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Comments: I am a member of the National Speleological Society and an active cave historian, researcher, and explorer of Colorado caves since 1974.

As someone who has visited the Sweetwater Indian Cave since 1979, I have particular interest in seeing that the cave is protected and preserved. My historic research shows that this cave was sacred to the Ute Nation in the late 19th century, prior to their removal to the Utah reservation.

Indian Camp Pass to the west of Sweetwater Lake was the primary thoroughfare for travel in that era, used by tribal members to travel between the Eagle River Valley and the White River Valley. It is not known as to the overall significance of the cave and the lake to Ute culture, but it is critical that the tribe be contacted and involved in any decisions regarding development as a potential Colorado State Park.

Cavers with our Society have inadequately examined and studied the Sweetwater Canyon and associated side canyons for caves and karst features. Past trips have located a few smaller caves, along with a significant high altitude gypsum karst region at Hack Lake on Bureau of Land Management land north of the lake.

Known karst to the west of the proposed state park may contain underground drainage that feeds water to Dry Sweetwater Creek. It is also believed that springs feeding the lake itself may be karst related. Additional studies must be undertaken to better understand the geology and hydrology of the region.

Though many Colorado Society members supported the purchase of Sweetwater Lake to preserve and protect the lake from commercial development, the decision to partner with Colorado Parks and Wildlife was a surprise. White River National Forest did not choose a similar administrative action with Trappers Lake to the west or Hanging Lake to the southwest. The reason for this partnership has never been adequately explained by the WRNF or by the State.

There are legitimate concerns from local Sweetwater residents regarding the decision to develop the lake as an official state park. Additional traffic on the narrow access road, inadequate parking, and resulting restrictions on daily visitation seem counterproductive to preserving and protecting this unique Colorado resource. Have any visitation studies been undertaken these last few years to determine the baseline visitation, local and visitor traffic, visitors to the cave, animal and plant life in the region, or any other metrics that are useful in developing professional management plans?

I am curious if there is a reason for any sort of special administrative designation for the area. Could the WRNF simply undertake modest and required improvements to the facilities at the lake and work with the prior outfitters, A.J. Brink Outfitters, to provide public services as a federal outfitter. In our conversations with the owners in the last two decades, they were always friendly and willing to assist in our studies. We were impressed with their interest in protecting the cave; they installed a register in the entrance to document the annual visitors.

Cave explorers are generally reluctant to provide information to the public regarding sensitive caves that can be impacted by thoughtless or careless visitors. There are many examples of caves in the WRNF that have been degraded in the last 50 years by the public. Simply gating and closing of caves is not the answer, however. The WRNF gated Hubbard Cave in Glenwood Canyon four years ago to protect a significant winter bat hibernation site. Unfortunately, this gating failed to consider the century of visitation by residents of Glenwood Springs, who visited the remote cave since its discovery in 1893. The situation is similar at Sweetwater, where area residents have visited this culturally significant cave for as long. Rather than gating and locking the cave for no public access, a better plan might be to keep the cave open, but install interpretive signage, and on busy holiday

weekends, provide USFS-guided trips to the cave. This is not unlike the actions by the WRNF in recent years at Spring Cave on the South Fork of the White River.

To illustrate the recorded significance of the Indian Cave, here is an article from the August 1, 1889 Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle:

Weeping Maiden's Cave

The Cave at Sweetwater Lake, Once the Place of Worship for the Ute Indians-A Horrible Crime Committed.

That Colorado abounds in wonderful creations of nature is acknowledged by all who have taken the trouble to investigate her resources, and the natural caverns that are to be found scattered over the hills form no small part of the same wonderful formations. To many these formations are a mystery, but it has been conceded that most of them have been formed by water; argued from the point that the whole of this country was once submerged, and when the waters receded that many of the caves were formed. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the caves create no end of astonishment from those by whom they are visited. Of course the greatest of all the caverns in the state are those to be found near Manitou. The cavern is a great cave in the solid rocks of the very center of the mountain, and consists of subterranean hallways, chambers, galleries and grand ceilings and domes, all beautified with innumerable stalactites, stalagmites, crystals and many other curious formations. Through the mountains are to be found many caves of smaller dimensions that do not offer the attractions that the above mentioned cavern does, but which have interest for those who have visited them.

