

Jester Cave Beginner's Trip Saturday, January 20th, 2007 By Diana Tomchick

Jester Cave is in Oklahoma, about 4 1/2 to 5 hours northwest of Dallas. At 6 1/4 miles, it's the longest gypsum cave in the U.S., though we will not see all of it on this trip! We'll see about a third of it. The trip should last about 4 to 5 hours—if there are enough people interested in doing a longer route, then we can divide into two groups once the trip starts. I recommend that people either spend Friday night at Quartz Mountain State Park (information about the park is included below) or if you choose to drive up on Saturday morning, to meet at the Quartz Mountain Resort Lodge at 9:30 a.m.. Everyone who stays at the park can caravan from the park to the cave property. You can make reservations for rooms in the Quartz Mountain Resort Lodge or just look for a camping site in the park, this weekend is not likely to be busy. Bill Steele and I will be camping out on Friday night and will return to the Metroplex on Saturday night. There are lots of other fun activities in the park and in nearby locations, so you may want to consider spending the whole weekend.

Since some people will be staying in the lodge, others will be scattered throughout the campground, and some will return to the Metroplex on Saturday night, typically we eat dinner on Saturday night at a steakhouse in Altus. The steaks are great and the price is reasonable (about \$10-15 for a steak dinner).

If you are planning to bring an RV to the park—you will need to ride to the cave in someone else's vehicle, so be sure to bring some dry clothes and shoes and a few plastic bags for your wet belongings so you can change before the ride back to the park. We will load up the vehicles and drive from the lodge to the cave entrance, park the vehicles, do the through trip in the cave, then walk back to the vehicles.

If you have any questions about required caving gear for this trip, please, PLEASE contact me in advance, so that you have enough time to prepare. Standard caving gear (a helmet with chin strap and a light mounted on it, two extra sources of light, batteries for these lights, elbow and knee pads, and a pack to carry the spare lights and some food for lunch) in addition to the appropriate clothing will be all that's needed for this trip. Jester is water-filled, though most of the water is about mid-shin deep. Since the water is about 60 degrees, and you will get wet, you should NOT wear cotton clothes—synthetics such as nylon and/or polypropylene will keep you warm. Often I wear polypropylene long underwear with cotton T-shirts and jeans over the underwear to protect it, as polypropylene isn't very abrasion-resistant. There is sucking mud in places in the cave, so you should have footwear that is at least ankle-high and tight, so you don't lose your shoes! Ankle-high tennis shoes will work well in this cave, but

low-cut ones will not. The trip should last about 4 hours, so if you need a pee bottle, bring one! An empty Gatorade bottle works quite well.

You may want to bring along camera gear—please pack anything valuable in a water-proof container such as a Pelican case. A good alternative is to bring along a disposable camera with flash, and put it into several Ziploc bags. That way if it's water-damaged, you didn't ruin your valuable camera.

Remember to bring along a large, black plastic trash bag (we'll be removing trash as we travel through the cave) and a wire-bristled brush (if you have one) for removal of graffiti.

This trip is suitable for children aged 14 and older. However, if you choose to bring along younger children, this is a decision that the individual parent should make—remember, children need to have a good time on a caving trip if they're going to want to pursue this activity in the future. Children younger than 14 should have one of their parents "one-on-one" with them at all times, and ideally these children should have some prior caving experience. Many Venture Scouts aged 14 and above have gone to Jester as their first caving trip, so it is not a technically demanding cave, but younger children might have difficulties with the water, mud, and crawling (not a lot, but some) in the cave.

Questions? Contact either Bill or myself at

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Quartz Mountain State Park Info

