



Arizona Rocks 35

Text and photos by Ray Grant

Kartchner Caverns near Benson, Arizona was voted the best cave in the United States by USA Today readers (Arizona Republic, April 23, 2016). Kartchner Caverns is an Arizona State Park and information about making reservations and visiting the cave is at azstateparks.com/Parks/KACA/tour_info.html.

The cave is formed in the Escabrosa Limestone that is same age as the Redwall Limestone in northern Arizona. They are Mississippian in age and formed from the sea that was present in Arizona at that time. For really good information about the geology go online to the Journal of Cave and Karst Studies and look for back issues. There is a whole issue devoted to Kartchner Caverns, v.61, no.2, 1999, it has many papers including geology, mineralogy, geophysics, and hydrology of the caverns.

One of the interesting papers is about the age of the speleothems (cave formations). They formed from about 200 to 40 thousand years ago. Another paper about the pollen present with the cave formations found that the plants living there show that when the speleothems were forming the climate was cooler and wetter than it is now.

I was interested in the paper on the mineralogy because they found some interesting minerals including two not previously reported from Arizona. They are rectorite and brushite. The rectorite is a clay mineral and found in fault zones in the caverns. The brushite is very interesting, it is a calcium phosphate, and forms from decaying bat guano. It is called moonmilk and the deposit here is “one of the most

extensive brushite deposits ever reported from a cave.”

Arizona has great geology and now we have the best cave in the USA.



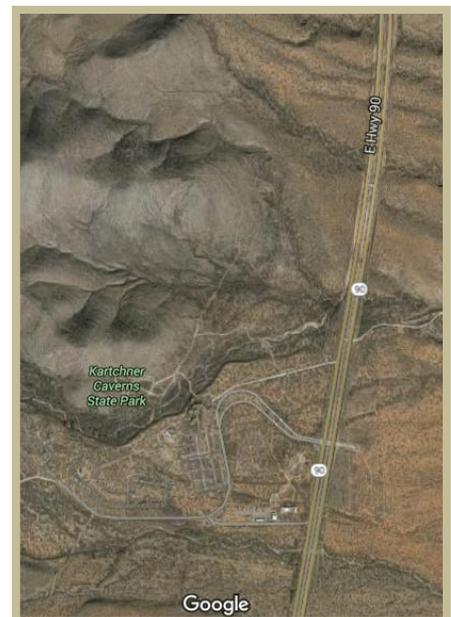
Kartchner Caverns is located in the Whetstone Mountains near Benson, AZ

Photo: en.wikipedia



The Big Room - Kartchner Caverns

Photo: en.wikipedia



Kartchner Caverns South of Benson, Arizona