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# Carlsbad Caverns National Park Fact Sheet

## *Quick reference to basic information*

Size: 46,766 acres, including over 33,000 acres designated wilderness

Location and terrain: southeastern New Mexico; Guadalupe Mountains (primarily limestone) and Permian Basin (primarily gypsum)

Elevation: ranges from 3,596 feet to 6,368 feet above sea level; Visitor Center at 4,406 ft

117 caves known at this time; This number changes as exploration continues.

Largest caves in the park, by surveyed length – as of July 31, 2012

1. Lechuguilla Cave, > 134.86 miles; 1,604.2 feet deep. Access to this cave is limited to research and exploration, with skilled technical ability.
2. Carlsbad Cavern, > 30 miles; developed for public touring; Big Room – 8.2 acres – largest, readily accessible cave chamber in North America
3. Spider Cave, 3.52 miles; undeveloped; guided adventure tour offered weekly
4. Slaughter Canyon Cave, 2.3 miles; minimally developed, adventure tours offered

Annual visitation: ~ 400,000. Since 1923, the park has had over 41,000,000 visitors; most arrive by private vehicle

Park services:

- 7 mile paved road, Highway 7, from entrance at Hwy 62/180 to Visitor Center; with wayside exhibits
- Visitor Center (GPS location 32.174212°N; 104.445855°W) – 3 organizations provide services
  - National Park Service operates: information and ticket desks; educational exhibits; theater; cave art exhibit; restrooms; drinking fountains; pay phone; elevator to/from Carlsbad Cavern
  - Carlsbad Caverns-Guadalupe Mountains National Parks Association (non-profit partner) operates: book store, audio guide rental for cave self-guided areas; [www.ccgma.org](http://www.ccgma.org)

- Carlsbad Caverns Trading, LLC (contracted concessioner) operates: gift shop, restaurant, kennel, and ATM machine. In Carlsbad Cavern, at base of elevators, they operate a limited snack bar and merchandise sales area.  
www.carlsbadcavernstradingco.com
- Walnut Canyon Desert Loop drive: 9 mile gravel road; not recommended for low clearance vehicles or RVs
- Rattlesnake Springs Picnic Area – For day use only, this 40 acre area is about 2.5 miles off highway 62/180 (turn off is about 5 miles south of Whites City). Tables, grills, restrooms, and water are available. Very popular with bird watchers.
- Over 50 miles of backcountry trails, minimally maintained; no dependable water sources in the backcountry; overnight camping in backcountry only, with free permit from Visitor Center

Surface ecosystems: Chihuahuan Desert, with Pinyon-Juniper in higher elevations and shrub/grass lands in lower; over 750 plant species

Mammals: 67 species;

Bats: 17 species known to live in the park; 3 species roost inside Carlsbad Cavern; largest colony is of Brazilian Free-tailed bats, *Tadarida brasiliensis*, also called Mexican Free-tailed bats – population estimated at about 400,000.

Birds: 357 species;

A large colony of Cave Swallows, *Petrochelidon fulva*, has nested just inside the cave entrance since 1966 and been banded and studied continually for over 30 years.

Amphibians and Reptiles: 54 species;

Invertebrates: unknown number of species

## Significant dates:

1903	Guano mining begins in Carlsbad Cavern, then known as “Big Cave” or “Bat Cave”
1915-1918	Ray V. Davis photographs Carlsbad Cavern, which stimulates interest in the cave. Davis’ photos appear in the <i>New York Times</i> in 1923.
1923, April 6-May 8	First survey and mapping of cave, performed by Robert Holly of General Land Office; his awe of the cave and recommendations led to establishment as national site.
1923, October 25	President Calvin Coolidge creates Carlsbad Cave National Monument

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1925	Wooden stair system built through cave's natural entrance eliminates need for cave visitors to enter via guano bucket
1930, May 14	Congress designates Carlsbad Caverns National Park
1931	First elevator shaft blasted and infrastructure installed, goes into operation in January 1932
1950s	Throughout Carlsbad Cavern dirt trails and wooden stair systems are replaced with winding, paved trails.
1955	Second elevator shaft blasted and installation of larger capacity "passenger" elevators. These become the "primary" elevator system, while smaller original elevators are secondary.
1959, March	Construction of Visitor Center is completed; most recent renovation completed in 2008
1963	Bat Flight Amphitheater is constructed at the cave's natural entrance to provide seating for visitors to view evening exodus of bats from cave
1972, January 6	Self-guided tours of entire Cavern are initiated
1973, September	First public, guided tours of Slaughter Canyon Cave, then known as <i>New Cave</i>
1986	Lechuguilla Cave discovered to have more than entrance pit; current mapped length is over 130 miles
1993, November	Kings Palace guided tours start in "Scenic Rooms" portion of Carlsbad Cavern paved trail system because excessive damage, such as breakage, to cave features during twenty years it was self-guided
1993-94	Scheduled "adventure tours" are started to Left Hand Tunnel, Lower Cave, Hall of the White Giant, and Spider Cave
1995, December	Carlsbad Caverns National Park is designated a World Heritage Site.

[www.nps.gov/cave](http://www.nps.gov/cave)