

CAVE RESEARCH FOUNDATION

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 53, NO. 4

NOVEMBER 2025



CRF NEWSLETTER

Volume 53, No. 4
established 1973

Send all articles and reports for submission to:
Laura Lexander, Editor
laura.lexander@cave-research.org
21551 SE 273rd Ct., Maple Valley, WA 98038

The CRF Newsletter is a quarterly publication of the Cave Research Foundation, a non-profit organization incorporated in 1957 under the laws of Kentucky for the purpose of furthering research, conservation, and education about caves and karst.

Newsletter Submissions & Deadlines:

Original articles and photographs are welcome. If intending to jointly submit material to another publication, please inform the CRF editor. Publication cannot be guaranteed, especially if submitted elsewhere. All material is subject to revision unless the author specifically requests otherwise. For timely publication, please observe these deadlines:

February issue by December 1
May issue by March 1
August issue by June 1
November issue by September 1

Before submitting material, please see publication guidelines at: www.cave-research.org

NEWSLETTER STAFF:

Content Editor: Laura Lexander,
laura.lexander@cave-research.org
Assistant Editor: Maddy Ellis,
maddy.ellis2013@yahoo.com
Layout/Photos: Ralph Earlandson,
ralph.earlandson@gmail.com
Mailing: Bob Hoke, bob@rhoke.net

©2025 Cave Research Foundation

Cave Research Foundation Board of Directors

President - Kayla Sapkota, kayla.sapkota@gmail.com
Vice President - John Lyles, jtml@losalamos.com
Secretary - Ed Klausner, klausnere@gmail.com
Treasurer - Jenn Ellis, caverjenn@gmail.com
Hamilton Valley Director - Pat Kambesis
Directors - Derek Bristol, Jennifer Ellis, Joyce Hoffmaster,
Mark Jones, Edward Klausner, Robert Lerch,
Benjamin Miller, Dave West, Craig Williams

Operations Council

Scott House (Ozarks), John Tinsley (Lava Beds), Karen Willmes (Eastern), Pat Kambesis (Hamilton Valley), Janice Tucker (Carlsbad Caverns), Fofu Gonzalez and Jen Hopper (Sequoia/Kings Canyon)

For information about the CRF contact:

Kayla Sapkota
316 Thistle Ridge
Denton, TX 76210
kayla.sapkota@gmail.com

Donations to CRF should be sent to:

Jennifer Ellis, CRF Treasurer
9615 Park Highlands Dr.
Dallas, TX 75238
(479) 659-2247
treasurer@cave-research.org

President's Column

By: Kayla Sapkota

Hi Friends,

"Mapping is more than measurement—it's the transformation of mystery into knowledge, turning voids into data and darkness into understanding." -- unknown

Sometimes I think to myself, why caves? Maybe you do the same. Maybe our ancient ancestors did, too. There's something about taking the unknown and making it familiar - shining a light into darkness, if you will. We make maps using our tablets, sketchbooks, Distos, BRICs, Tandems, and tapes. We gather data to bridge the unknown. But we do other things that are just as meaningful. We make memories. We build teams and lasting friendships. And those are a big part of answering the question for me. So, why caves? It's about the connections made: both scientific and human.

Muddy Smiles,
Kayla Sapkota, President



Dani Lotz in a decorated passage in an Ozarks cave. Photo by Nathan Curran.

On the Cover

Mark Jones squeezes out of a breakdown entrance in Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve in Idaho. See Mark's report on this year's expedition in this issue. Photo by Fred Wilkinson.

REGIONAL EXPEDITION REPORTS

Craters of the Moon National Monument & Preserve Butte County, Idaho, September 2025

By: Mark Jones

September 6:

The 2025 September Cave Research Foundation Craters of the Moon National Monument & Preserve Expedition began with Andrew Erickson, Mark Jones, Paul McMullen, and Fred Wilkinson hiking out on the Blue Dragon Lava to survey several caves identified by Todd Stefanie, the Wildlife Biologist and Research Coordinator, with the help of the Wilderness Volunteers. Mark and Fred surveyed a known cave doubling its length to over 200 feet and two recent finds – one for 80 feet and the other to 100 feet, so far. Meanwhile Andrew and Paul got five new caves inventoried for a total of 350 feet.

September 7:

Returning to finish their previous survey Mark and Fred planned to knock it off quickly, but instead they spent the entire day crawling 350 feet on their bellies. The effort was worth it though with significant bat guano being found. Nearby Andrew and Paul knocked off three more caves for 500 feet of survey. They also spent the day surveying in low crawlways.

