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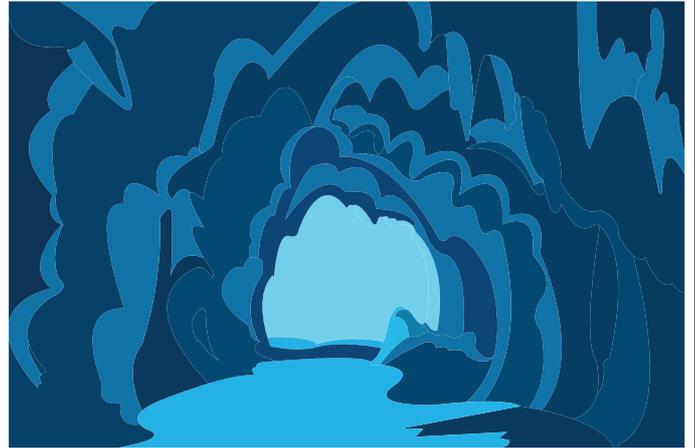
Underground Wonderland

by Guy Bellaranti

Carlsbad Caverns National Park is in the state of New Mexico. There are over 100 caves here. One of the better explored caves is Carlsbad Cavern. It features one of the largest underground chambers in the world.

Tours leave from the Visitor Center and go to different parts of the cavern. Wearing a jacket is a good idea because the temperature is 56 degrees inside.

CARLSBAD CAVERNS



NATIONAL PARK

Two tours are self-guided, and the other tours are led by National Park guides. The self-guided tours require no reservations, but the guided tours do.

Some of the guided tours have age restrictions because they involve crawling through tight spots and/or climbing ladders. Other guided tours are easier and have no age restrictions. One of these, the Kings Palace tour, goes through many beautiful chambers. The guide stops at several places of interest. On one stop, the guide turns off the lights for a minute and everyone sits in total darkness. This might sound scary, but for many people it's actually fun!

The two self-guided routes are very popular. You can rent audio listening guides for these tours. They are fun to listen to and provide a lot of information. On a self-guided tour, you walk at your own pace. One self-guided route begins at the cavern's huge Natural Entrance and the other starts deep in the cavern at the Big Room. Both tours feature many beautiful and interesting sights.

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The Natural Entrance route is 1¼ miles long and follows a steep paved trail where you descend 750 feet. That is like going down 75 stories! You pass many places including Bat Cave, Devil's Spring, Witch's Finger and the Boneyard. At the bottom is an underground rest area with a place to buy lunch food and sit at tables. Restrooms are also located here.

The Big Room route begins near the underground lunchroom and is also 1¼ miles in length. Some people walk it after walking down the Natural Entrance route.

People touring only the Big Room take an elevator down. Most of the Big Room is easy walking. The Big Room gets its name for a good reason. It is huge, having room enough to hold over six football fields! The ceiling is 255 feet above you. Many beautiful formations are in this room. Some are small and fragile, and others, like Crystal Spring Dome and Temple of the Sun are giant sized. The Bottomless Pit is one of many interesting stops in the Big Room.

After your tour, you take the elevator up to the surface in the visitor center. The visitor center has a museum, gift shop and café. It also has a short movie about the cave. Rangers are on hand to answer questions and some give talks.

Outside the visitor center are desert nature trails. You'll see cactus and probably some lizards and rabbits. Snakes, coyotes, eagles, hummingbirds and other animals also live here. You may or may not see these.

A favorite ranger talk is the bat flight program. This program runs on evenings from late May into October and occurs in an area outside the natural entrance. The ranger talks for a while. Then, as the sun sets, bats fly from the cave. At first, there are only a few, but then the numbers grow into the hundreds and then thousands. The bats eat millions of insects every night and return near dawn. The flight is an amazing sight to see.

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1) The following words are taken from the article. Match the words with their correct definitions.

Restriction • • An object easily broken or damaged

Explore • • A large cave or chamber in a cave

Ranger • • To travel through an unfamiliar area in order to learn about it

Cavern • • To pass from a higher place or level to a lower one

Guided tour • • A person whose job is to protect a forest or a park

Descend • • A visit to a place with a guide who explains facts about the place

Crawl • • Something that limits or controls someone's actions or movement

Fragile • • To move forward on the hands and knees or by dragging the body close to the ground

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2) Why does the author say that "The Big Room gets its name for a good reason"?

3) Which of the following is not true of the favorite ranger talk mentioned in the last paragraph?

- a) The program is held on evenings from late May into October.
- b) Bats fly from the cave well before the Sun sets.
- c) The flight is a great sight.
- d) The program is held outside the natural entrance.

4) Describe in your own words, the self - guided tour route that begins at the Natural Entrance.

5) If you were to visit the Carlsbad Caverns National Park, which of the two routes (Natural Entrance and the Big Room) would you prefer to take the tour from? Give sufficient reasons to support your choice.

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2) Why does the author say that “The Big Room gets its name for a good reason”?

The author says so because it is huge enough to hold over six football fields.

Its ceiling is 255 feet high. It has beautiful formations like Crystal Spring

Dome and Temple of the Sun that are giant sized.

3) Which of the following is not true of the favorite ranger talk mentioned in the last paragraph?

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4) Describe in your own words, the self - guided tour route that begins at the Natural Entrance.

The Natural Entrance route is 1¼ miles long and follows a steep paved trail

that descends 750 feet. It passes through many places including Bat Cave,

Devil’s Spring, Witch’s Finger and the Boneyard. At the bottom is an

underground rest area with dining facilities and restrooms.

5) If you were to visit the Carlsbad Caverns National Park, which of the two routes (Natural Entrance and the Big Room) would you prefer to take the tour from? Give sufficient reasons to support your choice.

Answers may vary.