

Oregon Caves

Oregon Caves
National Monument and Preserve
Oregon

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Inside the cave



View from the Cliff Nature Trail



Chalet Visitor Center, near the cave entrance



On the Cliff Nature Trail

Intimate Adventure Outside Time

Tall trees reach skyward, framing the curves as you climb a road built just to reach these high-elevation caverns. At the end of the climb, breathe in the medley of fragrances exhaled by the ancient forest that blankets the Siskiyou Mountains. Take a stroll. Listen. Follow the burbling sounds of a creek. Discover it tumbling out of the rock. Feel the wet, cold breath of the cave on a hot summer day—both foreboding and beckoning you.

Nearby, notice how the Chateau curls gracefully around the creek and cave entrance, embracing it. The rustic exterior of Port-Orford-cedar bark blends with the surrounding forest. Explore inside the Chateau. Discover the brook that babbles through the dining room. Relax in the lobby's pleasing mix of forest and cave ambience. Sit, relax, mull over all the nearby hiking opportunities. Discover Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve.

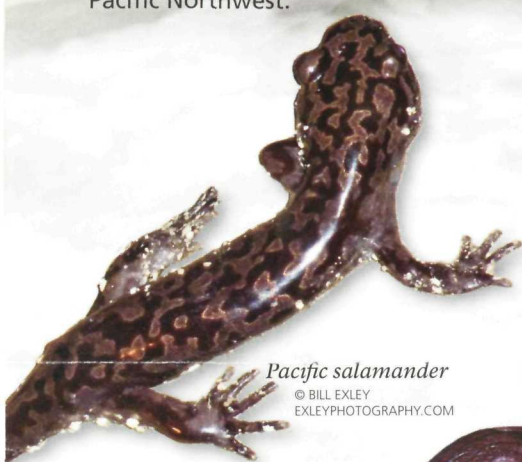
Chateau Built from 1932 to 1934 of local materials in the rustic tradition of architecture, the Chateau features marble rock-work, including a grand fireplace, and massive pillars of ponderosa pine and beams of Douglas fir. The chateau is a National Historic Landmark within Oregon Caves National Historic District.

Historic, colorful Monterey-style furniture from the 1930s graces some rooms and common areas. Large windows frame views of the forest canopy outside.

CHATEAU ART © PAUL LANDQUIST

Processes Above and Below

Groundwater carved and decorated the cave over the millennia. Water soaking through forest soils carries nutrients that feed life underground. Good watershed management preserves the natural processes that create the cave and sustain the life within. Downstream, the fresh clean water that tumbles out of the cave flows to the Illinois River, one of the last free-flowing, undammed rivers in the Pacific Northwest.



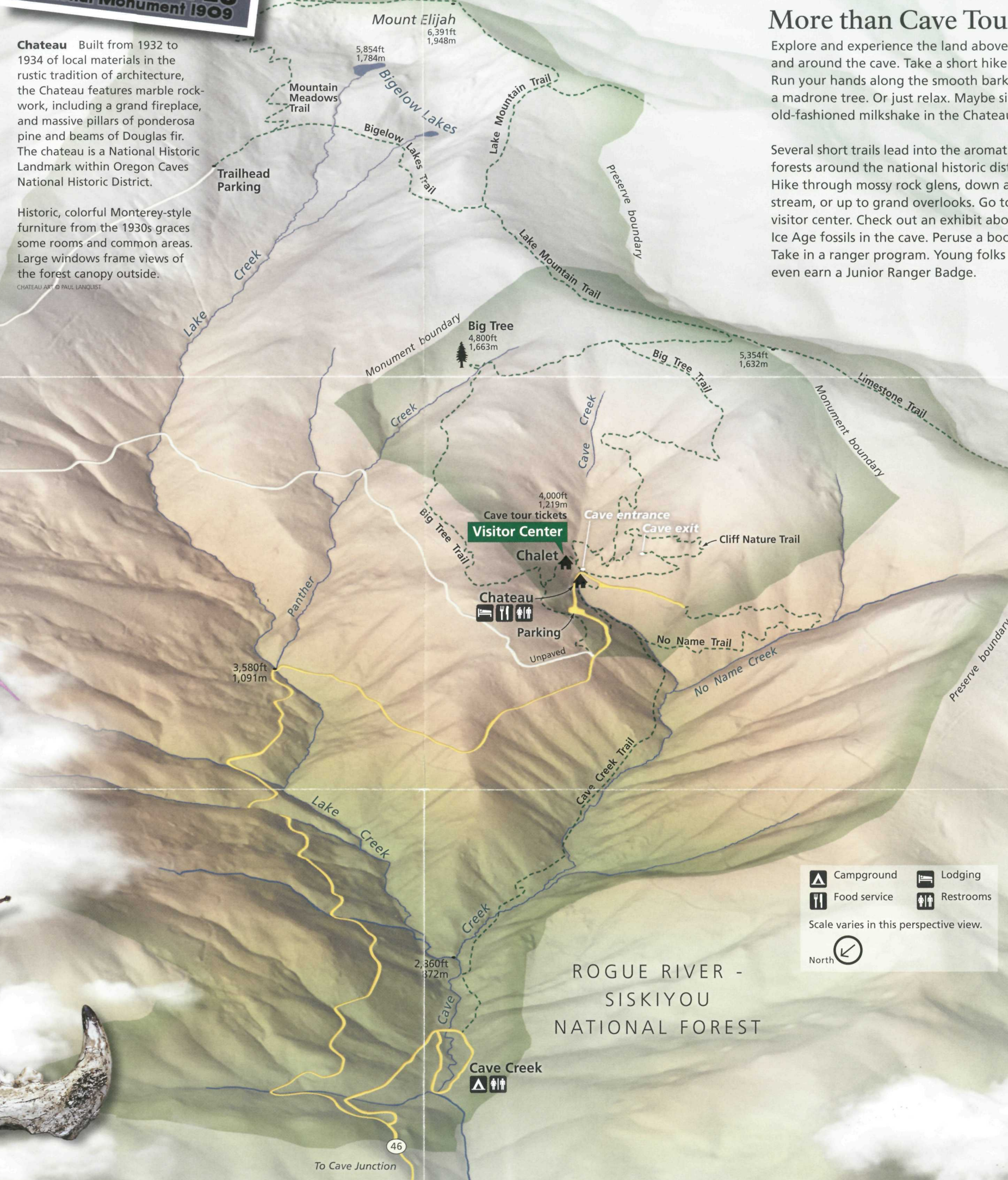
Pacific salamander
© BILL EXLEY
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Calypso orchid