September 8-9:

The Archeological Team of Craig Williams, Bre Henderson, and Chase Barber joined Andrew, Mark, Paul, and Fred surveying and conducting archeological assessments of two caves in a remote area in the monument. The pop-up trailer served as the headquarters of the campsite for the three-day excursion with tents surrounding it.

The first cave was in an unusual spot but was worth the effort. After two days crawling through surface tubes, we were relieved to be spending two days walking in a significant lava tube for over 2,700 feet. Some ceiling breakdown was encountered, but it was not much of a nuisance. This cave is an important refuge for a variety of animals, both terrestrial and subterranean. The most important were the five Townsend's big-eared bats that were documented. Historical graffiti was documented in isolated sections of the cave.

September 10:

The third day of camping had the team venturing to another nice lava tube with walking passage. A trench collapse separated the cave into an eastern section 75 feet long and a western section nearly 1,000 feet in length. The last 200 feet dropped to a comfortable hands-and-knees crawl in soft sand. This cave was very popular with birds as well as woodrats.

September 11:

Returning to the monument's headquarters the group split with Andrew leading Chase, Bre, and Craig out to document some lava features south and Mark taking Paul and Fred on a hike around the North Crater Trail to knock off some of the smaller leads. Andrew's team surveyed one cave for 70 feet and monitored four others. Mark's team surveyed four known caves, two that had important fauna usage.

September 12:

Andrew, Chase, Bre, and Craig spent the day documenting an important site from the monument's files. Paul and Fred continued to survey the caves in the North Crater Flow. In the evening the 4th Annual CRF Fish Feast was held in appreciation of the staff at Craters of the Moon. Following the meal a presentation was given by Craig and Bre on their archeological work.

September 13:

Although the archeological team departed for home, Eric Harrison joined Andrew, Mark, Paul, and Fred for the weekend to survey more lava features. Mat Gornentz and Ariana Mallory with the National Park Service also joined our team for the day. Andrew, Mat, Eric, and Paul surveyed four caves with over 130 feet of survey. Mark, Ari, and Fred knocked off a hanging survey from July for over 150 feet before Paul and Mat joined in surveying 200 feet in an interesting surface tube with two levels. Obvious bat and woodrat usage was noted. Nearby Andrew and Eric got a related 70-foot surface tube recorded. Meanwhile Paul finished another 70-footer.

September 14:

Andrew and Eric met Jessie Mendoza to survey a small pit, the shortest survey of the expedition at 12.5 feet, but were rewarded with a surprisingly nice cave for 200 feet. Mark, Paul, and Fred continued to survey three small caves along the North Crater Trail. This team was also surprised with 370 feet of survey as well as bonus cave faunal usage.

September 15:

After the very successful mule train from 2024 Todd worked with Ryan Edwards, a local packer, to provide the services we required to document and monitor lava features east of Echo Crater. Gage Merkel joined Andrew, Mark, Paul, Jessie, and Fred for the week. The 2nd Annual CRF Mule Train Expedition began with Ryan and Cody Hamilton loading the caving and

camping gear while we sauntered down the Wilderness Trail. East of Echo Crater Andrew, Paul, and Jessie cut across broken lava with their vertical gear to survey some caves while Mark, Gage, and Fred battled sagebrush to wait for the mule train to deliver their cave gear. As we waited Gage discovered a new cave in a mound of lava that measured sixty feet. The known cave was a dusty dry crawl with plenty of woodrat scat that totaled 300 feet. The other team had success with their initial cave, but ice and loose rocks prevented them from surveying in the second. The knowledge gained from this will be used to prepare for future exploration. Both teams arrived at the campsite before sundown.

September 16:

By camping close to a cluster of significant caves the group was able to begin surveying within a few minutes of camp. Mark, Paul, and Fred surveyed a large lava tube with excessive breakdown that filled most of the passage. Several lava formations were encountered in the 400 feet of survey. Mountains of woodrat scat and numerous middens were found in the entrance area.

At a nearby cave Andrew, Jessie, and Gage doubled the length of a known cave to 400 feet when they not only pushed through a maze of breakdown but found a backdoor! Three Townsend's big-eared bats were found during the survey. Woodrat scat and middens in this cave would rival any other in the monument.

