



An American Tour: 157



New Mexico's Carlsbad Caverns

Carlsbad Caverns National Park is an American national park in the Guadalupe Mountains of southeastern New Mexico. The primary attraction is the show cave, Carlsbad Cavern. Visitors can hike in on their own or take an elevator from the visitor center. Carlsbad Cavern includes a large limestone chamber, named simply the Big Room, which is almost 4,000 feet long, 625 feet wide, and 255 feet high at its highest point. The Big Room is the largest chamber in North America and the thirty-first largest in the world.

In 1985, a distinctive method of exploration was invented. In a dome area 255 feet above the Big Room floor not far from the Bottomless Pit, a stalagmite leaned out. Using a balsa wood loop with helium-filled balloons attached, the explorers, (after several tries over several years), floated a lightweight cord up, over the target stalagmite, and back down to the ground. Then they pulled a climbing rope into position, and the explorers ascended into what they named The Spirit World. A similar, smaller room was found in the main entrance corridor, and was named Balloon Ballroom in honor of this technique.

In 1993, passages totaling nearly a mile in combined length were found in the ceiling of the New Mexico Room. Named "Chocolate High", it was the largest discovery in the cave since the Guadalupe Room was found in 1966. The Bottomless Pit was originally said to have no bottom. Later exploration revealed the bottom was about 140 feet deep and covered with soft dirt. The stones made no sound when they struck the bottom because they were lodged in the soft soil.

On October 31, 2013, a cave technician exploring the Spirit World area discovered a new chamber hundreds of feet up from the main area. Dubbed "Halloween Hall" for the date of its discovery, the fresh find marks the biggest discovery for the caverns in more than 25 years. The room's diameter is about 100 feet, and more than 1,000 bat bones were discovered inside the room.

A detached part of the park, Rattlesnake Springs Picnic Area, is a natural oasis with landscaping, picnic tables, and wildlife habitats. It is home to remarkable variety of birds; over 300 species have been recorded. About 500 species have been recorded in the whole state of New Mexico. Rattlesnake Springs is designated a historic district. The National Audubon Society has designated it an Important Bird Area. The natural entrance to the caverns is also an IBA because of its colony of cave swallows, possibly the world's largest.

Antibiotic-resistant bacteria have been discovered in the isolated and little-visited Lechuguilla Cave within the park.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlsbad_Caverns_National_Park]

