

Florida Caverns Tour
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By Craig Brown

When it gets hot and muggy, some head for the beach or a nice, cool spring. Our club decided it was time to head underground to the Florida Caverns, located in Marianna. Most of the substrate of Florida is composed of limestone that is full of holes, tunnels and caves that are usually full of water. The aquifer flows happily through this underground Swiss cheese, so SCUBA gear is usually required to visit this subterranean world. The Florida Caverns are just above the water table and dry most of the year-- plus they provide a 65 degree temperature!

We met at Don and Pam's farm to begin the trek and were cheerfully met by Snoopy the Border Collie. Pam, the consummate hostess, had prepared a wonderful spread of drinks and snacks for the would-be cave explorers.



After catching up on the latest news and projects, the convoy headed west on scenic North Florida back roads.



There was some curiosity and interest generated as the antique cars pulled through the ranger station and into the parking lot. Car aficionados of all ages took time to admire the hardware and swap stories of automobiles from the past.



There was time to visit the museum before the tour. There was a special display of turtles and Nell even got to hold a 50-year-old box turtle. Box turtles don't get very big, so the burning question was "How do you know how old a turtle is?" The answer is held in the rings that can be seen circling the shell. Much like a tree, the turtle shell grows out and leaves a ring for each year of growth.



There was a short lecture including instructions, rules and safety procedures prior to the tour. The President of TRAACA gave this the attention it deserved and was quickly identified as the “one to keep an eye on” by the tour guide.



We descended down into the cave. The first stop was the “big room” named for its expanse and variation of cave formations. Some received ‘cave kisses’ consisting of a drop of water, dissolved limestone and carbolic acid. There was momentary panic over the possibility of carbolic acid eating a hole through the skull and into the brain, but the tour guide assured us soda contained fifty times the concentration of carbolic acid. The panic subsided, but it was curious that no one drank soda at lunch.



The next stop was named the “wedding room” due to the impressive formation resembling a wedding cake. You can see the formation lighted behind the group.



Pam moved in to take a closer look at the cake. It looked tasty enough, but was cold and slimy to the touch.



As you move throughout the cave, there are the standard stalactites and stalagmites, but there are also representations of everyday shapes such as a heart, South America and a duck. See if you can guess which shape is represented in the picture below.



On leaving the park, we noticed a statute honoring the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) workers who improved the cave system and made it accessible for all to enjoy. These young men toiled for \$1.00 a day from 1933 to 1942. They were able to keep 25 cents of that dollar and the other 75 cents was sent home to their families. When war was declared in 1942 they were among the first drafted and given a free trip overseas.

Local legend says that for a day's wages of a dollar, the CCC Worker in bronze will step off the pedestal and tell tales of the depression and his adventures overseas during World War II. Naturally, two members of the club had to put this to the test. The worker did not come to life, but I do think his mouth moved ever so slightly and I could barely hear a voice say, "Hey, watch it lady, your hands are cold! And by the way, I really like your cars."



We enjoyed our time at the caverns, but it was time to eat. Jims' on state highway 90 has a fantastic buffet of southern delicacies that was exactly what we needed after a day of arduous spelunking. We were set up in a private room and well taken care of by the staff.

Florida Caverns is a great day tour and something unique that one would not expect to find in Florida. We will definitely be going back, so don't miss the next one!