

Caving

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nerves and you wind up with a polished, semi-precious stone."

She explained that the onyx in their cave is the color of honey, rather than the black onyx most people are familiar with. The black onyx, she said, is only found in New Mexico

Demonstrating its translucence, Theresa held her

flashlight against an onyx stalagmite which let the light shine through its semi-transparent shape.

Theresa reassures her touring guests that they are safe when inside the cave. She tells them geologists claim nothing has moved naturally inside the cave for 3500 years.

To add credibility to her statement, she beams her flashlight to a fallout shelter sign deep within the cave. This sign, she said, was placed there by the civil

defense so she knows she'll be safe inside the cave in case of a nuclear attack.

Theresa is a delightful tour guide, answering questions about the cave with mystery and humor.

When explaining about the 125 foot long natural bridge that angles through the cave, she tells her guests that the bridge is strong enough to support the weight of an elephant... "but who ever heard of getting an elephant into a cave, much less up there."

And at one point in the tour, she let the cave visitors get a feel for how dark the cave actually can be without lights. After they're convinced that they can't see their hands waving inches in front of their faces, she hauntingly says, "It cost you \$3 to get into the cave—what's it worth to get out?"

As her guests laugh nervously and give sighs of relief as she switches the lights back on, Theresa tells how the water level inside the cave fluctuates with the weather. She relates that in dry spells, the water actually dries up and the cave becomes dormant. When Hurricane Agnes went through, she said, the cave

was completely filled with water.

"When the cave is dormant and there is no water dripping from the ceilings, the cave formations cannot grow. If the water never comes back, over the years the formations will begin to flake away and disintegrate."

As the tour ends, Theresa explains that since their family took over the cave they have done something special at Halloween—they 'haunt' the cave.

Using colored lights and other special effects, the cave takes on an eerie glow, just right for the special mood of Halloween.

"The first year we tried it, we only had it haunted for two weeks," she said. "Now we have it haunted the whole month of October."

Onyx Cave is open 7 days each week from May to Labor Day in September. The hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. They are open weekends during the months of September through November, and March through May.

Admission charges to tour the cave are: adults, \$3, and children under 15 years old, \$1.50. Children under the age



Leaning against a stalagmite, Theresa tells the cave visitors about the various cave formations, like the 125 foot natural bridge behind her.

of 6 are free, and senior citizens are only charged \$1.75.

Ann Rizzo pointed out that if several families want to tour the cave as a group of at least 15, the admission charge is: adults, \$2 and children under 15, \$1. She pointed out advanced reservations are needed for groups.

If you follow the signs for Onyx Cave, found scattered around the Hamburg-Kutztown area, there are generally signs marking the way to Crystal Cave nearby.

Less than 5 miles east of Onyx Cave, near Kutztown, the cave enthusiast can take a look at a slightly different type of cave.

If you think when you've seen one cave, you've seen them all, you're in for a big surprise.

As you turn your car into the parking lot of Crystal Cave, you'll notice a difference on the spot—a spacious, paved parking area, large office, food and souvenir shops, Indian teepees, and a picnic grove give the visitor a more commercial 'hello'.

A strenuous hike up several flights of steps to the cave's entrance keeps the tour guides in tip-top shape and lets the cave guests know they're not as fit as they used to be.

Crystal cave is somewhat older than the 140 million year old Onyx Cave—the tour guide explains that Crystal is estimated to be 190 million years old, still a 'baby' in geological years.

Like Onyx Cave, Crystal was found on November 12,

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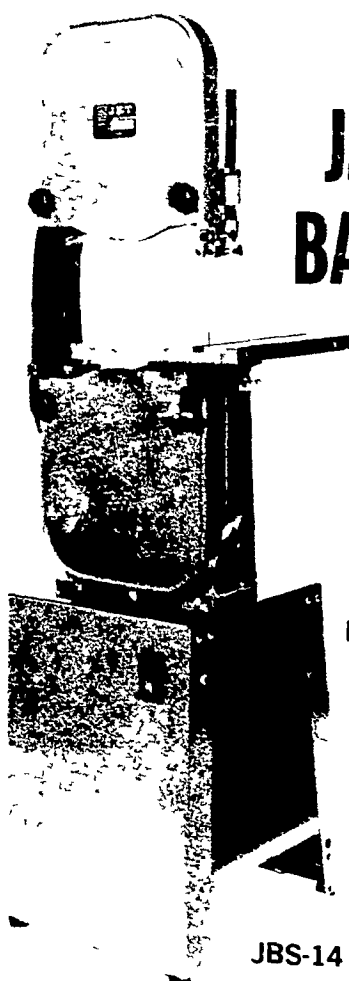
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