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Leviathan Cave

Cave System on Mountaintop North of Rachel, Nevada

Report by Glenn Campbell

Based on an expedition by the Groom Lake Interceptors on 8/24/96

Leviathan Cave is an impressive series of tunnels and chambers on the top of the Worthington Mountain Range, north of Rachel, Nevada. The opening is a huge sinkhole on the northwestern flank of Meeker Peak at an elevation of about 7800 feet. The remote location and difficult four hour hike keep most visitors away. Entering the cave involves a vertical drop of about 15 feet requiring ropes or freehold climbing, but the rest of the cave is fairly level. This is a "living" limestone cave with stalagtites, stalagmites and many other formations. It is said to be about 1/5 mile at its longest, but many side passages make this cave quite complex. [GC 8/96]

[Photos of Leviathan Cave](#)* by Rick Schnaible

Facts

Warning: This expedition is recommended only to those who are experienced in strenuous mountain hiking. The remote location and rugged terrain offers many opportunities for disaster. A drop of about 15 feet into the cave may require some rock climbing skills.

Due to its remote location and the rugged surrounding terrain, visitors to this cave are rare, usually experienced spelunkers or geologists. The location is near the top of a rugged mountain ridge just northwest of Meeker Peak in the Worthington Range. The Worthington Range is a north-south range of mountains about 15 miles north of Rachel, Nevada.

The mouth of the cave is a huge sinkhole, big enough to land a military helicopter in. This gaping hole in the mountainside is visible in the afternoon from parts of the Sand Spring Valley west of the cave. The best way to reach the cave is from the other side of the mountains, however. The cave entrance is surrounded by a fortress of sheer cliffs, and there are many ways to go wrong in approaching it. The fact that the location of the cave entrance is known does not make it easy to reach. Many people have decided to "follow their nose" toward the cave and not reached the entrance.

The entrance can be found on the USGS Meeker Peak 7-1/2 Minute quadrangle. GPS position is 37°49.89', 115°36.37' (from the field).

Leviathan Cave is a scenic preserve, and it is illegal to remove anything from it or cause any damage. There is a guest register inside the cave where you should sign in.

Preparations

The hike to the cave is suitable only for experienced hikers in top physical condition, and getting into the cave, although only a 15 foot drop, make require some knowledge of ropes and rock climbing. You need to bring both light clothing and sun protection for the hike, and warm clothing for inside the cave.

Because of the very rugged and remote terrain and many opportunity for accidents, no one should ever visit here alone. This journey is safest in a group and with multiple vehicles. There is a possibility that cell phones may work near the cave entrance, but it would be hard for anyone to rescue you if you did get into trouble. There are unconfirmed rumors of hikers being killed or injured in this cave, especially at the entrance. The scale of the entrance is intimidating, and some people who have hiked to it have been scared off from entering by the first drop-off.

Inside the cave, there are many narrow crawl spaces where you need long pants and long sleeve shirt to avoid hurting yourself. The temperature of the cave is in the 50s year round. You need a lot of light to explore this cave - at least three light sources per person. Several chambers are so large that hardly illuminated by a flashlight. In this cave, you will quickly encounter total darkness, and if your light sources fail it is possible you will not find your way out.

You will need a high-clearance vehicle, preferably a four wheel drive, to get to the trailhead.

Winter at this altitude can be severe, and the area around the cave entrance may be snowbound. In any case, longer hours of daylight make early summer the better time to hike. Since most people make the hike up and down in a day, and the hike is at least 4 hours in each direction, the length of daylight determines the.

Getting There

The cave is at least a three hour drive north of Las Vegas. To maximize the amount of time you have in the cave, you need to start the hike at dawn; therefore, it is recommended that you camp at the trailhead.

The directions below start at Rachel, Nevada, the nearest town. Rachel is about 150 miles from las Vegas via I-15, US-93 and NV-375. If you come directly from Las Vegas, you can avoid Rachel and come through Hiko and Murphy Gap and probably cut 45 minutes off the journey, but you'll have to figure out those instructions on your own.

Most of the drive from Rachel to the Trailhead is on maintain county roads that any car can handle, but the last few miles require a high clearance vehicle like a pickup or 4WD. Some people have driven cars and vans close to the trailhead, but this is foolish if you don't also have another vehicle to rescue you if you get stuck. Should anything go wrong, you are 45 miles from the nearest civilisation, so if you come in a single vehicle, be prepared to walk that distance through the desert.

