

# OREGON'S SYSTEM OF MAMMOTH CAVES

W. L. Crissey writes the following highly entertaining article on the wonderful caves of central Oregon, which rival the Mammoth cave of Kentucky:

Few people in Oregon, to say nothing of our country in general, are aware that in the southern part of this state is to be found a series of caverns second only to the world-famous Mammoth cave of Kentucky.

Indeed, the Oregon caves may one day be granted first place, for no attempt at thorough exploitation has ever been made, though the main passages have been penetrated to a distance of more than seven miles, with no indication of the end.

It was in 1874 that Elijah Davidson, out hunting in the mountains, followed his dogs on a fresh bear track to find them baying before a dark opening in which the wounded animal had taken refuge. From the cavern rushed a stream of limpid water, through which Mr. Davidson had to wade in entering.

A few feet inside the bear was dispatched, but the discoverer had seen enough to fill him with wonder and curiosity, and as soon as neighbors could be enlisted in the expedition, the party returned.

**Made Start to Open Caves.**  
The country being thinly settled, it was some time before the caves were sufficiently known to attract visitors from abroad. Then a party of San Francisco capitalists became interested and decided to develop them as a commercial enterprise. Men were hired to cut a trail over the mountains, others worked inside, enlarging small passages, that they might be more easily traversed, a big hotel was planned and all was bustle and activity.

The promoters themselves camped at the entrance, spending many hours daily in the caves. Cards whiled away the time and games for princely stakes were played in a chamber still known as the "Gamblers' Hall." At the close of the summer the capitalists departed, with assurance that money would be sent to pay the workers, but the paymaster never appeared. It was a great disappointment to the sturdy mountaineers who had worked for a small wage and then lost that.

**Squatters "Froze Out."**  
After several years had elapsed two young men built them a cabin and undertook to establish their residence there, so that by "squating" they would be given a title to the claim when the government surveyed the land. Several bridges were constructed over the mountain streams, more work was done on the trail and the boys worked hard, but seeing that the longest for survey was indefinite and uncertain of accomplishment, they reluctantly abandoned their cabin.

Within the past year the United States government has recognized the caves as one of the scenic marvels of its domain by withdrawing the spot from entry and designating it a national park, a fitting sequel to its romantic history.

"The Marble Halls of Oregon" lie in the midst of the most picturesque mountain scenery imaginable. Descending into a little valley over rugged granite boulders, the forest-covered mountains rising on every side, one comes to Cave creek which bursts from the foot of a perpendicular granite fall 100 feet in height. Nature has draped the white facade with luxuriant green moss, in beautiful contrast to its uncovered portions. It is like a grand overture introducing the theater of wonders to follow.

Entering a low passage by following the bed of the stream, one gradually ascends over rugged rocks to the upper levels, leaving the water below. A hundred feet and the real beauties begin to disclose themselves. The walls are of creamy whiteness, while slender stalactites depend like icicles from the ceiling; stalagmites rise from the floor; fantastic formations of the same soft white abound on every hand.

Darkness absolute and impenetrable is but intensified by the candles as one moves through the large chambers. Silence as in a vacuum reigns—not a sound of life exists in the air or water. Every stalactite has its drop of crystal liquid, yet it never seems to fall, and the caves are in most places remarkably dry. The air is pure and fresh, the temperature remains at 60 degrees the year around.

**The Marvelous Rooms.**  
One of the first rooms is the "Queen's Palace." At the sides, rising in tiers like the seats of an amphitheater, are shelves, couches hung with fairy tapestry. It is a royal apartment in very truth.

Not so large as some others, but unique in its attractiveness, is "The Organ Loft." Down the center hangs a row of enormous stalactites of different lengths. Struck gently with a bit of stone, they send forth mellow sounds like deep-toned bells, the pitch of the different pipes sometimes varying as much as two octaves, yet no two alike. These reverberating chimes give an indescribably weird and beautiful effect in the silent chambers.

"The Ghost Chamber" is modeled on the grandest scale of all, though so irregular in its outline that dimensions convey but little meaning. Emerging into this great salon, one is startled by a gigantic shadowy white outline lost in the obscurity of the further end. Unlike most of the other rooms, the "Ghost Chamber" is hollowed out of a brownish rock, and the stalactite formation only appears in one place, where it covers the wall like a crystallized waterfall, producing the spectral effect that names the room. The dome is fully 100 feet in height, while the length of the room must be as much or more.

