

Underground Wonders

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Earth-sheltered homes are nothing new. Early man found that caves make ideal homes, offering solid construction, even temperature, and relative safety. Nature carved out these underground passages and rooms over millions of years, early man lived in them for millennia, and tourists have been enjoying their beauty for the past few centuries.

Why not take the time to visit a couple of the Raystown area's impressive caves — Indian Caverns, Lincoln Caverns, and Penn's Cave.

Let's get this out of the way up front. Stalactites have to "hold on tight" because they're suspended from the ceiling of a cavern or cave. Therefore, stalagmites are the geological shapes that rise from the cave's floor. There also are pillars, columns, dripstone, curtains, cascades, and draperies. All these formations are created by millions of years of slow, unrelenting dripping of mineral-rich water. The results are nothing short of spectacular.

It's not surprising that these unique natural masterpieces have been given majestic names like The Giant's Shield, The Diamond Cascade, Frozen Niagara, and The Garden of the Gods.

There are nearly 100 show caves or caverns (caves that are developed for the public to visit) registered with the National Cave Association. Each is strikingly different with its own history, special features, and unique natural formations.

Pennsylvania is rich in show caves, now numbering nine. Of the 23 states that boast show caves, only Missouri

has more. You'll be near at least five of the Keystone State's caves when you visit our area — and perhaps pass a few more on the way.

Our area's oldest is Penn's Cave, opened to the public

in 1885. Located on scenic Route 45 between Centre Hall and Spring Mills in Centre County, Penn's Cave has the distinction of being "America's only all-water cavern and wildlife sanctuary." Penn's Cave and Penn's Cave House are on the National Register of Historic Places.

A gentle one-mile motorboat tour takes you through the cave's pretty passageways and emerges on Lake Nitaneer — a charming pool swimming with rainbow trout, mallard ducks, and muted swans.

The tour is enhanced by the legend of Indian Princess Nitaneer, for whom the famous Penn State Nittany Lion is named. It is said that she fell in love with Malachi Boyer, a

French trapper. The couple was captured as they ran away to be married — against Indian custom — and the trapper was thrown into the cave to die.

Penn's Cave's unique sideshow is its lush wildlife sanctuary, resting on a thousand acres of rolling countryside. Wildflowers and white tail deer, wolves and mountain lions, cattle and horses, bison and bear; your family will discover many examples of central Pennsylvania's wildlife, geology, biology, and agricultural heritage.

The area's next oldest show cave is Indian Caverns. Though the small entry room was first visited in 1816,



Lincoln Caverns

no one knew what lay behind it until the Wertz family excavated an assortment of passages, rooms, and Indian artifacts. They opened Historic Indian Cave on June 15, 1929. Now under the care of the fourth generation of the Wertz family, Indian Caverns observed its 75th year in 2004, featuring a Native American-style celebration and exhibits.

Like Penn's Cave, Indian Caverns is located on Route 45. At least a half-hour closer to Raystown Lake, Indian Caverns is in Huntingdon County between Water Street and State College.

Certainly the closest cave to Raystown Lake, Lincoln Caverns is located on Route 22 just three miles west of Huntingdon. Its unusual location on a main highway is actually the reason it was discovered. While excavating for the highway in 1930, road workers uncovered an entrance to Lincoln Caverns. Additional rooms and passageways were discovered in 1941.

The winding passageways and breathtaking rooms feature massive flowstones, thousands of delicate stalactites (holding on tight), pure white calcite, and sparkling crystals.



Indian Caverns — Beautiful cavern room, home to Native Americans for centuries as proven by artifacts (right) left behind.

Over the years, skeletal remains and relics of American Indians have been unearthed which may be as old as 9,000 years and as recent as 400 years. One of the rooms was undoubtedly occupied by Indians as a winter shelter. The Indian Council Room is a high point of the tour, as is the room used by outlaw David Lewis, who used the cave as a headquarters for his gang from 1816-1820.

An archaeologist is re-examining the collection of over 500 artifacts to find out more specific information about their origin including what type of materials were used to make them, what general time period they came from, and what tribe or group of people made them. These artifacts will be encased in a new display with more information for the 2005 season.

The one-hour interpretive tour includes both caverns (Lincoln Cavern and Whisper Rocks) for one admission price.

Lincoln Caverns' Learning Center not only hosts thousands of school students each year, but Scout troops from all over the northeastern United States for programs on speleology, geology, bats, cave life, and overnight adventures. Also featured are Ultimate Underground Birthdays, Kids Cave Kamp and tours for groups of all ages.

The cavern's Ghosts & Goblins Tour, which has been taking place for more than 20 spooktacular years, offers a haunted cave and haunted trail in addition to one natural

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cave tour. Running the last four Fridays and Saturdays in October, each year Lincoln Caverns adds new scary attractions.

Join Lincoln Caverns and Whisper Rocks in celebrating its 75th anniversary and find out what's in store for June 25 and 26, 2005.

Lincoln Caverns offers this advice, good for visitors to all our show caves: "Caves remain at a constant temperature of 52° or 53° F. It is recommended that visitors bring a light jacket, even in the heat of summer, and comfortable walking shoes with rubber soles and good treads."

The Pennsylvania Caves Association notes, "Each has something special to experience and remember. Huge rooms, massive flowstones, and delicate crystals of indescribable beauty – even remains of prehistoric animals and relics of Indian lore fascinate visitors of all ages."

Remember, nature's beauty is not all found on the surface of the earth. Dig in to Pennsylvania's caves – and enlighten your family with underground wonders.