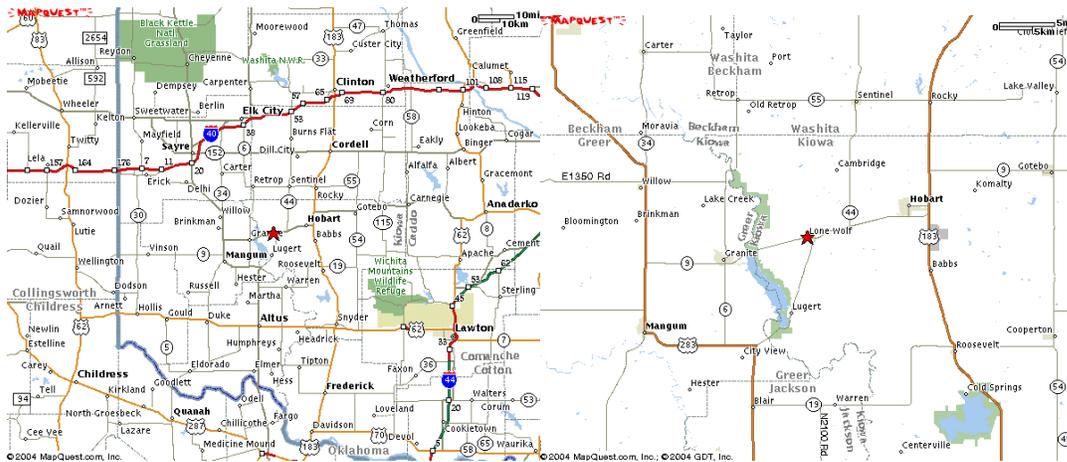
<http://www.shopoklahoma.com/quartzmo.htm>

<http://www.shopoklahoma.com/quartzmh.htm>

<http://www.quartzmountainresort.com/>

Quartz Mountain Resort Park
Route 1, Box 40
Lone Wolf, Oklahoma 73655
(580) 563-2424 / Resort Lodge
(580) 563-2238 / Park Office
(580) 563-2520 / Pro Shop
(877) 999-5567 / (toll free)
E-Mail quartz@onenet.net
Lyle.Exstrom@QuartzMountainResort.com

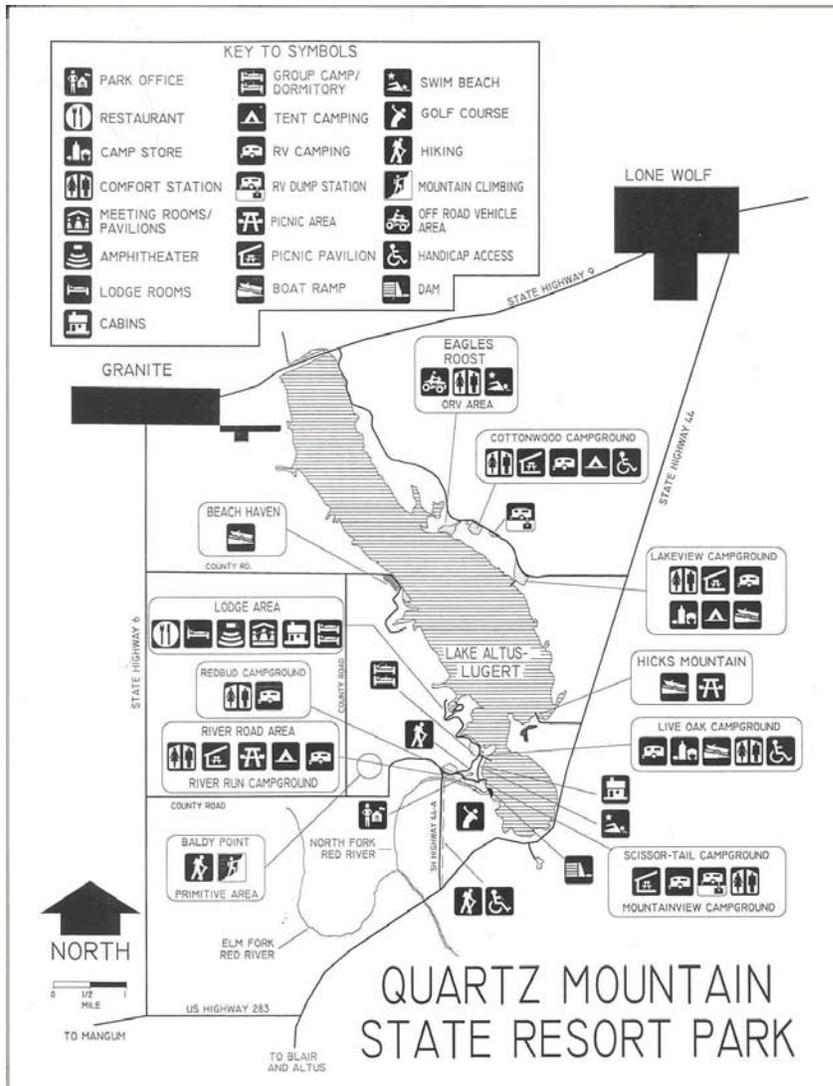
Location: In southwest Oklahoma, 17 miles north of Altus on SH-44A, overlooking Lake Altus-Lugert.