Traveling sideband snail

Jaguar and grizzly bear fossils In 1995 a cave team found the most complete and northernmost jaguar fossil in the United States (*jaw, right*). The cold-storage and acid-free environment of the cave preserves animal remains for a long time. Grizzly bear bones found in the cave date to over 48,000 years old!



More than Cave Tours

Explore and experience the land above and around the cave. Take a short hike. Run your hands along the smooth bark of a madrone tree. Or just relax. Maybe sip an old-fashioned milkshake in the Chateau.

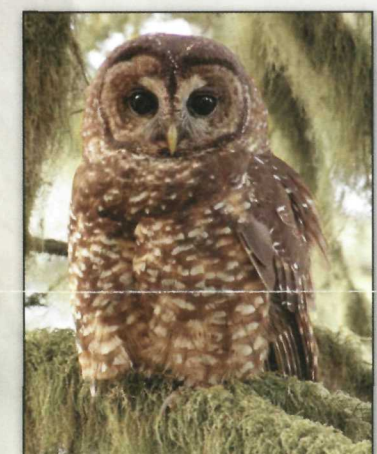
Several short trails lead into the aromatic fir forests around the national historic district. Hike through mossy rock glens, down a stream, or up to grand overlooks. Go to the visitor center. Check out an exhibit about Ice Age fossils in the cave. Peruse a book. Take in a ranger program. Young folks can even earn a Junior Ranger Badge.

Explore the Chalet Visitor Center The original chalet was the first permanent structure here, built in 1924. It houses the visitor center exhibits and bookstore, where you buy cave tour tickets. Its third floor and breezeway were added in 1942. Cave guides now live in the upper two floors in summer.

Historic Landscape In the 1930s the Civilian Conservation Corps added walled gardens, curved trails, and wispy waterfalls to the scenery near the cave entrance. By intent, mossy rocks and emerald ferns colorfully contrast with the russet hue of cedar-bark buildings.

Hike a Trail Take the path at the back of the Chalet Visitor Center's archway (*photo above*). This **Big Tree Trail** leads 1.3 miles one-way to Oregon's widest-girth Douglas fir, over 41 feet in circumference. A loop trail option is 3.3 miles long. Allow two to three hours. Elevation gain: 1,100 feet. Also ask about the **No Name** and **Cliff Nature** trails and **Bigelow Lakes**.

Know how long your hike is and let someone know what trail you take. Be prepared. Take and drink plenty of water. Wear good walking shoes. Wear a hat or use sun block. Ask a ranger about trail conditions.



Teeming with Life The Siskiyou Mountains concentrate more species of fungi, plants, and animals than almost any other temperate region in North America. Spotted owls (*above*) live here in mature, old-growth forest.

