

Friday, July 21, 2000

The mystery cave of Laidlow Park

By C.G. HAMMER
For the Post Register

Just off the southwest corner of the Craters of the Moon National Monument, where the desert grassland meets the lava flow, is the entrance to a cave that has held a dark secret of mystery and

death for many years.

Lava caves on the Snake River Plain are as commonplace as holes in Swiss cheese. But the adventure they have provided for cave explorers and the archaeological breakthroughs made possible are anything but common. Although the first published account of the

location and contents of the "Mystery Cave of Laidlow Park" was made available to the public in 1956, neither archeologists nor cavers have been scurrying to explore this place.

Lucille Hathaway Hall first visited this cave in 1898. She was 14 at the time. She and her younger

brother were taking her father's cattle to spring grazing south of the lava fields when Lucille saw what appeared to be a cave entrance in the lava east of them. The two rode over and found a large opening where the rocks were higher than the rest. It was dark inside, and they were not equipped with lanterns or torch material necessary to go inside. Lucille had a strange feeling about the cave and left a marker in a bush near the entrance so she could explore later.

Years went by, but each time a return trip was planned, something came up. It was not until May 30, 1929, that Lucille Hall finally succeeded in putting together an organized expedition to explore the cave. She and a small group of friends drove from Carey to a ranch near Huff Creek. There they left the Buick and borrowed horses for the last leg of the journey. They were equipped with water jugs, two Coleman lanterns and firearms.

They had been riding about two hours and had covered about 15 miles when Lucille led the party north toward the cave. There were serviceberry bushes growing on each side of the hole, but it was unmistakably a cave entrance. The Coleman lanterns were started. The explorers, now feeling the excitement of the venture, entered the yawning dark hole.

Although the entrance was large enough for them to stand upright for a short distance, inside they were forced to crouch briefly, then entered into a large chamber. Thousands of bats, excited by the light, swarmed around them. Lucille and her party hurried to a small passageway that could be seen across the room. They crouched again, then went down a steep incline of broken rock into an even larger room. They shined the lanterns around, and there on the rough floor were about 50 snakes. At that point the rest of the group was ready to turn back, but Lucille was determined to go on.

Picking their way gingerly among the snakes, they worked their way toward a small opening at the far side. One of the men went down first, with the others holding on to him. When he reached the floor of the third chamber, he held up the lantern for better light while the rest worked their way down through the sharp rock.



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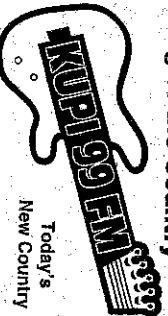
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For More Information 522-5962 or 522-3758

OUTDOOR BRIEFS

The Pocatello Parks and Recreation Department will host a children's day camp Aug. 21 through Aug. 23. The camp is for children ages 7 through 12, and activities may include swimming, canoeing, zoo trips, nature hikes and more. Cost is \$38, and includes adult supervision, transportation to activity sites and dinner and breakfast for the campout. For information or to register by Aug. 18, call 234-6232.

When the entire group was safely on the floor of the room, the lanterns were held high for a look around. A shocked gasp went through the entire gathering. There on the floor, right at their feet, were three human skeletons, laid out side-by-side on the cave floor, much the same as they might be in a mortuary. There was no indication of a violent death. Clothing still covered the bones, and appeared to be intact until it was touched, then seemed to disintegrate like ashes. The mouths of the skulls were open and presented an interesting study. One had crude gold fillings in the teeth.

The explorers lingered only a short time, trying to find utensils, weapons or anything else that might give a hint to the identity of the silent but smiling threesome on the floor. They found nothing. Lucille picked up the three skulls, and the group worked its way back up the steep incline of broken rock.

Lucille Hall, a woman who on more than one occasion had gone charging into the darkness of night with rifles blazing to combat a raging grizzly in the herd, prayed to her Lord, promising never to come back to this place if she would just be permitted to leave safely.

The frightened gaggle reached the entrance, only to find that a drenching rainstorm was in progress, accompanied by frequent flashes of lightning and deafening crashes of thunder. By waiting inside, they would have remained dry and safe from the lightning. Without even a slight hesitation, the entire group charged out into the teeth of the storm. Staggering against the wind and rain, working their way toward the chuck wagon in the distance, they were soon soaked to the skin. At that point, Lucille realized she had lost the skulls.

Hot coffee, and a brief drying out period proved to be some comfort for the wet unnered explorers before starting the long ride home.

Through the years, since that 1929 spring day of horror, many people have asked Lucille Hall to take them to the cave in Laidlow Park. She never did. A promise was made to the Almighty that day which she intended to keep. Quite possibly, the third chamber of that cave has not had a visitor since.

The Pocatello Parks and Recreation Department is offering a weeklong float trip on the Main Salmon Sept. 9 through 16. The cost is \$425, and includes five days on the river, food, transportation and boating equipment. Most camping gear is also available. Group size is limited; early registration is suggested. For information or to register, call the Park and Recreation office at 234-6232.