

A Spelunker's Guide to Samwel Cave

Shasta Lake Station • Shasta Unit • Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area
Shasta-Trinity National Forest



Welcome to Samwel Cave

According to "Webster," a spelunker is one who makes a hobby of exploring and studying caves. We are sure that you will have an exciting time exploring the sights and sounds in and around Samwel Cave.

This handout will help acquaint you with the cave and its surroundings. It will also tell you how to prepare for your exploration and also offer some tips about conduct, safety and etiquette.

Native American History

The Wintu Indians of the area believed that grizzly bear spirits lived in the cave and they referred to it as "Sa-Wal" or "Grizzly Bear Cave," a holy place where one could get magic strength by bathing in the pools located deep inside. Wintu men would go to this cave to pray to the Spirits of the Great Bear for strength or bravery before a hunt or a fight. A Wintu legend about the cave goes like this...

A long time ago, three girls went to an old woman and asked her where they could find good, strong men. She told them to go to the cave and bathe in the pool. There they would find brave men. And so, the three maidens went to the cave, but in the darkness one of them fell to her death.

In the early 1900s, a team of University of California anthropologists did, indeed, find the skeleton of a young Indian girl at the bottom of the pit, lending credence to the old legend.

About the Cave

Samwel Cave opens out from a precipitous limestone crag overlooking a northern portion of Shasta Lake in what was formerly the McCloud River Canyon. The main entrance to the cave lies 355 feet above the river bed and 1,270 feet above sea level.

The structure of the cave's interior is composed of varying colors of spectacular limestone formations in various stages of development. Unfortunately, many of these formations have been removed or destroyed by vandals and souvenir collectors.

Conduct and Etiquette

Samwel Cave can provide a unique and rewarding experience to its visitors. The cave is rich in legend, cultural significance, and fossil history. However, it can be extremely hazardous to the poorly informed and unprepared explorer.

The Forest Service installed a locked gate on the cave entrance in 1972 to help prevent accidents, to protect the fragile cave resources, and to provide Forest Service personnel with an opportunity to talk to cave visitors before they enter the cave. The key to the locked gate is retained at the Shasta Lake Visitor Information Center.

Since this is a relatively small cave, overnight use is not permitted without special permission. Permits to enter the cave are issued free by the Shasta Lake Visitor Information Center.

Your permit is solely for entrance to and exploring of Samwel Cave. The United States shall not be held responsible or liable for any injury or damage to property or individuals as a result of exercising this permit. **The Forest Service will not initiate search**

Conduct and Etiquette continued...

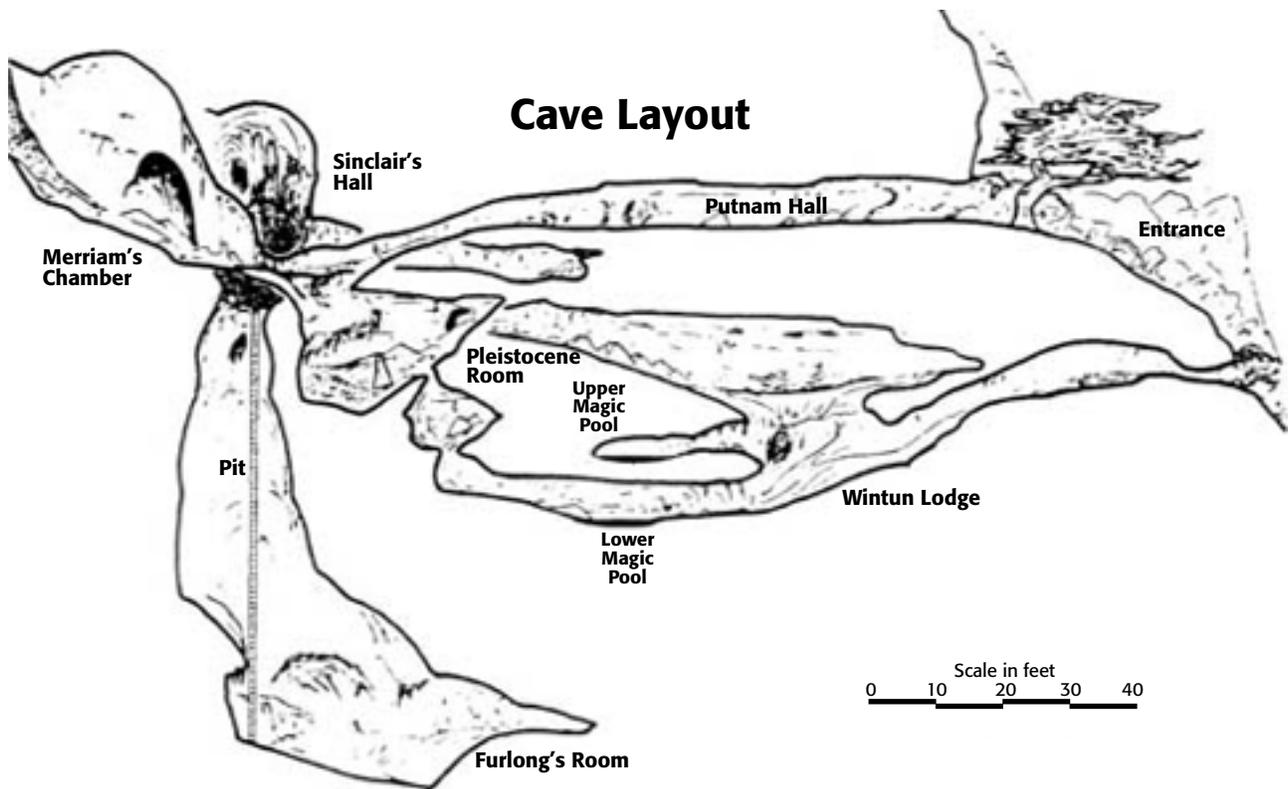
and/or rescue services unless requested and cannot be responsible for determining whether or not parties have exited the cave safely. Cave users may be held accountable for rescue costs.