Campers and picnickers will find 237 picnic tables, 5 group picnic shelters, 1 enclosed group shelter, 20 modern RV sites w/ all hookups, 101 sites w/ water & electricity, and 99 regular campsites w/ no utilities. There are also 7 comfort stations (5 with showers), 2 swimming beaches, a volleyball court, a mini golf course, 8 playgrounds, a paddleboat and canoe rental, 2 grocery stores w/deli and gift shops, snacks, bait & tackle, 5 boat ramps, a Group Camp facility for up to 125 persons, a private group facility for 64 persons, an amphitheatre (seats 665) and performing arts pavilions (the Oklahoma Arts Institute offers summer and fall programs), Restaurant, and a Visitor/Nature Center.

The 18 hole golf course includes a putting green, a Pro Shop, and rentals. A resort lodge with over 122 guest rooms and suites. Comfort lovers will find 8 cottages with kitchenettes available to rent. The group camp facility-with 10 bunkhouses and a community building/kitchen-is set off by itself, surrounded by shade trees and activity areas. Hiking consists of a 3/4 mile nature trail SH 44A from SH 44

Hours & Days of Operation Park Office/Nature Center: 8AM to 5PM, 7 days a week, year round; Campgrounds and Cottages are always open year round except the North Shore Campground which closes from November to March; ORV area closed November through February; Golf Course open dawn to dusk daily; Mini-Golf & Paddleboats closed from December through March; North Shore Grocery Store closed Dec. through March; main area grocery store/deli remains open



Price Description During peak season (NOTE: these rates are from 2004, and the current rates are bound to be higher!) the rate for campsites is \$7 (no utilities), \$12 - \$13 for sites w/water & electric hookups, and \$15 - \$18 for sites w/ all hookups. Discounts, # of people, time of year, site location, etc. will affect the rate. Groups renting multiple campsites may receive a discounted rate. Cottages (2 bdrms w/ kitchenette, heat, air) rent for \$88 a night in summer season, \$70 a night in value season, & \$65 a night in winter. Golf fees range from \$7.50 (9 holes) to \$12 (18 holes) during the week to \$10 - \$14.50 on weekends. An all day fee w/cart is \$40. Junior/Senior discounts apply. Annual memberships available. Currently there is a \$5 charge per vehicle to use the ORV area. Call for mini-golf, paddleboat, etc. rate info.

Check-In Time: 3PM - cottages, 5PM - campsites

Check-Out Time 12PM - cottages, 5PM – campsites

Accommodation Amenities:

Cabins at Campground, Flush Toilets in Campgrounds, Kitchen/Dining Hall at Campground, Lake/River View Rooms, Outdoor Grill at Campsite, Picnic Table at Campsite, Sanitary Dump for RVs, Security Patrols, Showers in Campground, Suites

In-Room Amenities: Air Conditioning, Coffee Maker, Color TV, Kitchen, Linens Provided, Private Bathroom, Refrigerator, Rollaway Bed, Telephone (Single Line)

Number of Guest Rooms 120

Number of Cabins/Cottages 16

Total Number of Camp Sites 220

Number of Primitive Camp Sites 99

Number of Camp Sites w/ Water & Electric 101

Num. of Camp Sites w/Water, Elect. & Sewer 20

Recreation Activities: Biking (BMX Trail), Biking (Mountain), Biking (Road Bike), Bird Watching, Boating (Power), Boating (Sail), Camping, Canoeing, Fishing, Golf, Hiking, Hunting, Jogging, Kayaking, Rock Climbing, Swimming, Water Skiing, Wildlife Viewing, Windsurfing

Recreations Facilities: Boat Dock, Boat Launch, Golf (Pro Shop), Golf (Putting Green), Golf Course, Golf Course (Miniature), Hiking Trail, Lake on Property, Lake/River Access, Nature Center, Nature Trail, Off Road Vehicle Trail, Outdoor Grill, Picnic Shelter, Picnic Tables, Playground (Outdoor), Swimming (Beach)