SPOTTED OWL PHOTO © PATRICK KOLAR
ALL IMAGES NPS EXCEPT AS NOTED

Oregon Caves: a Wet, Vibrant, Living Marble Cave

An Intimate Adventure Outside Yourself

Going into the cave is going into the mountain and out of your day-to-day routine. Tune your senses to hear the cave's active stream—an unusual feature in West Coast caves—to see the cave formations, and to feel its air flowing. Beyond your senses, imagine a bat flying confidently in total darkness. Caves are known to elicit more varied responses and types of awareness than almost any other places on Earth.

From Rock to Cave

Long ago, bacterial reefs deposited calcite in layers, creating limestone. Later, buried miles deep and exposed to intense heat, this limestone baked into marble. Afterward, the marble rose up with other lightweight rocks to become the Siskiyou Mountains.

Water mixing with carbon dioxide in forest soils makes a weak acid. Trickling down into the bedrock, this acidic groundwater slowly dissolves openings through the marble layers below to create caverns. This process continues today.

Going into the Mountain

Touring the Cave For over 100 years guides have led tours of Oregon Caves. Today tours explore over a half mile of twisting passages. Your guide recounts the cave's natural and cultural history on the tour. Wait times can be long in summer and a fee is charged. If you are adventurous, you may be interested in the guided off-trail cave tour offered in summer. Visit www.nps.gov/orca for up-to-date information.

Safe Cave Tour Checklist

- Warm clothing for 40s°F
- Sturdy, nonslip footwear
- Watch for uneven surfaces
- Narrow, twisting passages
- 500 stairs and steep grades
- Low rock ceilings

Children must be at least 42 inches tall. There are no child-care services available.

Prohibited in the Cave

- Food, drinks, gum, tobacco
- Canes, tripods, flashlights

Help Protect the Cave

- Don't touch formations; skin oils discolor them
- Don't lean on cave walls or formations

Accessibility The cave's first room is accessible to those with canes or wheelchairs. Service animals are not allowed in the cave due to low ceilings and steep, open, or spiral staircases. Special arrangements can be made, subject to safety and resource protection. Ask at the visitor center or contact the park in advance. We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

Visiting the Park Cave tours run from early spring through fall but can depend on the weather. Call the park or check our website for details. The cave is closed in winter to protect hibernating bats. Surface areas of the park are open year-round.

The park is 20 miles southeast of Cave Junction, OR, on OR 46. This is a narrow, winding mountain road—take your time and drive safely. Leave trailers at the Illinois Valley Visitor Center in Cave Junction. The park is 50 miles from Grants Pass and 76 miles from Crescent City, CA.

Illinois Valley Visitor Center in Cave Junction offers videos, exhibits, maps, and brochures on local attractions: 541-592-4076.

Camping is available late May to mid-September at the Grayback and Cave Creek campgrounds on OR 46. No hookups or showers. A fee is charged.

Cave Life

The cave is home to many unique animals. Some live nowhere else in the world. Long slender antennae help the cave cricket find food in total darkness. Harvestmen are not spiders, have no venom, and do not make webs.

Most cave critters are small and not easily seen, like grylloblattids, or rock crawlers, whose body fluids act as antifreeze, and springtails, who can leap 20 times their own length. Life flourishes even in a seemingly harsh environment.

Bats The bats found here feed mainly on mosquitoes, moths, and other insects. Eight bat species shelter in the cave. In winter, hibernating Townsend big-eared bats (right) are most common. All use echolocation to feed and fly in total darkness.

Horizontal rungs on the cave gates allow bats to fly in and out safely. To protect hibernating bats, the caves are closed in winter.

DRIP PHOTO © BILL EXLEY
EXLEYPHOTOGRAPHY.COM
BAT PHOTO © J. SCOTT ALLENBACH

Living in Total Darkness, Do You Need Color?



Springtail



Grylloblattid, rock crawler



Cave cricket



Two harvestmen

ALL IMAGES NPS EXCEPT AS NOTED

Lodging and food are available mid-May to late September in the park. For information and reservations contact: The Chateau at the Oregon Caves PO Box 1824, 20000 Caves Highway Cave Junction, OR 97523 541-592-3400 www.oregoncaveschateau.com

Regulations and Safety

Do not feed wildlife. Mammals can carry rabies or bubonic plague. Pets must be on a leash and stay on paved roads when not in a vehicle. Pets are prohibited on trails. They disturb wildlife and can attract cougars and bears. Check your body for ticks; ticks can carry Lyme disease or Rocky Mountain spotted fever. For firearms regulations check the park website or ask a ranger.

More Information

Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve 19000 Caves Highway Cave Junction, OR 97523 www.nps.gov/orca 541-592-2100

Oregon Caves is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

Emergencies call 911

National Park Foundation. Join the park community. www.nationalparks.org

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