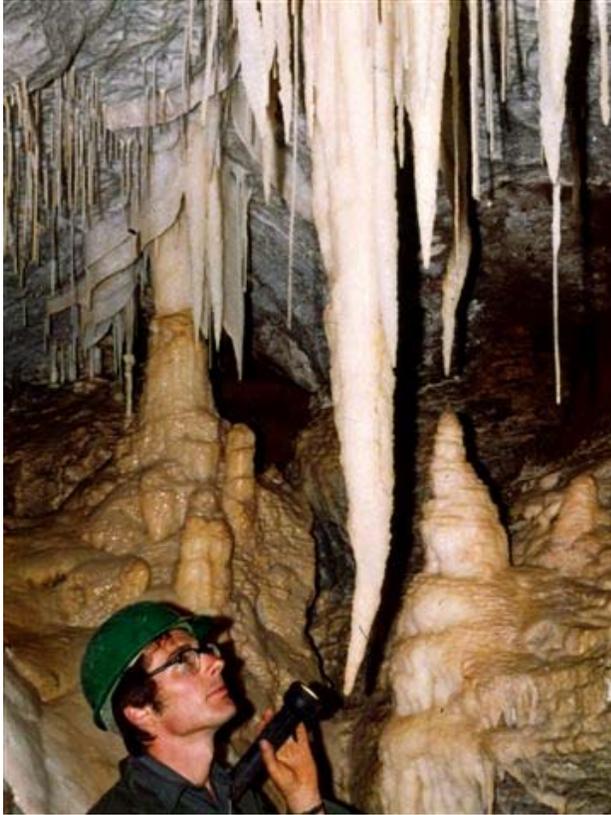


STALACTITE RECOVERED ON KEPLER TRACK, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND

– Press Release via Neil Collinson

Bent stalactite in Luxmore Cave



A stalactite, likely to be thousands of years old, has been recovered by Department of Conservation staff after it was reported to have been forcibly removed from Luxmore Cave on the Kepler Track.

DOC staff were alerted to the incident by a group of trampers who reported their concern that the crystallised limestone had been removed from the cave by another group of trampers. The department immediately activated an investigation and the stalactite was located close to the track by the caves.



Decoration in Luxmore Cave

“Unfortunately, it is not possible to obtain conclusive fingerprints from the stalactite” said Constable James Ure from the Te Anau Police Station.

A group of trampers were questioned by a DOC compliance officer about the incident, but nothing was found to indicate they had been involved in removing the stalactite.

Stalactites, which look like stony spikes, hang like icicles from the roof of limestone caves such as these found on Mt Luxmore. These spectacular formations develop over hundreds and thousands of years and are so delicate that they can be severely damaged simply by the touch of a human hand.

“This serves as a reminder to all users of the National Park that the land should be left undisturbed” said Reg Kemper, DOC Te Anau Area Manager. “Caves are extremely fragile environments and they must be treated with respect”.

Stalactites form as a result of water dripping from the roof of the cave or flowing over the exposed limestone walls. As the water flows down through the earth towards the cave roof and walls, it dissolves limestone in its path. This limestone is then left as a crystalline deposit within the cave.

The removal of this stalactite is a serious offence. If convicted, any person found removing or damaging any natural or historic features on conservation land is liable to a substantial fine or three months imprisonment.

The stalactite cannot be repositioned in the cave and so has been offered to local iwi. It is likely it will be used as an interpretation tool to educate future cavers of the need to look after the cave environment and refrain from touching the cave formations.



The recovered stalactite

