



# Branson Beat

Photo by Bruce Menzies

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## The Cave State

**M**issouri the Cave State. Missouri is not only known as the SHOW-ME-STATE, but also as the CAVE STATE. This is because we live above and around more than 6,300 recorded caves, a number that continues to grow each year. Caves have been valuable resources for our state's inhabitants. Having been used for shelter, entertainment and storage for the beverage industry, caves also reveal details of past climatic conditions.

Caves are home to many unique forms of life. They are one of the last frontiers of exploration for adventure seekers who enjoy the underground. Caves serve as an integral part of the state's groundwater system. They provide underground conduits that move water to springs that form the headwaters of our state's outstanding rivers and streams.

**M**arvel Cave, a Registered Natural Landmark, opened for tours in 1894. The cave, which lies beneath Silver Dollar City theme park, was the first attraction to bring tourists to the Branson area. One of the deepest caves in Missouri, it has one of the largest subterranean entry-rooms in the United States. Traditional guided cave tours are included with standard admission to Silver Dollar City.

Cave tours depart every half-hour; they last about one hour. Because of the strenuous nature of the tour, which includes nearly 600 stairs and some stooping, it is not recommend for visitors with heart or lung conditions, bad backs, weak knees or bad ankles.

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**T**alking Rocks Cavern (originally called Fairy Cave) is a cavern system located in Stone County, just west of Reeds Spring. It is privately operated by Herschend Family Entertainment as a tourist attraction.

Guided cave tours are offered at regular intervals. The visitors are led down a series of platforms and steps eventually to the floor of the cave. There are 265 steps, 150 down and 115 out. Features include 'curtain' and the 'bacon' formations. The tour also includes a light and sound show.

The bottom of the caves routinely floods during heavy rains. Water seeps in from the surface level and the cave acts as a drainage system which empties into the river below. Flooding shortens but does not eliminate tours.

**S**mallin Civil War Cave was the first documented cave in the Ozarks. It was written about at great length in Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's journal in 1818. Schoolcraft was a significant explorer in the United States. Smallin Cave was considered to be noteworthy enough that it was cited by major publications, including the 1923 National Geographic and 1948 issue of the Ecological Society of America. The town of Ozark was a centralized location of union activity during the civil war. There is strong evidence that Smallin Cave was used for war related activities.

Visitors to the historical cave are treated to an almost one hour long tour that consists of about one-half mile of walkways and inclines, no stairs, guided tour through the cave.

### Websites:

- Caves in Missouri's State Parks [www.mostateparks.com/karst.htm](http://www.mostateparks.com/karst.htm)
- Exploration of Missouri's Caves [www.mospeleo.org](http://www.mospeleo.org)
- Missouri Caves Association [www.missouricaves.com](http://www.missouricaves.com)
- Caves in General: [www.caves.org](http://www.caves.org)

