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Jewel and Wind Caves Celebrate National Public Lands Day with Free Cave Tours

JEWEL CAVE NATIONAL MONUMENT, SD – On September 29, National Public Lands Day, Jewel Cave National Monument and Wind Cave National Park will host visitors and volunteers for a special day of service and celebration. Additionally, cave tour fees will be waived at both areas for the day.

“This is the largest, single-day volunteer event for public lands in our country,” said Wind Cave Superintendent Vidal Davila. “Both Jewel and Wind Caves will be offering opportunities for the public to help maintain these special areas, along with providing an opportunity for people to get outside and enjoy their parks.”

Jewel Cave visitors may choose either the Scenic Tour or Discovery Tour as their venture into the second longest cave in the world. The Scenic Tour provides an opportunity to view a variety of beautiful, colorful, and rare cave formations for which Jewel Cave is famous. This half-mile tour is moderately strenuous, follows a paved lighted trail with over 700 stairs, and lasts approximately an hour and twenty minutes. The Discovery Tour is a twenty-minute wheelchair accessible program, conducted in one large room of the cave. Cave tours will begin at 9:20 a.m. with the last tour at 3:35 p.m.

Wind Cave will be offering tours lasting an hour and fifteen minutes every thirty minutes from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Visitors will walk along the Natural Entrance Tour and view the boxwork for which the cave is famous. This half-mile tour is moderately strenuous with approximately 300 stairs, most of them going down.

Cave temperatures at both caves are around 50 °F. A light coat or sweater and sturdy walking shoes are recommended. All tours begin at the respective visitor centers, and cave tour tickets will be issued on a first come, first served basis. This event can be extremely popular resulting in long wait times and possible “sold out” tours. Visitors are encouraged to explore the surface trails and visitor center displays during their wait in order to fully appreciate the significance behind each site.

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.



Jewel Cave is also celebrating this date by offering a Wild Caving Tour for interested participants. This strenuous tour takes up to five cavers off-trail into the underground wilderness areas of the Monument. The trek lasts between three to four hours. All cavers are required to fit through an eight and a half inch by 24-inch opening. Participants must be eighteen years of age or older; however, young adults sixteen or seventeen are allowed on the tour with parental approval. The tour requires a reservation and has a ticket fee. The tour begins at 11:30 a.m. and concludes around 4:00 p.m.

People interested in volunteering at Jewel Cave on this special event date are encouraged to report to the visitor center by 10:00 a.m. Volunteers will be assigned various tasks, such as picking up litter along the Monument's interior roadways, parking lot areas, and trailhead locations. Other tasks will include some trail work along the one-quarter mile Roof Trail. Superintendent Larry Johnson of Jewel Cave states, "National Public Lands Day is much more than a fee free day. Volunteerism is a focus toward this special day and allows the public to roll up their sleeves and help agency staff with projects. The one on one time not only completes tasks, but it offers the public a chance to learn about these special areas behind the scenes."

The Friends of Wind Cave National Park will be working in the park's backcountry, on the former Sanson Ranch, rolling up segments of interior fences. The fence will then be recycled and used to replace fence destroyed in last July's Myrtle Fire.

The day ends at Wind Cave with a ranger program listening for the sound of elk bugling. Beginning at 7 p.m. in the Elk Mountain Campground Amphitheater, a ranger will give a brief talk about elk then the group will drive to a pullout to listen for the elk's high-pitched bugle. Dress warmly and bring a flashlight.

National Public Lands Day is a time to celebrate the heritage sites of the United States. All visitors are encouraged to explore these natural and cultural treasures and take the time to learn the significance behind each location. For more information, contact the visitor centers at 605-673-8300 (Jewel Cave) or 605-745-4600 (Wind Cave).

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