Your permit is issued for a specific date. A \$10.00 deposit is required for the gate key. The deposit will be refunded if the key is returned by the date specified on the permit. Please do not disappoint the next cave users by not returning the key on time.

The cave is significant for several reasons. Excavations since 1903 have uncovered a wealth of fossils and cultural artifacts dating back to the Ice Age. Although most of the cave has been thoroughly studied, additional remains probably exist. **It is illegal to dig up, move or remove anything from the cave.** If you find something which you think may be important, please report it when you return the key.

Many of the speleothems (limestone formations) in the cave have already been damaged by vandals or careless explorers. Obviously, this sort of behavior is not permitted. Please report anything that appears recent. Subtle damage is occurring in the cave due to traffic through delicate areas. Exercise extreme caution in and around pools to avoid muddying the water, or damaging the fragile shorelines. Moving, cutting or digging out narrow areas or obstacles is not permitted. Fires are not allowed either. Smoke and soot are a serious threat to cave formations and to the limited air supply.

Finally, the cave environment is a small, self contained area with limited capabilities to accommodate or absorb wastes, litter or debris. Please leave nothing behind when your trip is completed.



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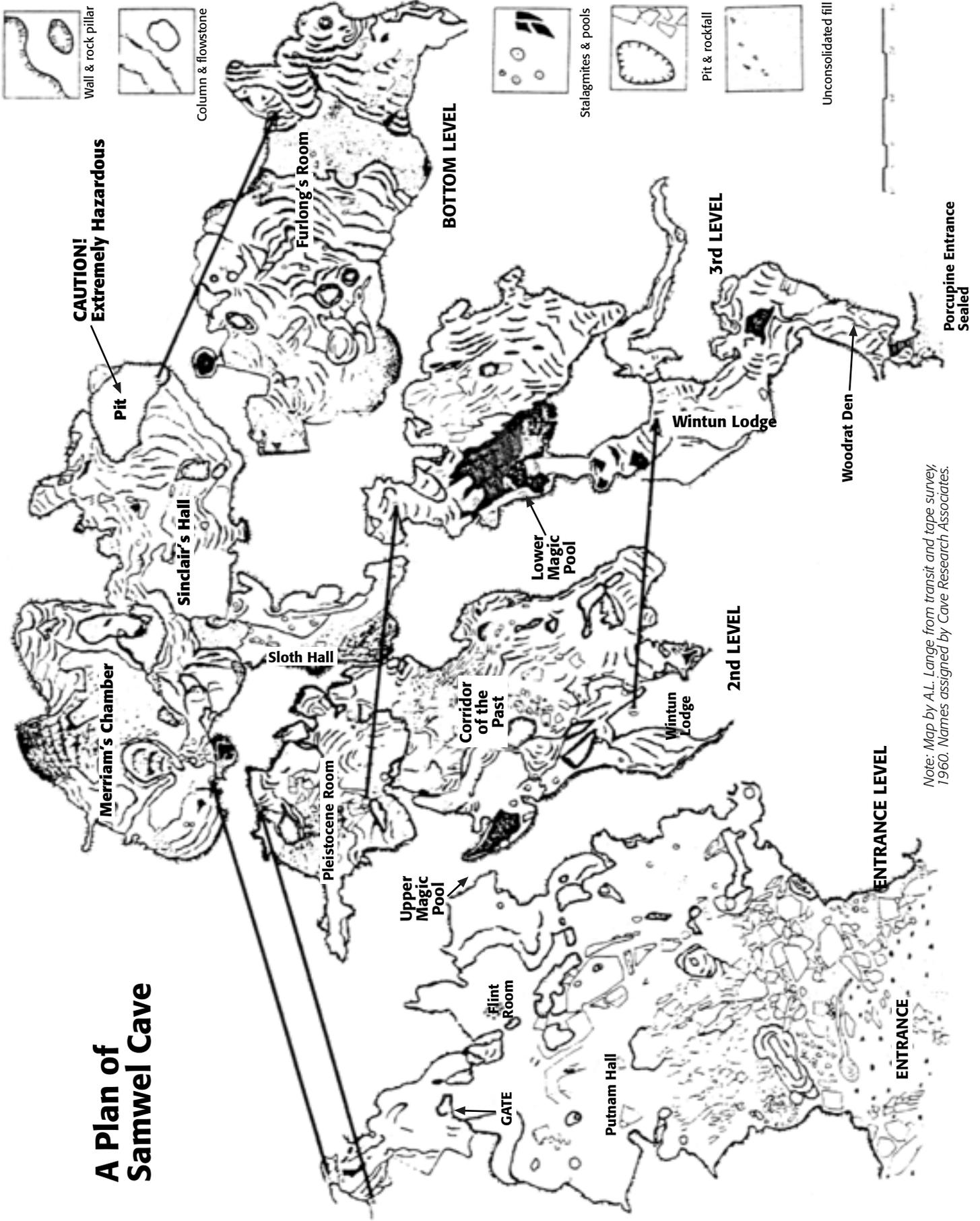
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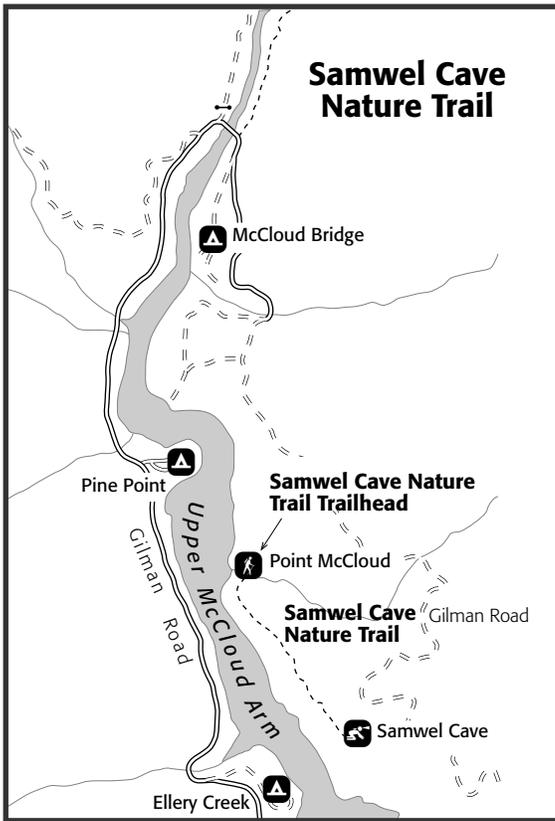
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A Plan of Samwel Cave



