs Cave (6,903 ft/2,104 m)

This very long cave is easily entered but gradually increases in difficulty. It is possible to walk upright for approximately 800 ft (244 m) to the stairway, after which the ceiling rarely exceeds 3 ft (0.9 m). A few places exist where the ceiling height is less than 12 in (30 cm). *A cave map is highly recommended for any group planning to explore the entire length, as multiple levels and numerous side passages can be confusing. This cave is not recommended for inexperienced cavers.*

Thunderbolt Cave (2,561 ft/781 m)

Crawling is required in the downstream portions of this cave where it connects to Labyrinth and Lava Brook Caves. Upstream (right) from the entrance are a few tight areas, one of which is 6 in (15 cm) wide at knee level. There is some stooping before the ceiling height allows walking upright.