

OZARK MOUNTAINS, MISSOURI

Donald E. Harrison

1. History

The history of Meramec Caverns is rich with the treasures of time. Going back through the centuries, the Indians reserved the caves as the their god. An 18th century French miner, found the Cavern's greatest natural resource, saltpeter, which is used in the manufacture of gunpowder.

In 1993, Lester B. Dill, noted caveologist, discovered five upper levels of the Caverns. Futher exploration revealed 26 miles of underground passages. Meramec Caverns was opened to the public as a tourist attraction in 1935.

2. Bandera Volcano

Bandera Crater is the largest volcano in the region. It erupted around 10,000 years ago. Bandera's lava flow is nearly 23 miles long. The crater that remains is nearly 1,200 feet wide at the top and roughly 750 feet deep.

3. Ice Cave

The ancient Lava Trail leads you to Ice Cave, the patially collapsed remains of a lava tube. The temperature at Ice Cave never rises above 31 degrees Fahrenheit. It is floored with natural layers of perpetual ice that glisten blue-green. The green tint is caused by unusual forms of Arctic algae.

The cave thus maintains frigid winter temperatures all year round.