September 17:

Andrew, Jessie, and Gage surveyed two small caves and two nice lava tubes, both over 200 feet. One of the larger caves boasted a peeled-wall crawl, a variety of lavacicles as well as other lava features. The other had a large room filled with breakdown in the middle. Bat guano and woodrat scat were discovered in both these caves. Mark, Paul, and Fred focused on surveying the Bridge of Tears as the monument will be celebrating the centennial visit by the Limbert Expedition next year. In addition, a comfortable 200-foot cave and an uncomfortable 100-foot cave were surveyed. Woodrat activity was noted in all the caves.

September 18:

Andrew, Jessie, and Gage surveyed several dusty, dry small caves with little redeeming value, but did find three new surface tubes that were more interesting. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough time to survey them. Meanwhile Paul had discovered a nice hands-and-knees crawl surface tube that Fred helped survey. Later, Mark and Fred ridgewalked the area but were skunked by the Blue Dragon Lava.

September 19:

After a fabulous camping trip in the wilderness, it was time to trek seven miles back to rejoin society. On the way seven caves were

surveyed, five known and two newly discovered. There was little to pique our interest in the smaller caves, but the longer caves captured our attention. The longest cave was two hundred feet long with rafted blocks, lava gutters, extruded lava, and colorful lavacicles. Significant bat guano and woodrat scat and middens were also noted. While both new caves were 100-foot dusty dry crawls, one had a large bone bed filled with elk bones, the other had a row of webworm strands along a damp wall.

This concluded a very successful week of work at the monument. We're looking forward to the 2026 CRF 3rd Annual Wilderness Mule Train next September.

September 20:

Samuel DeGrey joined Paul and Fred in surveying and monitoring more cave leads along the North Crater Trail. One of the numerous possibilities was a low priority lead in the red clinker rather than in the pahoehoe. Instead of being a bust, this was the biggest discovery of the expedition! A mishmash of lava mixed to form three tiers of narrow canyons with five entrances. A large perennial pool with submerged ice was found at the lowest level. The convoluted passage required three days to properly survey. Not far away Andrew and Jessie were surveying other cave leads. Unfortunately, their leads were less spectacular, but they did enjoy a nice day on the lava. Mark spent the day entering data.

September 21:

Paul, Jessie, and Fred returned to survey and inventory yesterday's interesting discovery while Andrew and Mark hiked out the Cave Wilderness Trail to map and monitor a Wilderness Volunteer discovery from July. Both teams were rewarded with surveys that will make interesting maps.

September 22:

Paul and Fred finished their survey in the North Crater Flow. Nearly 300 feet were recorded in this new discovery. Meanwhile, Mark and Andrew hiked through thick sagebrush to document three caves in a northern section of the monument. 350 feet were garnered by this team.

September 23:

Andrew, Mark, Paul, and Fred hiked out the Cave Wilderness Trail to survey some caves reported by the Wilderness Volunteers in July. Andrew and Paul surveyed two caves for 350 feet, while Mark and Fred got 400 feet in four caves. Both teams spent the day on their bellies in low, tight, "cheese grater" crawls. The only reward was the discovery of bat guano in a few caves.

September 24:

The final day of the expedition was spent by Andrew, Mark, Paul, and Fred surveying five

