

Black Hills Cave Opposed as SAC Command Location

By RAY SERATI
United Press International
Pringle, S. D. — South Dakota's ancient Black Hills have known many strangers — Gen. George Custer, Wild Bill Hickok, the Gold Rushers of Deadwood.

The latest strangers in America's oldest mountains are crisp experts from the defense department and Air Force. They are looking for caves. One of the caves could become a new home for the

heart of the nation's air power, the Strategic Air Command (SAC).

The newcomers have become spelunkers and have crawled into darkened, Rocky caverns with an eye for potentialities for a vast, underground military headquarters. One of the caverns — and perhaps the most likely — is Wind Cave, chief natural wonder of the Black Hills.

The present SAC command post is underground at Oma-

ha, Nebr. Recently, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara said he felt the post was too vulnerable to attack. He said he would like to move part of SAC's deadly eggs to another basket.

Alternates listed

At that time McNamara listed what he considered to be three acceptable alternates. They were to bury the Omaha headquarters deeper with a harder core on top; find a mountain in Colorado and put

the alternate SAC command inside; or put in Wind Cave National park in the Black Hills.

McNamara implied Wind Cave, with its miles of subterranean passages, was the most likely choice.

That touched off one of the Black Hills' greatest outcries against the military since Custer's last stand. Spelunkers, park lovers, naturalists and Black Hills residents joined forces in the attack on the Pentagon.

Defense department spokesmen were quick to say there might be other likely caves in the hills. They mentioned abandoned gold mines — or parts of the still operating and long famous Homestake mine, the leading gold producer in the Western hemisphere.

South Dakota state officials believe the Black Hills had the inside track as the alternate headquarters site. Their reasons were the big Ellsworth Air Base, a SAC base, nearby and a vast dispersal of missiles immediately outside the Black Hills.

Preliminary surveys of the caves have been completed and they are now in a "limbo" while the initial surveys are digested, according to Air Force officials.

Defense department men have said that because of the Black Hills' rugged and mountainous topography anyone shooting at a target would have to make a direct hit. A near miss would leave a target unscathed.

The Black Hills have a dome-shaped up-thrust and

they are the tallest mountains between the Rockies and the Alps. Geologists believe they are the world's oldest mountains — that the Himalayas were still swamps when the Black Hills were formed.

Granite found in the hills is estimated at more than one billion years old. Ancient sediments into which the Granite intruded as molten rock are even older.

The Geologists believe Wind Cave, like many other caves in the hills, was created in the Paha Sapa limestone formation as ground waters containing carbonic acid dissolved limestone along rock fractures. The rock fractures apparently were formed by the same forces that lifted up the Black Hills.

In 1874, an expedition led by Custer discovered gold in the Black Hills.

Up to that time the hill had been the "Paha Sapa," the sacred land of the Sioux Indians. Word of the discovery spread. Hickok was shot to death in the back at Deadwood in 1876. In 1877, the Homestake mine was started at Deadwood Gulch and now produces more than \$20 million a year in gold.

Wind Cave was the first of the large Black Hills' caves to be found.

It was discovered in 1881 by Tom Bingham, a Black Hills pioneer. While deer hunting, he was attracted by a strange whistling sound coming from beneath a clump of brush. Bingham found a small opening in the rock underneath the brush from which the wind was blowing.

Geologists have found that when the wind blows out of

the cave the barometer is falling. When it blows in, the barometer is rising. The temperature of the cave is an unvarying 47 degrees Fahrenheit, winter and summer.

National Park

Wind Cave and the surrounding 44 square miles became the seventh National park in 1903. It was the first National park to include a unique cavern.

Another cave which might make an alternate SAC headquarters is Jewel Cave, discovered in 1900. The cave, which became a National monument in 1934, takes its name from the thick crystalline calcite covering the walls.

Last year Herb Conn, Custer Jewel Cave. He mapped 12 miles of passages, seven more than Wind Cave.

Jess Lombard, superintendent of Wind Cave, says Conn's explorations have opened the most beautiful rooms — "really dazzlers" — of Jewel Cave.

There are many other caves in the hills — Rushmore Cave, Sitting Bull Cave, Stagebarn

Crystal Cave, Wonderland Cave and Wildcat Cave.



LOOK OVER FORMATION—Two tourists look over the rock formations in one of the rooms in Wind Cave in the Black Hills of South Dakota near Pringle, S.D. The cave is being considered as a possible alternate site for Strategic Air Command headquarters. (UPI)

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