



# Pulaski County's Onyx Mountain Cavern

In the scenic Gasconade River valley of Pulaski County there is a large cavern known today as Onyx Mountain Caverns. The unique cavern has many formations, natural scenic wonders and a history not found in other caves in the area.

The woodland Indians used the cavern for shelter. Bones and flint artifacts found indicate the cavern was used as a ceremonial cave as well as evidence of residential habitation.

The huge entrance to the cavern spans a 420 foot long, 100 foot wide opening and could have accommodated many small tribes of the area.

By the time the first settlers came, the woodland Indians had vanished. The Indians probably joined with the Osage tribes, or could some other fate

have befell them?

The Onyx Mountain Caverns were the site of onyx mining activities during the Queen Victoria period of the 1800s. The white marble onyx was shipped to St. Louis for decorative rock to be used in public buildings. The onyx was mined by the Imperial Onyx Mining company. Although the onyx was mined, the company never disturbed the other formations in the cave. There is also an underground river running through the cave. Bear beds from bears spending their winter hibernation in the cavern are also found in one section of the cavern.

Some prehistoric bones have been uncovered in the clay deposits in the cavern and a few embedded within the onyx formations. Geologists and scientists have studied the

cavern for years, the most recent being life scientists from Edwards University in Illinois. A scientist from Florida discovered a rare algae not found anywhere else in the world. The discovery is listed in the National Sciences Annual.

Although it never came to pass, the cavern was once planned to be used for a tuberculosis hospital in the late 1800s and a jet propulsion lab in the 1950s. At the turn of the century, tourists coming from St. Louis on the Frisco railroad were brought upriver from Jerome to see the large entrance room of the cavern.

Heavy doors and walls now block casual entrance to the cave to keep vandals out. However the cave will be open for tourists during the middle of the summer.



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