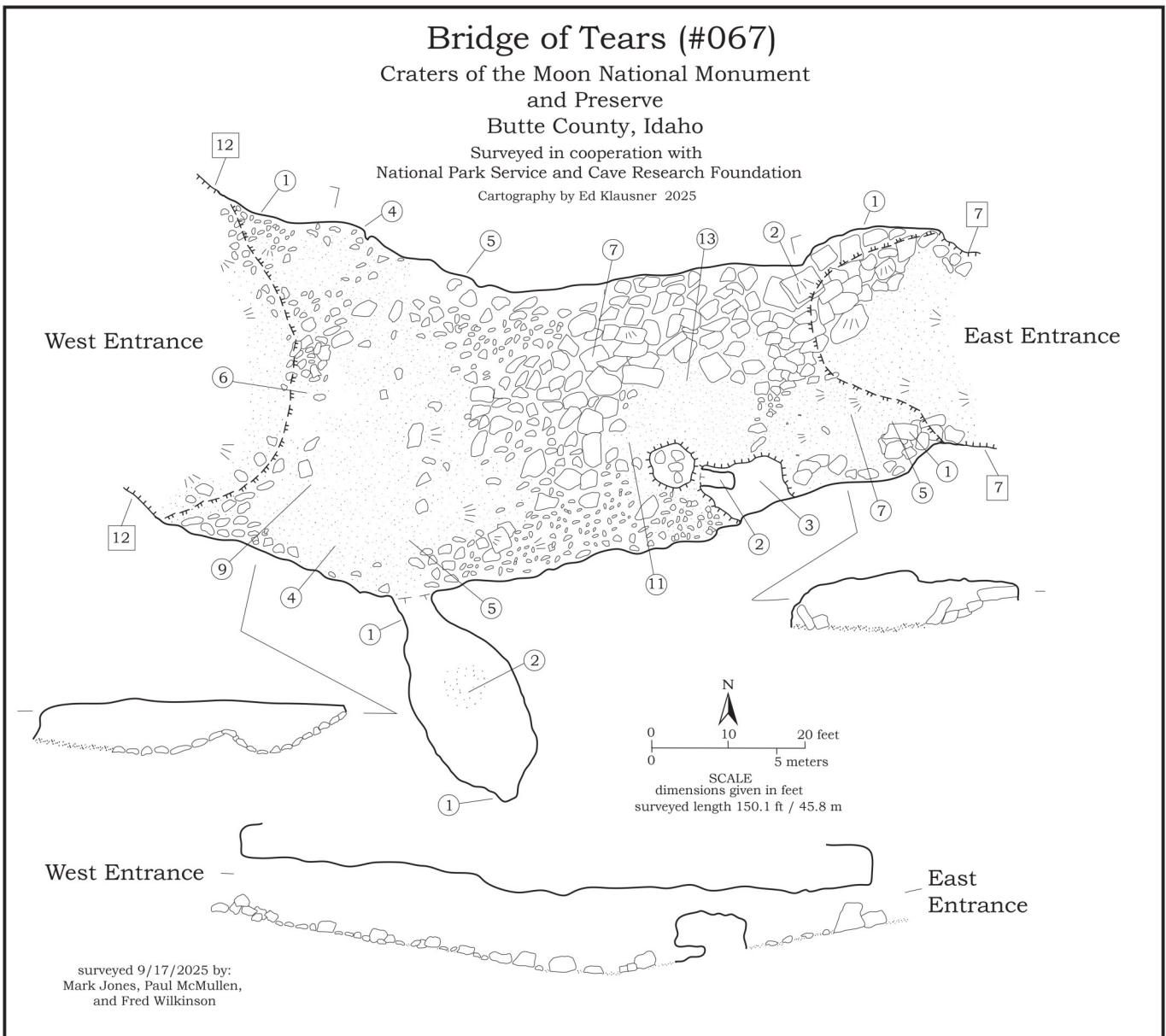
small caves with little redeeming value except for some bat guano.

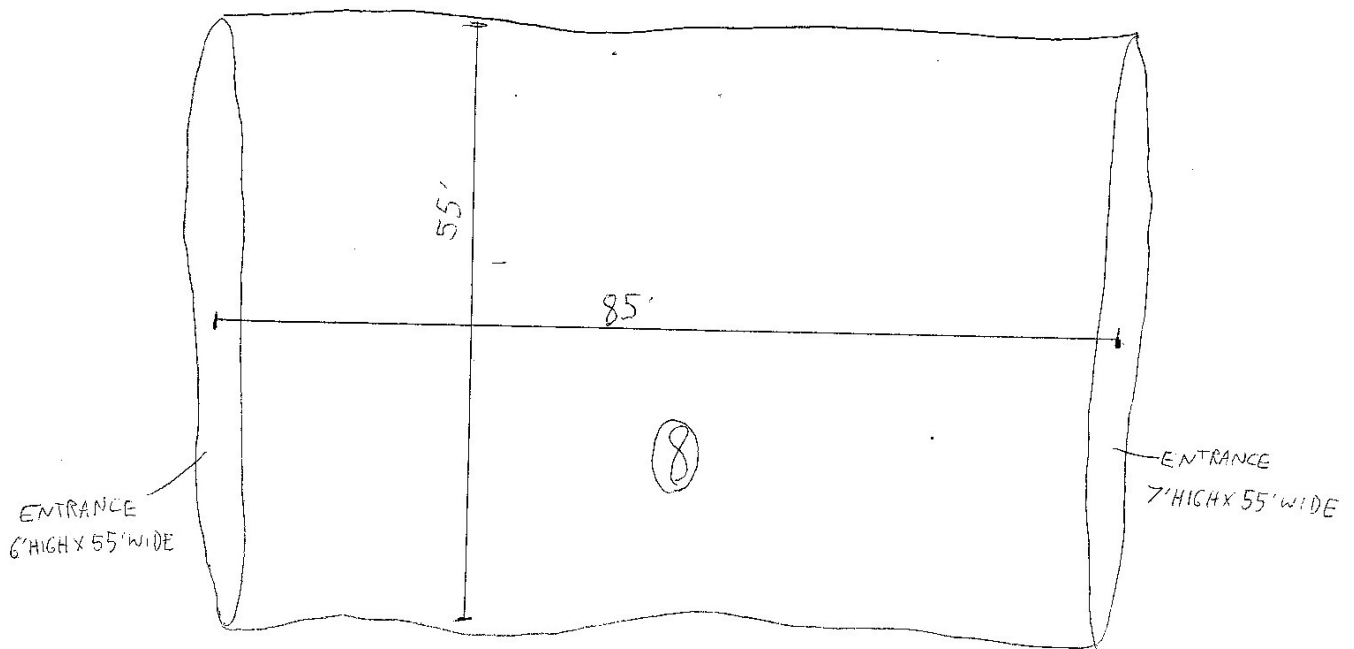
Summary:

