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LOCAL LORE TELLS THAT PIONEER AMMON BILLINGS UPON DISCOVERING THIS CAVE IN 1867 CALLED IT "THE OUTLET TO HELL, THE DEVIL'S OWN SINKHOLE." THE NAME STUCK. AT 65 FEET WIDE AT THE SURFACE AND 350 FEET OF HUMAN-EXPLORED DEPTH, THIS SUBTERRANEAN PORTAL CHRONICLES EONS OF GEOLOGIC CHANGE, CENTURIES OF HUMAN FASCINATION AND AT TIMES, HOME TO 3 MILLION BATS.



A restored windmill speaks to the area's ranching heritage. Enterprising pioneer ranchers laid windmill pipe to underground pools deep within the Sinkhole to water thirsty livestock.

Former owner Clarence Whitworth once said of the Sinkhole, "The only thing crazy enough to get around that thing is people. Horses and cows won't go near it." Nonetheless, Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area functioned as a successful working ranch prior to its purchase by the State of Texas in 1985.

Access to Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area is limited to guided tours; reservations are required. For information, contact the Devil's Sinkhole Society at (830) 683-2287.

Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area Visitor Center  
101 North Sweeten Street  
Rocksprings, Texas 78880

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[www.texasstateparks.org](http://www.texasstateparks.org)

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INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

# DEVIL'S SINKHOLE

STATE NATURAL AREA





## A SUBTERRANEAN WORLD

**W**ater played a vital role in the formation of Devil's Sinkhole. Starting about 1 million years ago, slightly acidic, slow-moving groundwater carved a huge cavity in 150 million-year-old Edwards Limestone. As nearby valleys cut downward and groundwater levels dropped, the cavity drained. No longer supported by water, the cavern's ceiling collapsed, revealing a portal into a deep, dark subterranean world. Today, visitors on guided tours peer 150 feet downward from a platform at the sinkhole's rim onto a "breakdown mountain" of that collapsed rubble.

As Texas' largest single-chambered and fifth-deepest cave, Devil's Sinkhole resembles a massive, inverted funnel. If the breakdown mountain were a substitute for her pedestal, the 151-foot Statue of Liberty could stand inside the Sinkhole with her torch extending just above the surface. At its widest point some 350 feet below the surface, the sinkhole measures 1,081 feet across—that's over three football fields placed end to end.



## HUMAN CURIOSITY AND FASCINATION



used it. Some native groups considered these earthly openings as sacred emergence points of life and used them as final resting places for their dead.

H.S. Barber claims the first known adventure into the depths of the Sinkhole by carving his name and 1889 into a rock at the bottom. How Barber got down there remains a mystery. During World War II, a team of army scientists entered the "darkness of the netherworld" on a swaying 150-foot ladder of rotted wood, rusty nails, barbed wire and frayed rope to collect bats for Project X-Ray. Before it was abandoned, this top-secret military plot planned for bats to deliver fire-bombs to roosts in enemy cities. Workers originally installed the rickety ladder in the 1920s to mine bat guano, valuable as fertilizer and used as a chemical component of gunpowder.



Fred Foster and Calvin Furr produced an adventure film inside the Devil's Sinkhole in 1947. This spurred other entrepreneurs to offer rides to the bottom and back in an elevator cage for \$1 per person.

The mystical lure of Devil's Sinkhole captures the human imagination and entrepreneurial spirit.

Based on archeological clues, Native Peoples certainly knew of the Sinkhole, but we are unsure of how they may have

MERLIND TUTTLE - BAT CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL



Millions of Mexican free-tailed bats such as this one rise from Devil's Sinkhole in a counter-clockwise tornado.

## SINKHOLE INHABITANTS

Three million prized Mexican free-tailed bats inhabit Devil's Sinkhole from summer through October. Biologists determined this number by measuring guano deposits on the cavern floor. About 200 bats roost per square foot, meaning 150 could roost in an area the size of this entire brochure! Although Devil's Sinkhole provides excellent habitat for non-breeding bats, it is not warm enough for a maternity colony—females give birth to their pups in other Central Texas caves.

During winter, Devil's Sinkhole bats journey to North-Central Mexico where warm temperatures mean a plentiful insect supply. On a summer night in Central Texas, the Sinkhole colony consumes up to 30 tons of beetles and moths, many of which are agricultural pests. That's the weight of about 20 mid-sized cars! Bats contribute greatly to the quality and quantity of the human food supply. By paying tour fees and visiting Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area, you are supporting projects and land management practices that protect the bats, other wildlife and plants that call this place home.

