

## **Troop 3 Caving Weekend (June 8 – 9, 2007)**

### Tentative Plans:

Friday (June 8<sup>th</sup>) Meet at Bell Tower at 4:30pm, drive to Blanchard Springs Campground.

Saturday (June 9<sup>th</sup>) Morning: Dripstone Tour or Wild Cave Tour that continues into afternoon

Afternoon: Discovery Trail &/or fishing

Return to Fort Smith after all tours completed

## **General Blanchard Caverns Facts**

There are certain facts about the caverns that you should know in preparing for your tour. Throughout the year the temperature is a constant, cool 58 degrees F, so a sweater or light jacket is always comfortable. Humidity is close to 100 percent.

The limestone rock from which these incredibly varied formations develop was laid down in an ancient sea more than 350 million years ago. We can only speculate on how old the formations are. Take, for example, the impressive Giant Column, which towers about seventy feet high. A stalactite, lengthening from the ceiling, and a stalagmite rising from the floor, probably formed it. No one knows how many thousands, hundreds of thousands, or millions of years it took for dripping water to deposit the calcite and other minerals that you see in the column's color.

Depending on the amount of water that seeps into the caverns from the surface, formations sometimes grow as much as an inch or more in a few years, or as little as a fraction of an inch in one hundred years, or not at all during dry epochs.

In addition to the Giant Column, other features that will capture your attention and stir your imagination are the Indian Feather leaning against its companion flowstone; the Coral Pond with its fragile lace-like patterns formed by dikes and terraces beneath the shallow water; draperies, popcorn crystal, stalactites, stalagmites, a natural bridge of gravel, and huge piles of breakdown - slabs that fell from the ceilings ages ago.

### **Dripstone Trail** (one hour tour, \$10 adults, \$5 scouts)

With a tour guide, you'll ride an elevator two hundred feet into the earth and find yourself in the gigantic Cathedral Room. . Masonry curbs border paved, comfortably wide paths. Overall interpretive lights that the guide turns on to display particularly beautiful or interesting formations reinforce lighting. You will enjoy practically every type of calcite formation found in limestone caves. Everything from delicate, hollow soda straws to massive flowstones and stalagmites.

The trail takes you through two major rooms in the upper level of the cavern system. The Cathedral Room is long enough to hold three football fields and still have space left over. The many snow-white formations in the Coral Room are pure calcite, or calcium carbonate, the mineral that makes up limestone.

Bats are rare in this portion of the cave, but you may be able to see tiny cave creatures such as salamanders and crickets.

Here in silence, punctuated only by the dripping water, nature has truly created a masterpiece. In quiet pools of water, almost every kind of cave formation is reflected.

A vast amount of dripstone is found in this portion of the Caverns for two reasons. First, this section is higher than the other, allowing air-chemistry changes, which cause the dripstone to form, and second, this portion is older than lower areas, giving the features more time to develop.

### **Discovery Trail** (two hour tour, \$10 adults, \$5 scouts)

Here, you'll take the routes of the early explorers and pass through campsites of their early expeditions. You'll look up through the natural entrance where those early explorers dangled from ropes on homemade harness. You will see the underground stream which eventually gushes from the Blanchard Springs.

Here the underground stream is first seen. Again, one wonders at the centuries, which passed before the smooth vast, passages were dissolved away, with only time and water at work. Before you leave, you'll discover the Giant Flowstone - one of the largest anywhere. And the colorful Ghost Room has an enchantment all of its own

You may see some of the Cavern's creatures along the way, particularly near the natural entrance because more food is present there. Organic materials, like leaves, fall down the shaft. The underground stream also brings in leaves, twigs and aquatic life. Some animals of the cave occasionally return to the surface for brief periods. This brings most of them to the natural entrance where they become prey to certain surface predators. Still this area has far less animal life than a similar area on the surface.

### **Wild Cave Tour** (3 – 4 hour tour, \$65 with \$25 deposit at reservation)

The newest of the Caverns tours takes visitors to the undeveloped sections of the middle level. Participants should be in good physical shape, wear sturdy shoes or boots, and come prepared to get dirty and have fun. Tour participants should expect to climb very steep slopes, crawl on hands and knees, pass under low ceilings, and travel through red clay. The tour ends at the Titans, a group of tall spectacular columns. Hard hats, kneepads, gloves, lights, and belts are provided, along with a souvenir t-shirt. The Wild Cave Tour lead by two guides is limited to a minimum of 3 but no more than 12 people per tour. Participants must be at least 10 years old. The Wild Cave Tour is available by reservation only.

*Note: Tour Descriptions taken from Blanchard Springs website (<http://www.fs.fed.us/oonf/ozark/recreation/caverns.html>)*