Recreation Services: Bait & Tackle Available, Nature Programs

Recreation Rental Services Boat Rental (Paddle), Canoe Rental, Golf Cart Rental, Golf Club Rental, Picnic Shelter Rental

Number of Golf Holes 18

Lake Acreage 6770

Other Destinations at Property/Event: Museum of the Western Prairie, Wichita Mountains, Wildlife Refuge, Altus-Lugert Wildlife Management Area, Great Plains State Park

Some photos of Jester Cave on the web:

<http://www.troop168.net/venture168/campouts/aprilcave2000/jester.htm>
<http://okcavers.net/firms.com/picturepro/nfpicturepro/> follow various links to either Jester Cave or SW Okla Bat Counts

Some info about gypsum cave formation:

From

<http://www.showcaves.com/english/explain/Speleology/Gypsum.html>

Gypsum Caves

Gypsum Karst

Gypsum karst is very rare. It depends on deposits of gypsum or anhydrite, often also called alabaster. Chemically it is calcium sulfate CaSO_4 .

Gypsum is much rarer than limestone, as it needs very special conditions:

1. You need a depression, in which sea water is trapped and evaporated to form gypsum deposits.

2. It has to be an arid part of the world.

Gypsum is deposited when sea water is evaporated by the sun and the concentration of numerous salts in the water grows. Rain would revert this process and dissolve the gypsum.

3. A temporary connection to the sea.

There must be a continuous or periodical (sea) water efflux, to allow the deposit of a decent amount of gypsum. If there is no (temporary) connection to the sea, the layer would be rather thin.

Now you have gypsum, but there is another problem: water is able to dissolve gypsum without the complicated CO_2 stuff with limestone. And it will do it much faster and be able to dissolve a much higher amount!

For gypsum karst this means:

1. It is very rare!

2. It is always very young! Getting older means to disappear.

3. The caves are often very big!

The longest gypsum cave of the world is Optimisticheskaya Cave in Ukraine with 165km of passage. Because of their size, there are several gypsum show caves.

Examples

- * Barbarossahöhle, Germany
- * Heimkehle, Germany
- Alabaster Caverns State Park, OK, USA

A description of Jester Cave from Andy Harris, a well-known OK caver:

As far as I know there has never been any true troglobitic life found in any western Oklahoma gypsum cave [NOTE: a troglobyte is a permanent cave dweller]. The largest determining factor is the shallow nature of the caves. Very few ever exceed 100ft in depth. Almost all gypsum caves in western Oklahoma of any significant length have multiple entrances, preventing the occurrence of a stable static environment. It also allows surface dwelling carnivores and omnivores to travel long distances in the cave to find food or prey.

Jester cave stats: Surveyed length: 33,022 ft. (6.25 miles). Longest gypsum cave in the United States, with 68 known entrances, although you can travel great distances in the cave without finding any. They tend to cluster in the side passages. Main trunk is just under two miles in length. A believed to be authentic Jesse James signature is carved on a piece of breakdown just inside the window section of the cave (just inside the southernmost entrance). It is badly weathered and hard to read. There is a very small crawl just inside the same area that is man made. It was some kind of mine dug out in the early 1900's.

Almost all the fish and turtles that are present in the cave are somewhat cave adapted, having lost a lot of their surface coloring. I've been told that when brought back out they will regain it, though I've never tested this theory. The catfish are almost fearless, probably from being at or near the top of the food chain in the cave.

Some noted biota are:

Large population of *Myotis velifer* (cave bat)--hibernation and maternity colony
Plecotus townsendi (western big-eared bat) (reclassified as *coryanidis* or something)

Eptesicus fuscus (big brown bat)

Pipistrellus subflavus bat

Pipistrellus hesperus

Western diamondback rattlesnake

prairie rattler
black rat snake
bull snake
corn snake
snapping turtle
jeweled box turtle
Texas horned lizard
bull head catfish
speckled channel catfish
various species of perch
green sunfish
raccoon
Tiger barred salamander
opossum
packrat
field mouse
bull frog
leopard frog
tree frog
common toad
turkey vulture
barn owl
rock dove

I couldn't locate the official biota list, although I can get a copy if you need it. This was just from some field notes.