The trailhead is on the east side of the Worthington Range, and the best way to get there from Rachel is to drive all the way north of the Worthingtons, then drive south down the other side. Here are the directions from Rachel...

- 0.0 - Rachel. *Reset odometer. Go west on 375 (Tonopah direction) to....*
- 5.5 - Gunderson Road (unmarked), the maintained dirt road north at milepoint ?.?. *Go north on Gunderson Road past the lake bed and Worthington Mountains on the right. While travelling past the range look for the entrance to the cave on the mountainside, left of the highest peak. (Easiest to see in the afternoon -- a gaping hole in the rock.) Studying the location of the cave from this location could be helpful on the hike.*

This road is in good condition but watch for some unexpected turns where some drivers have run off the road. Continue on Gunderson Road to...

- 32.9 - Junction north of Worthington Mountains. *Turn right one of the two maintained roads found here. (The first is a cutoff.) This road now goes south along the other side of the Worthington Mountains to....*
- 39.7 - A small dirt road, right, toward a water tank. GPS: 37°50.98', 115°33.59'. *Any car can make it to this junction, but between here and the the water tank are two sandy patches that could be trecherous for two-wheel drive vehicles. Not recommended for cars unless you also have a 4WD to rescue you. Continue straight past the water tank on a two-track road that looks overgrown. A little further, the road takes a left turn at a debris pile and improves. Continue on this road to...*
- 44.0 - A dirt track on the right. *Turn here on this unmaintained road. At this point, you'll need high clearance, although a car might make it most of the way. Continue toward mountains as far as you can go. Where the road ends is...*
- 45.5 - The trailhead and campsite. GPS: 37°50.59', 115°35.01'. *This is where visitors often spend the night in preparation for an early hike.*

From the trailhead, you should begin the hike as early in the morning as possible, as soon as there is enough light to begin.

As of this writing there is no marked trail to the cave. There are several possible routes -- and hundreds of ways to go wrong. The simplest path is this:

As you look up the canyon from the trailhead, there are two massive buttes on your left. You want to climb up the canyon between these two buttes. Hiking is difficult at times but requires no rock climbing. When you get to the top of the canyon, start down the other side, and the cave entrance will appear below you without warning. Don't fall into it!

If you don't take any false turns, the hike should take 3-5 hours up and about 2-3 hours down.

In the streambed along the trail, where the Canyon between the buttes branches from the main one, we encountered a 500-pound bomb lying in the stream bed. It may be a practice bomb or a real one; in any case, don't touch it. We've informed Nellis AFB, and it might be removed by the time you pass through. Here is information on the bomb from one of our hikers:

The bomb was lying in the very bottom of a ravine, (i.e., flowline), 1.65 kilometers from Meeker Peak, bearing 7 degrees true. As an alternative, the UTM coordinates are Zone 11, 4,187,670N, 623,500E. The bomb had stamped

on its casing the following: "Mark 82 Mod 1A 500 pound bomb". There were several other numbers, including a "0875" sequence that looked like a date. The casing was very scraped and had gouges about a quarter inch deep. There was what appeared to be the remains on a gray, composite material nose cap on one end. On the other end was what looked to be an shiny alloy cap that looked like it might have had fins at one time, but the fins had broken off. The color of the casing was a yellowish green, and was rusting a bit where the scratches were."

[The Air Force has since retrieved the device, saying it was a practice bomb. See [What's New, 8/28/96](#) and [8/29/96](#)

There is a rumor of another bomb or missile found in the vicinity of the trail - one with fins intact - but we never saw this.

At the top of the canyon is what appears to be a cleared helipad. Apparently geologists have landed here to visit the cave.

From the cave, you could continue hiking to Meeker Peak, where you should have a panoramic view of the surrounding area. However, most people reaching the cave are too interested in the cave or too exhausted by the hike to continue on.

For specific questions about the cave, contact Jim Bakos at akazero@pe.net or Tom Mahood at tmahood@netcom.com. (Other geologists and spelunkers know more about the cave than we do. Bakos and Mahood may be able to refer you to them if required.)

Local Documents

- [Invitation to 8/24/96 Leviathan hike](#) (archive only - event has passed)

External Links

- [Photos of Leviathan Cave*](#) by Rick Schnaible [9/30/96]
- Altavista search for "[Leviathan Cave](#)"
- Metacrawler search for "[Speleology](#)"
- [Caving WWW Sites, Worldwide](#)
- [Speleology Home Page](#)

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This is not the work of Chuck Clark of the Little A'Le'Inn in Rachel, who frequently claims our work as his own.

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