



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

Restoration after degradation

There is nothing more sad to those who enjoy the lava caves of Central Oregon than to enter these pristine natural wonders and discover they have been vandalized by the thoughtless acts of previous cave visitors who defaced the cave with offensive graffiti.

This is especially true for the members of the Central Oregon NSS Grotto. The National Speleological Society (NSS), with over 10,000 members and 250 grottos (chapters), is the largest organization in the world working every day to further the exploration, study, and protection of caves and their environments, and foster fellowship among cavers.

Members are bound together by their love of caves and caving and their desire to learn about the underground wilderness and protect it for future generations. It is especially upsetting when someone reports a cave that's been vandalized, and Boyd Cave, so close to Bend, is a popular recreational site for those interested in learning about and enjoying caves.

The cave is well known, on USFS land, and open to the public. Unfortunately, more and more of these popular recreation sites are becoming the victims of those people who seem to have no feelings for the beauty of such wonderful resources, and have to leave their message of not caring spray-painted all over the cave.

Neil Marchington, a long-time member of the Central Oregon Grotto, took it upon himself to notify the USFS of graffiti in Boyd Cave (and others) and of his goal to sandblast off the offensive paint from the cave rocks.

Sandblasting is a very intense job that requires a crew of at least eight hardy souls who can handle hard work. To begin with, there are reels of 250 foot, heavy-duty air hoses required to supply air pressure to the airgun used to blast the paint off the walls and objects in the cave.

Wait! I've got the cart before the horse — the first thing the crew needed to

have before conducting a sandblasting project is the air compressor to supply the high-pressure energy so the sand can remove (as in destroy) the graffiti. That's an expensive proposition, which Neil and the grotto took on using the proceeds of a combination of county grants and the generosity of Wanderlust Tours, who also donated funds.

They had to mount it in a trailer, another big expense, then purchase the sandblasting equipment, sand, and safety equipment; then the tarps and the air hoses — and the list goes on and on.

While the air compressor and trailer stayed above ground on the surface, everything else has to be hand-carried into the cave, and if you want to take on a project that's a tough can of worms, try uncoiling 250 feet of heavy air hose in a lava tube that's eight feet wide. Not to forget all the tarps, five-gallon buckets, and material to collect and reuse the sand.

The clean-up project began bright and early at 8 a.m., but Marchington says it took the crew until 10 a.m. just to get everything in the cave and ready to go.

Most of the heavy lifting and general hard work was done by Marchington

and the hardy volunteers from Wanderlust Tours, with owner Dave Nissen doing a great deal of the sandblasting, placing huge tarps under and around the graffiti so there was no contaminated sand left behind. It took the Grotto and Wanderlust crews over three days to get the job done.

Boyd Cave is the destination of many, many people seeking a pleasant adventure in a lava tube. It is also the destination for winter hibernation of two species of our local bats, the Townsend big-eared and the little brown bats. Back in the 1970s, when I was experimenting with placing an anodized gold-colored band on the bat's wing, I had a big-eared that came back to Boyd Cave for 10 years running.

I'd check the cave in November and there that little guy would be, sleeping away winter in almost the same place it was in the previous year. On the 11th year, however, I went into the cave to check on my little friend and found him dead on the floor of his bedroom; someone had shot him, and I don't know why.

Marchington has this to say about the work he and his wonderful volunteers do: "The improvement in how



PHOTO BY SUE ANDERSON

Neil Marchington and Dave Nissen about to sandblast paint from vandalized cave rock.

the cave looks is fantastic. Erasing the destruction done by a few selfish people is very fulfilling. Watching the enthusiasm of the volunteers this weekend was truly wonderful. I can't express enough thanks to Wanderlust Tours staff and Dave Nissen for helping us reach this next step in the project!"

And in that light, if you want to help the Grotto to remove the graffiti in the other caves in the Central Oregon region, you can

donate money at <http://ohdgrotto.caves.org> as well as contact them about volunteer opportunities. They could really use volunteers with sandblasting and industrial experience.

It took nearly three days to remove about three minutes of intentional spray-painting. If you come upon anyone engaged in the act of defacing our treasured caves, please call the Forest Service and give them their license plate number.

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