

# Secret Chambers

You can find natural, historical, and archaeological resources on BLM lands. But not all of them are out in the wide open spaces. Some are deep inside caves. Exploring caves can be fun and exciting. They are full of natural wonders. Cave formations are called **speleothems**. Some speleothems have been growing for hundreds or even thousands of years.

Prehistoric peoples often found shelter in caves. They sometimes left evidence of their lifestyles behind in the form of rock paintings and other artifacts. Caves are also home to a variety of unusual animals. Some of these animals live their entire lives in total darkness. Deep inside a cave, the temperature and humidity never change.

People come from great distances to explore caves on public lands. If they are not careful, though, they sometimes leave their marks behind. Broken formations, muddy footprints, graffiti, and litter can damage a cave's fragile ecosystem. The BLM is responsible for protecting cave resources. It is also responsible for helping visitors understand the risks of visiting caves.

Passages in caves can go for miles, and visitors can become lost or injured. BLM managers sometimes place gates over cave entrances. The gates keep people out, but the openings in the gates are big enough to let in some wildlife, including the caves' most famous residents—bats.

## —Did You Know...?—

... that a single bat can eat thousands of insects in just one night? These flying mammals don't look for their prey in the dark. They send out pulses of sound and then listen for the echoes that bounce off even tiny insects.

## —Calling All Cavers!—

You can visit many BLM caves by obtaining a permit from your local BLM office. Caves can be exciting and fun to explore using very simple equipment. However, exploring caves can also be risky. You have to be aware of your own safety and the protection of things inside the cave, too. Here are some important caving rules:

1. Always tell someone where you are going and when you plan to return.
2. Never go caving alone. It's best to go in groups of three or four.
3. Go with an experienced caver, preferably someone who is familiar with the cave you'll be exploring.
4. Always wear a helmet with an attached light. That way your hands will be free to climb and crawl.
5. Take at least three light sources, with extra batteries and bulbs.
6. Treat cave environments with respect. Remember, they are very fragile environments.

