

Colossal Cave Mountain Park

Just north of the town of Vail, Arizona there is a secret hidden in the heart of the mountain. Deep underground dwells a place of other-worldly architecture. Huge columns and draperies made of translucent white minerals decorate the rooms. It's all part of an ancient cave system so extensive they named it Colossal Cave.

Can you imagine what it would be like if you found, in the side of the rock, an enormous passage profusely decorated with shimmering formations? This is exactly what happened to rancher Solomon Lick in 1879 when he discovered Colossal Cave. In actuality, Mr. Lick wasn't the first person to find the cave: the Hohokam Indians in the area had been using the cave since around 900 A.D.

Solomon Lick wasn't even sure of what he had found, reportedly saying it's "either an extensive old mine or a wonderful cave." This statement was enough to intrigue the director of the Arizona State Museum to take an expedition into the cave. It was quite an adventure to explore the far depths of this massive unmapped cave system. Heavy ropes and brass lanterns were used as the expedition made its way through the winding cave passages. Along the way, the expedition created one of the first maps of the cave, and upon their return, they reported finding Indian artifacts as well as two human skeletons.

Visitors to the cave today don't need to use lanterns or ropes; they can follow their tour guides along well-lit walking trails. Colossal Cave is now a show cave managed by Pima County Parklands, with tours given continuously since 1923. To this day the cave has not been fully explored; waiting just off of the paved path are passages inviting someone to come and discover them.

Source(s):

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