

S202 - 1986 CARSLBAD CAVERNS RESTORATION PROJECT

A SLIDE SHOW FOR THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

1) In June of 1986, the Cave Research Foundation and the National Speleological Society sponsored the Carlsbad Caverns Restoration Project in cooperation with Carlsbad Caverns National Park. It was the second large scale cave restoration effort held in Carlsbad Caverns; the first effort was in 1981.

(2,3) The twenty-eight cavers who participated stayed in two houses overlooking the entrance to Carlsbad Caverns.

(4,5) Carlsbad Caverns entrance.

(6) On the morning of the first day of the five-day project, Ron Kerbo, the only Cave Specialist in the National Park Service, briefed the participants.

(7) Our goal was to clean specific areas of the Big Room floor of debris thrown to the side during trail construction more than 50 years ago.

(8) Using the elevator to descend, we were quickly in the Big Room, 687 feet below the entrance. We broke into groups and started work.

(9) Ron had four areas in the Big Room that needed attention: Giant Dome,

(10) two areas near the Totem Pole,

(11) and just south of the elevator near the Dome Room.

(12) Working in the cave was quite pleasant and the hours and days passed quickly.

(13) All the while tourists looked over our shoulder and asked questions like: "Are you digging for gold?"

(14, 15, 16, 17) Gradually rocks and pebbles that littered the floor were cleared and the remaining dust was removed.

(18) The debris was loaded in wheelbarrows and hauled away.

(19) By the end of the day we were tired, but it was worth it.

(20) Rimstone pools were uncovered (Before)

(21) (After)

(22) debris removed from the floor (Before)

(23) (After)

(24) and the cave floor returned to its natural state before trail construction (Before)

(25) (After)

(26) Much had changed as a result of our efforts (Before)

(27) (After)

(28) While we worked during the day, Ron let us see some of the wild portions of the cave by night.

(29) One evening we explored the Left Hand Tunnel, seeing the Vegetable Patch along the way.

(30) We passed by several small pools and

(31) a blister lying on the floor.

(32) One of our tasks was to retrieve the old rope on the drop to Lake of the Clouds. It definitely needed replacing.

(33, 34, 35, 36, 37) We tied off a new rope and started down the first part of the three-hundred-foot drop.

(38) Midway down the drop there was a wide ledge.

(39) We tied off a second rope and continued down.

(40) The drop was steep,

(41) but the rope was needed only as a handline.

(42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49) We carefully stayed on a narrow path between formations along the way.

(50) As we descended closer to the Lake of the Clouds, you could see the 'clouds' on the ceiling.

(51, 52, 53) Then 1,037 feet below the entrance was Lake of the Clouds.

(54) At the end of the five-day restoration project we were able to get a permit to enter Spider Cave, one of the wild caves in the park.

(55, 56) Parking on the top of the ridge, we descended into the canyon below.

(57) A short walk along a dry stream bed,

(58) brought us to the gated entrance.

(59) After climbing down a small pit and negotiating a short belly crawl, the cave opened with a blood red formation just ahead.

(60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67) Gradually the passage became lined with white formations.

(68, 69) In one area the formations grew from a shelf in both directions.

(70) Along the way were fossils in the wall.

(71) Several white formations had a strange silver colored fan marking at their base.

(72, 73, 74) In one room the mud stain part way up the formations indicated past flooding.

(75) After several hours exploring Spider Cave, we reluctantly left.

(76) So ended the 1986 Carlsbad Caverns Restoration Project. Not only was the cave floor in the Big Room returned to its natural state in several very visible locations, but the many tourists who stopped to ask "Why?" now appreciate the value of caves. They were impressed that cavers from across the country felt this was so important that they spent their limited vacation time and paid their expenses to help out. Those who participated found the experience rewarding. We got to know Carlsbad Caverns well and left the cave better off for the experience.

(77) CREDITS: The cave map was by Cave Research Foundation. The slides were by Paul and Lee Stevens.