The September 2025 CRF Craters Expedition was very successful with 74 caves surveyed for a total of 12,880 feet. The surveys ranged from 12.5 feet to 2,701.4 feet, with 41 less than 100 feet long and two over 1,000 feet in length. Most of the caves were pristine with little or no visitation. Very little graffiti was found in the caves and much of it was historical. A separate report will be filed by the archeological team. During the expedition the CRF confirmed that

the caves in the Monument are important to a variety of creatures including woodrats, bats, pika, marmots, coyotes, owls, ravens, pigeons, camel crickets, spiders, webworms, and ants.

The team is grateful to the staff at Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve for all their help, with special thanks to Todd Stefanie for his assistance during the year. Thanks to Ryan Edwards and Cody Hamilton for providing the mules to pack our gear out past Echo Crater. Dave Jones is once again acknowledged for providing the delicious fish for the annual fish feast.



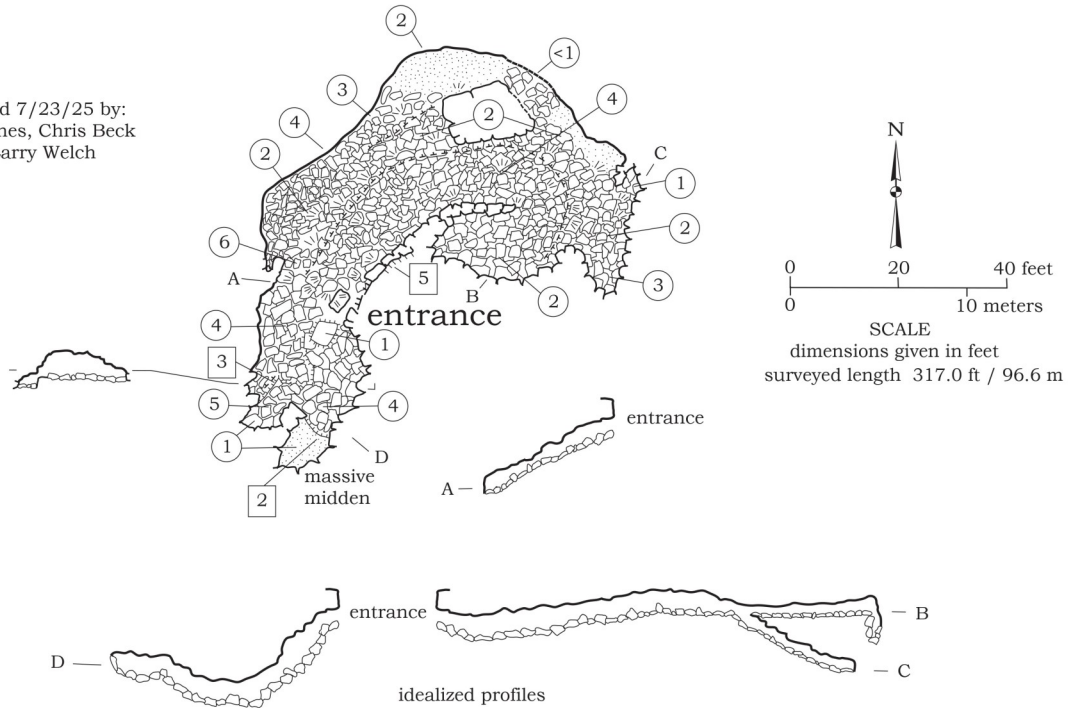


Top: #067 Bridge of Tears Cave. Historic Bob Limbert photo from his expedition in 1926. **Bottom:** Bridge of Tears Cave draft map.