Note: Map by A.L. Lange from transit and tape survey, 1960. Names assigned by Cave Research Associates.



Getting to Samwel Cave

Access to the cave is by boat to Point McCloud on the McCloud Arm of Shasta Lake. From Point McCloud, follow the nature trail one (1) mile to the cave entrance.

Be prepared

Your Party: A properly organized caving expedition should consist of no less than four persons. The reason for this is in the event of injury the victim need not be left alone and no one has to leave the cave alone to get help. This buddy system is good insurance against further calamity.

Lighting: To enter a cave relying on a single light source and especially one of questionable quality is foolhardy to say the least. To minimize the risk the best procedure is to equip every member of a party with a dependable light source (either electric or carbide, handheld or headlamp variety), and an alternative light source as well as necessary spare parts.

Head Gear: Caves are filled with low bridges, protruding speleothems, an: loose rocks. To avoid a "cave kiss" (concussion, fractured skull, etc.) you would be well advised to wear a hard hat or climbing helmet.

Footwear: Caves like Samwel are formed by the solution of limestone by water and. As a result, they can be very muddy, especially in winter. Because of these slick conditions, many cavers prefer lug sole boots, although sneakers are sometimes selected when small crawlways are being explored. The footwear you select is largely determined by cave conditions and individual comfort.

Clothing: The climate in Samwel Cave is consistently cool (mid 60s) and highly humid. Avoid synthetic clothing which tends to trap moisture close to your body. Cotton or wool provide the best insulation and ventilation (down garments are not functional). When selecting clothing consider rough and sharp rocks which snag and tear clothes. Most cavers prefer coveralls because their construction reduces loose fabric that can get hooked on rocks. For additional comfort you may want to consider leather work gloves and knee pads.

Special equipment and hazards

There is only one section of Samwel Cave that involves technical caving. This is the 75 foot "Pit." The "Pit" is located in Sinclair's Hall and descends into Furlong's Room. If you are unskilled in deep caving techniques, you should not approach the "Pit" or enter Sinclair's Hall. The floor of Sinclair's Hall is a muddy, slimy funnel and can deceive an unwary explorer. Don't join the "Lost Maiden" and turn your adventure into a one way trip!

For more information call or write

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 (530) 275-1589 (voice)
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 Visit us on the world wide web at: www.fs.fed.us/r5/shastatrinity

The book "A Bag of Bones" about Wintu Indian folklore, including Samwel Cave, may be purchased at the Shasta Lake Visitor Center.

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