Development and Management of Glenwood Caverns, Colorado

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Abstract

Steve Beckley had read about Fairy Caves, an extensive cave system near Glenwood Springs, in an out-of-print book, *Caves of Colorado*, while he was in college. Fairy Caves had been open to the public as a tourist attraction in the late 1800s but had been closed since 1917. In 1982 Beckley contacted the owners of the caves to explore development of the caves to admit the public; however, Beckley and the owners were unable to agree. Steve persisted for the next 16 years and in 1998 reached an agreement with the owners under which he would be allowed to develop the property. During those years of negotiations, Steve continued to study what information was known about the caves. After a deal was made with the owners for development, Steve and Jeanne Beckley, with Bob Koper's help and the help of the caver community, began the substantial improvement projects necessary to allow the public to view this natural wonder. First, they graded and graveled a road up to the cave entrance and cleared the historic Fairy Caves of the debris that had collected there over 44 years. Because the purpose of development was to make the living cave accessible to the public and still not harm the cave, Steve and Jeanne decided to carve a new tunnel into the mountain, one that could control temperature and humidity and not harm the formations. The development team installed two airtight doors in the new tunnel to form an airlock. The doors are 50 feet apart so that when visitors enter the airlock, the door closes behind them. With the help of this airlock, the ideal humidity and temperature of the caverns can be maintained, ensuring the continuing growth of the ancient formations. The Beckleys also installed temperature and humidity monitors to ensure that the integrity of the fragile cave formations is maintained. Glenwood Caverns is now protected, able to continue to grow naturally, and yet is accessible to the public.