Stalactite

Stalagmite

Soda Straw

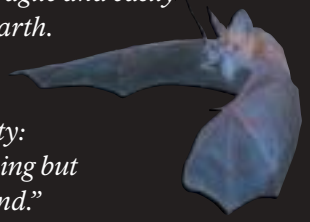
Column

Flowstone Floors

Cave and Karst Program
Geologic Resources Division
National Park Service
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, CO 80225

www2.nature.nps.gov/grd/geology/caves/

Caves are some of the most fragile and easily damaged environments on earth. When you visit caves remember the motto of the National Speleological Society: "Take only pictures, kill nothing but time, and leave nothing behind."



A desert Pallid bat catches its food using echo-location in the dark of night. Lighting for photo by Dr. Scott Altenbach.

The following is a partial list of National Park Service units that contain cave and karst areas. For more information about units that contain caves go to www.nps.gov

Carlsbad Caverns National Park
Carlsbad, NM
(505) 785-2232

Craters of the Moon National Monument
Arco, ID
(208) 527-3257

Great Basin National Park
Baker, NV
(775) 234-7331

Jewel Cave National Monument
Custer, SD
(605) 673-2288

Lava Beds National Monument
Tulelake, CA
(530) 667-2282

Mammoth Cave National Park
Mammoth Cave, KY
(270) 758-2328

Oregon Caves National Monument
Cave Junction, OR
(541) 592-2100

Russell Cave National Monument
Bridgeport, AL
(205) 495-2672

Timpanogos Cave National Monument
American Fork, UT
(801) 756-5239

Wind Cave National Park
Hot Springs, SD
(605) 745-4600

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Geologic Resources Division

Cave And Karst Program

Cave and karst areas are a rich source of yet-to-be-discovered knowledge of the world around us. The National Park Service Cave and Karst Program emphasizes stewardship, responsibility, science, cooperation, coordination, and education.

A lava tube entrance at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii

What is a cave?

The Federal Cave Resources Protection Act of 1988, 16 U.S.C. §§ 4301-4310 (1994) (FCRPA), defines a cave as "any naturally occurring void, cavity, recess, or system of interconnected passageways beneath the surface of the earth." Caves and karst features occur in some 120 units in all regions of the National Park System. There are at least 23 types of caves, including lava tubes, solution caves in limestone and gypsum, tectonic fractures (earth cracks), littoral (sea) caves, ice caves, and talus caves.

A troglobitic (cave adapted) salamander

On the cover: Canopy column in Carlsbad Caverns National Park

What is karst?

Karst is a landform comprised of sinkholes, sinking streams, zones of infiltration, underground passageways or watercourses, and spring resurgences, usually occurring in a soluble rock such as limestone or gypsum.

A karst spring in Ozark National Scenic Riverways, Missouri

Resources

Cave and karst resources include mineral deposits (cave formations), special species known as troglobites (animals adapted to living in cave and karst areas), paleontological materials, cultural artifacts and associations, bats and other animals, and underground water courses. These unique cave and karst areas were created and are continually changed by a combination of specific geologic and biologic processes. Contamination or other types of interference with these processes can change the basic characteristics of these environments and can lead to degradation, and even destruction, of cave and karst resources.

Importance of cave and karst systems

Cave and karst areas:

- hold about 25% of the nation's groundwater;
- include valuable data relevant to global climate change, waste disposal, groundwater supply and contamination, petroleum recovery, and biomedical investigations;
- contain data that are pertinent to anthropologic, archaeologic, geologic, paleontologic, and mineralogic discoveries and resources;
- are natural laboratories; and
- act as natural traps for flora and fauna, and new species of extinct animals have been discovered from paleoentological excavations in caves.

There are almost 4,000 known caves within the National Park System. The National Park Service has cave and karst management staff in Denver, Colorado to work with cave and karst specialists stationed in the parks.

The Cave and Karst Program

The Program provides:

- protection for natural processes in cave ecosystems and karst landscapes;
- scientific studies and research in or about cave and karst resources and systems;
- cartographic surveys and inventories of cave systems;
- educational and recreational opportunities;
- development of guidelines to maximize cave protection and management
- monitoring of natural environmental conditions and visitor use impact; and
- methods for sustainable use of cave resources.