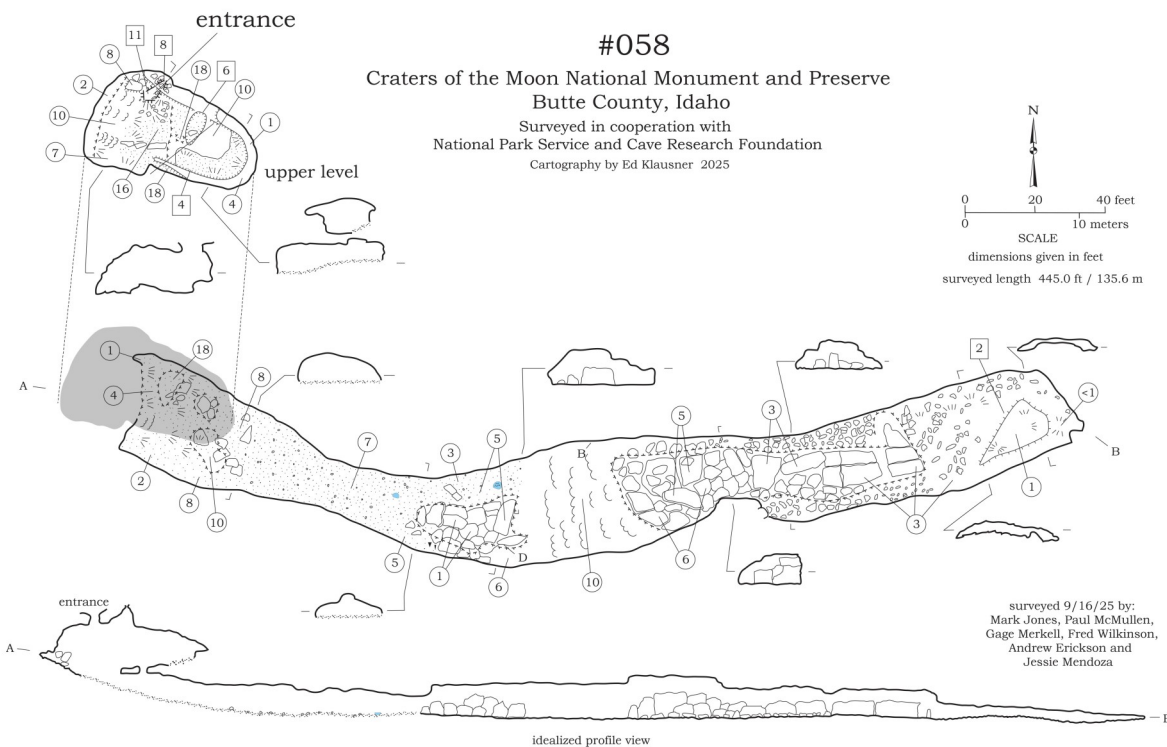
#573

Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve
Butte County, IdahoSurveyed in cooperation with
National Park Service and Cave Research Foundation

Cartography by Ed Klausner 2025

surveyed 7/23/25 by:
Mark Jones, Chris Beck
and Larry Welch

#058

Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve
Butte County, IdahoSurveyed in cooperation with
National Park Service and Cave Research Foundation
Cartography by Ed Klausner 2025surveyed 9/16/25 by:
Mark Jones, Paul McMullen,
Gage Merrell, Fred Wilkinson,
Andrew Erickson and
Jessie Mendoza



Craters of the Moon: clockwise from upper left: Cody Hamilton rocks Jenny's pack while Ryan Edwards watches; Gage Merkel surrenders!; Ari Mallery in a "comfortable" crawl; Paul McMullen enjoys being on point; Fred Wilkinson in a dusty dry crawl; Ari Mallery in a new discovery. Photos by Mark Jones.



Craters of the Moon: clockwise from upper left: *An alert Townsend's Big-eared Bat; Delicate lava formations; Lava tube with a rooted ceiling; Frosted deep canyon. Photo by Paul McMullen; Lava roses; Coated ceiling. Photos by Mark Jones except where indicated.*