

## Making Cave Lint Camps a Success

Gretchen M. Baker and Ben Roberts

Great Basin National Park, Nevada

One consideration of cave management for show caves is how to maintain the natural cave beauty while allowing for thousands of people to visit the cave each year. Each person who enters the cave brings a bit of dust and debris on their shoes and leaves hair and lint from their clothes. Over time, a sheen of lint and dust often covers many of the cave speleothems and walls. The lint can have many adverse effects on the cave, including providing an artificial food source, dissolving speleothems, providing unnatural odors, and marring the aesthetics of the cave (Horrocks and Ohms 2006).

Many show caves hold periodic lint camps in an effort to remove this buildup, calling for cavers to come help remove lint and other debris that have accumulated in the cave due to human visitation. Cave lint camps have gained popularity since the first one held at Carlsbad Caverns in 1988 (Jablonsky 1992). They have been held at many caves with volunteers coming from near and far. Due to the cumulative nature of impacts from lint and dust, continued lint camps are critical to restoring and maintaining caves in as natural a form as possible.

Horrocks and Ohms (2006) provide recommendations on how to hold a successful lint camp, including identifying areas to be cleaned, techniques to be used, advertising widely, securing lodging, and offering training. These are excellent guidelines, and we build on these recommendations to share how they can be used to provide educational opportunities for both cavers and non-cavers.

About 30,000 people visit Lehman Cave in Great Basin National Park, Nevada annually. The trail in Lehman Cave is often narrow, winding through tight passages and next to columns, shields, and other cave formations. Despite being remote, Lehman Cave lint camps have repeatedly attracted volunteers. Over eight lint camps have been held in the last two decades, with over 200 volunteers and over 3,000 volunteer hours. In 2015, two lint camps were held to accommodate all of the interested volunteers (Figure 1). How has a very remote area, three hours to the nearest shopping mall and over two hours to the nearest interstate, attracted these people?

The Lehman Cave lint camps have been marketed not only to grottoes, but also to the general public. Quite a few people who saw Lehman Cave on a cave tour and heard about



Figure 1. Participants in the February 2015 Lehman Cave lint camp.  
NPS Photo by G. Baker.



Figure 2. Some of the tons of sand removed from Lehman Cave during lint camp to restore the natural cave features. The sand is left from trail building many decades ago. NPS Photo by G. Baker

the perils of lint from an interpretive ranger wanted to come back for a lint camp so they could give back to the cave. In addition, the lint camps have benefited greatly from social media. The park used Twitter and Facebook to spread the word about events. These posts were quickly shared with others and have resulted in quite a few people coming to lint camp who otherwise wouldn't know about the event.

Recent media coverage has helped to engage even more people. Stories in *National Parks Traveler* and *the Los Angeles Times* have reached wide audiences. The stories concentrate on why people come to lint camp, and these stories have encouraged others to volunteer their time to help the cave.

In addition to removing lint and dust, lint camp volunteers have helped remove tons of debris left from trail-making efforts (Figure 2). These restoration efforts have been especially popular as original cave floor is uncovered. Some volunteers take ownership in the project—or rather, a small part of the cave—as they yearn to discover how the cave originally looked. In 2015, the park also had an archeologist attend the lint camp to help identify objects found next to the trail. Nails,



Figure 3. Volunteers of all ages help at the Lehman Cave Lint Camp, helping to ensure that the cave will be looking its best for the next generations. NPS Photo by G. Baker

coins, and a pool hall token were found, as well as additional historic signatures. Participants were keen on making the next archeological discovery.

Keeping volunteers happy can be accomplished in a variety of ways. They do a variety of tasks, from dusting to digging to removing algae near lights; they work in various areas of the cave. Free housing allows cavers and non-cavers to mingle and even try furniture caving, a popular event. One of the biggest perks of a Lehman Cave lint camp is being allowed to see some of the off-trail areas, including the renowned Talus Room, the largest room of the cave. It was closed during the 1980s due to rock fall, so is now rarely visited. In addition, some volunteers help park staff conduct White-nose syndrome monitoring for bats during internal winter cave visits and gain additional experience caving.

The National Park Service is charged with attracting the next generation to participate in park activities. The lint camps have helped greatly with that. In 2014, half the participants were under age 25. It is common for more experienced cavers to help the younger helpers learn the best cleaning strategies (Figure 3).



Figure 4. Breakdown of debris removed from the cave during a lint camp. NPS Photo by S. Thomas.

Lint camps are an excellent way to not only maintain a cave in a more pristine state, but also to attract stewards that will want to help keep the cave that way.

#### Bibliography

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