In the country where the Indians' once held possession caves have been found that contained many relics of a barbarous age, and in some of them are to be found to-day, signs that were put on the walls years ago by these nomadic people. Perhaps one of the most noted is that at Sweetwater lake, in Garfield county, which for years served as a place of worship for the White River Utes. It is situated in a gulch that leads to the lake and is about one mile from it. The entrance is partly covered with a heavy growth of brush, so that a stranger would easily pass it by. The room is about 75 x 50 feet, with lofty ceiling, and on the walls are inscribed signs representing the Deity, and other religious symbols familiar to the Utes. It was here that the medicine men of the tribe performed their great cures, holding that the waters of the lake gave a zest to their healing powers. It was also at this cave that, after the religious ceremonies for the year were ended, high carnival was held, war dances and feasting being the principal features of the grand carnival. The cave was also considered to have a great influence over the lives of any children born within its sacred walls, and mothers would travel miles to reach this charmed spot to give birth to their offspring.

But a change suddenly took place amongst the Indians that turned the cave from a place of worship to a sepulcher. Their images, and trophies of the chase were removed, the place deserted and war declared on the whites. The story as told the writer by an old trapper and scout, and that took all the charm from Sweetwater cave is as follows. Early in the forties, when the only whitemen were those employed in the service of the Hudson Bay Fur company, and who made long excursions into Colorado in search of fur. They were well repaid for their perilous undertaking, as the streams in the country were literally stocked with fur animals of every description. To the Indians, at the time, a white man was a curiosity and when the hardy trapper happened to meet them he was well received and entertained. But the advent of the white man amongst them was soon to cause considerable trouble and change the feeling of friendship to one of bitter hatred; which to a certain extent has remained with the tribe ever since.

One day in early spring three trappers struck the camp of the chief of the Utes and were invited to remain. One of the trappers was a young man of about thirty summers, tall, lithe, sinewy and extremely handsome. His splendid physique was shown to good advantage, dressed in the rough garb of the country - buckskin. He was an excellent shot, a good horseman, and a first class trapper. Besides he had a knowledge of herbs that often stood him in good need. He was named Jack Marcum. It was not long before he became fast friends with his dusky

hosts and he was their idol. An Indian worships a white man when he excels him in outdoor sports. The chief had an only child, a daughter, whom he idolized, and for an Indian, she was a handsome maiden, about 18 years old. It happened one day she fell sick, and the medicine man could do nothing for her. Jack, who had often noticed the maiden, happened to be in the tepee; seeing what ailed her, he went to pick some herbs, which he made into a beverage and gave her. In a few days she recovered, and thanked her white medicine man in her own naïve manner. From that time a friendship sprang up between the two that ended in love. Jack was able to speak their language, and many a tête-à-tête the young lovers had. Even with the children of the woods love does not run smoothly, and there were obstacles in their way that had to be overcome. The old chief had promised, and bound by a sacred oath, his daughter's hand in marriage to a young buck, who was to be his successor. The young Indian was headstrong and impetuous, and looked with disfavor on the friendship between his affianced bride and the trapper. The maiden was cognizant of the arrangement her father had made and so informed her lover. He knew that there was danger ahead for both of them, and set to thinking to devise a plan to get away and take his sweetheart with him. Often had she told him about the charmed cave at Sweetwater, and he determined with her guidance to reach it, get married, and all would be well. Telling her of his plans, she agreed, and the day for the elopement dawned. Early in the morning they stole from camp and started over the hills. They had some hours start before their absence was discovered, and when it was the Indians were frantic, as the maiden was much beloved. The young buck selected six of the most daring of the tribe, and started in pursuit. Hotly the trail was followed, but for several days they never caught sight of the fugitives. At last the divide was crossed, and the trail of the two lovers was discovered leading to the holy cave. Not deterred by this, the young chief and his men followed, and when night fell were within a few miles of their destination. Camp was made, and, early in the morning, they were astir. They went direct to the cave and discovered the fugitives. A determined fight ensued, in which four of the Indians were killed and Jack was badly wounded. At last he was overpowered. A council was held, and he was sentenced to death. The maiden was given her choice, to return to camp or die with her lover. She preferred the latter. The sentence was carried out in a most horrible manner by both having their heads dashed to pieces against the walls of the cave. The bodies were left to feed coyotes and other wild animals, and the Indians returned to camp. When the death of his child was reported to the old chief, his grief was terrible to behold, and he ordered that the images in the cave be taken away and that it should be abandoned as a place of worship forever, as it was accursed. His orders were carried out, and to-day the cavern is known as the Weeping Maiden's Cave, and can be seen by anybody who takes the trouble to visit it. Dark spots on the wall are pointed out as the blood of the two lovers, and the old scout said that no White River Ute would go near the place. This is one legend, out of many, that is connected with the caves which are to be found in Garfield county.