

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 can be found deep inside caves. Caves are full of natural wonders. Some cave formations have been in the works 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.

People come from great distances to explore caves on public lands. But they sometime leave their marks behind. Broken formations, muddy footprints, graffiti, and litter can all damage a cave's fragile ecosystem. BLM is responsible for protecting caves from visitors, but it is also responsible for protecting visitors from the dangers of caves. Passages in caves can go for miles, and visitors can get trapped or lost.

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 caves' most famous residents—bats.

—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. But caving can also be dangerous. So you have to be aware of your own safety and the protection of things inside the cave, too. Here are some important caving safety rules:

1. Always tell someone where you are going and when you plan to return.
2. Never go caving alone.
3. Go with an experienced caver, preferably someone who is familiar with the cave you'll be exploring.
4. Take at least three light sources, with extra batteries and bulbs.
5. Remember that cave environments are very fragile. Even slight disturbances can harm cave creatures.

—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.