**Many Secret Passages.**  
Scores of passages lead from the "Ghost Chamber" in every direction, yet the fact that a single one leads to the outer entrance gives an

idea of the intricacy of the caverns and the danger in attempting to visit them alone. Occasionally some one goes in by tying a string at the entrance and unwinding the ball to serve as a return guide. Dozens of these cords have been left in place, and they give one the uncanny feeling that if they were but followed to the end there would be found a dead man, for so seldom are the caves visited at certain seasons, and so isolated is the locality that this might easily happen to an over-daring explorer.

Soon after the discovery of the place the complete skeleton of a bear was found in one of the inner rooms, and if brute instinct did not serve to liberate him from that terrible maze, there would be little hope for a human being.

"The Golden Spairs," a wonderful natural flight, lead out of the Ghost Chamber and ascend for many feet, sometimes through a passage so small that one crawls on his stomach—or stays behind if inclined to embonpoint. Appropriately enough, "The Chapel" is soon reached, and here is a charming little lake of the coldest, clearest water, lying at one side of the room where the wall and ceiling approach to within a couple of feet of each other.

Hollow stalactites, like clear glass reeds, connect them, and where these have been broken away to allow visitors to drink the delicious water, the remaining fragments carry many a feminine tress as a reminder of fair visitors.

**Dangerous to Enter.**  
On and on, now climbing a ladder or descending by clinging to the rocks and stalactites, until the guide starts his charges by whispering, "There must be someone else in the cave." Far, far below, in a seemingly bottomless pit, glimmers a candle. It is but a stub left by the guide in the Ghost Chamber, and we are on an upper level, near its dome, where a single misstep would mean a fatal accident.

Climax of beauty and grace is the "Pond Lily Room," most difficult of access, richest in its adornment. The ascent by long ladders and slippery walls is fraught with danger at every turn, yet the risk is well repaid. Covering the walls of this room, as though carved in wax, are stalactites shaped as lily pads and blossoms, while from the ceiling hang immense fluted chandeliers of the most delicate formation.

Everything in the room is of dazzling purity and whiteness. As though this were not enough to enchant the beholder, dainty marine shells are found in strata near the floor, presenting an interesting problem to the geologist. "Holy of Holies"—this room has been called by later visitors and certainly it does inspire reverence—somewhat lessened when the guide gives his version of the name as "Holloest of Holes."

Some of the names bestowed are almost as picturesque as the rooms themselves—"Old Nick's Bedroom," "Kincaid's Dancehall" and the "Shark's Mouth." At one place is an immense pillar, reaching from floor to vaulted roof; again, there is a broad shelf covered with minute crystals resembling the tracery of frost on a window pane; here the floor lies in little ridges like sand on the beach as the tide goes out, and so strong is the likeness that one involuntarily stoops to take a handful.

**Four Distinct Levels.**  
There are four distinct levels to the caverns so far as known and an upper entrance has been uncovered and enlarged, perhaps 200 feet up the mountain, which makes it possible to avoid the waters of Cave creek altogether. Night and day are as one in these vast underground galleries, whose perfection must have taken century upon century. Not the slightest change in even the smallest stalactite is discernible since their discovery, save where vandals have broken them in unreasoning quest for souvenirs.

There are two ways of reaching the caves, both involving a start from Grant's Pass, whence stage is taken to either Williams or Kirby, then a supplementary journey on horseback or afoot. The Williams route is the shortest and the trail is being constantly improved; by Kirby is considered a little the easier journey. No man is so familiar with the labyrinth as John Kincaid, who was the original explorer of many of the passages and worked in their improvement for three whole months. "Johnnie" and his "bar" hounds are familiar figures in the mountains. Thirty-five miles distant from Grant's Pass, this very remoteness of the beaten lines of travel adds immeasurably to the zest of this outing. A whole week spent at the caves would bring fresh enjoyment to hundreds and thousands to visit this marvelous natural museum.

Women might be quieter if they wouldn't talk so much, but they wouldn't be nearly so amusing.

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Loans and discounts.....\$ 945,679.05	Capital stock.....\$ 200,000.00
Overdrafts..... 13,960.35	Surplus and undivided profits..... 74,856.87
U. S. Bonds..... 190,000.00	Circulation..... 103,940.00
Other bonds, warrants, etc..... 27,120.29	Due to banks..... 40,412.24
Real estate (bank building)..... 20,000.00	Deposits..... 1,298,982.13
<b>Cash.</b>	
Cash on hand 143,049.71	
Due from banks..... 271,381.84	
Redemption fund 7,000.00	
Total.....\$1,718,191.24	Total.....\$1,718,191.24

I, George Hartman, Jr., Assistant Cashier of the above named Bank, do solemnly swear that the above statement is true, to the best of my knowledge and belief.  
GEORGE HARTMAN, Jr.  
Ass't. Cashier.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 17th day of July, 1908.

[Seal] C. K. CRANSTON,  
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