

Welcome to

Bloomington Cave



Bloomington Cave is an awesome maze of passages formed along a 60° dipping fault. It is presently mapped to 1.35 miles in length – the fifth longest cave in Utah! Being a short drive from the city of St.

George in southern Utah, the cave is quickly growing in popularity.

To raise the appreciation of the cave resources and reduce the need for graffiti and stringing within the maze of passages within Bloomington Cave, routes have been marked. Currently, 5 routes are marked throughout the cave with different colored flagging. These routes wind throughout the cave. A lost caver shouldn't be able to go far without hitting a flagged route leading to an entrance. These routes will make Bloomington Cave one of the best caving destinations in Utah.

The marked routes correspond to the updated map of the cave. The map of Bloomington's maze of passages may be impossible to understand; however, matching the colored routes and numbered flags to the map should allow you to accurately and confidently navigate the cave's maze.

Safety

Flagged routes have been set to help navigate the lab-

yrinth of passages within Bloomington Cave. These routes may deliver hours of pleasure exploring into the depths of the cave if properly prepared. However, they could easily lead you beyond your physical, mental, and equipment capabilities.

Be prepared! (1) Always wear a helmet, either a fancy climbing helmet or at least a construction helmet to protect your head. Most of the serious injuries are from falls. Without helmets, these falls become fatalities! (2) Always have at least one nice helmet-mounted light. Most all of these routes require climbing; you need both of your hands free. (3) Always carry at least 3 reliable light sources. Candles, matches and lighters

are not considered reliable light sources. The farther in you go, the less likely you could make it out safely without light. (4) Wear appropriate footwear. Most people don't climb well in gym shoes. Ankle support is strongly recommended to help protect and support your ankles during abusive travel. (5) And in case things go wrong, like flat tires or getting lost, inform dependable folks where you are, where you expect to be in the cave, and your expected return times. Most cell phones work out at Bloomington Cave so bring them along!

If you are with an organized group, you should seek your organization's safety requirements to be sure you are covered under their insurance. Understand if

you are leading a group, you are responsible for the group! You must provide adequate information, training, and equipment to ensure a safe, fun trip. If not, you could be heavily sued!

For Boy Scout Troop Leaders, Boy Scouts of America (BSA) has caving policies and caving requirements. BSA's policy states that all scouts must be 14 years of age or older, trips should have 2 adult leaders with one being experienced in cave exploration, groups should be less than 10 people, must have equipment be up to today's caver standards, and that all caving trips require an approved tour permit. If the group doesn't have a tour permit, they are not covered by BSA's insurance!

Conservation

Along with your safety, please help protect the cave. Many hours have been spent restoring the cave by removing graffiti and trash from the cave.

All caves on federal lands are protected under the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act. Defacing caves through spray painting, leaving trash, or collecting mineral or biological samples is illegal! Overnight camping, firearms, and campfires are prohibited in this cave. If you vandalize Bloomington Cave, you will be arrested and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Please report any violations or suspected activity by immediately calling the Law Enforcement Hotline (800) 227-7286

To maintain the open access to Bloomington Cave, everyone must cave responsibly, following safety and conservation standards. As groups continue to abuse or ignore these guidelines, future access restrictions are likely.

Using Sandblasting to Remove Graffiti

Between January and April 2005, 48 volunteers worked 7 weekends sandblasting off the graffiti in Bloomington Cave outside of St. George, Utah. This monstrous effort was able to remove graffiti from the main visitation areas and has greatly increased attention and appreciation of the cave.

The project began as a huge restoration effort and is quickly becoming catalyst for the long-term management of the cave.

Problems Arise

In the 1950s in response to the unmanaged increase in visitation, the local Dixie Grotto blasted the entrances shut to protect to the cave and its visitors; twice. The entrances were dug open and the visitation continued to rise. Today, the cave's visitation is an average 650 visitors/year - that's 1.8 visitors/day! However, the visitation is not only the problem.

Most of the visitors to Bloomington Cave are vastly unprepared. Most are only equipped with one, possibly head mounted, light - no backups, no helmets, improper clothing, gym shoes, and no previous caving experience. To keep from getting lost in the labyrinth of passageways, graffiti and miles of string were placed. Over the years, the lack of any management and visitor education has greatly deteriorated the cave. The cave's Big Room has a high-angle

drop of about 150 ft. Many tales have been told of folks sliding out of control onto its bottom. In the summer of 2002, a Boy Scout was rescued after taking this fall and breaking his leg. Later the same year, on Christmas Eve, a 17-year old girl accidentally backed off the ledge called the Boardwalk where the cave's register is found. She rolled through a small opening and down through the Big Room to the bottom of the cave. She became the cave's first fatality.

This fatality marked a need for change – a need to improve public education of proper cave safety and a need to restore the esthetic and recreational value of Bloomington Cave. The removal of the graffiti throughout the main part of the cave was just the first step.

Sandblasting 101

To remove any significant amount of graffiti in Bloomington Cave is a massive undertaking. Sandblasting was the primary method to remove the graffiti. For 7 weekends, volunteers converged on Bloomington Cave to sandblast off the many tags from the walls and ceilings.

Setting up of the sandblasting equipment in itself is an amazing feat. High-pressure hose and electric cords need to be run from the air compressor and generator on the surface to be split to the 3 sandblasting guns removing graffiti in the cave.

Safety was a main concern for all of the volunteers. Diving goggles and respirators are worn to protect the workers from the sandblasting media that blasted everywhere as the graffiti is being removed.

Many drops had to be worked around



Scout sandblasting graffiti

for the thorough removal of the graffiti. Safety lines were rigged to prevent injuries from falls. The sandblasting equipment and 5-gallon buckets of media beads were rappelled to the bottom reaches of the cave.

Keeping the project going took great effort combating weather, recruiting of volunteers, maintaining equipment, and cost of acquiring sandblasting media. The project started just after a large flood hit St. George. The flood was large enough that FEMA arrived to help. Several bridges were washed out. The route we successfully used took us 4 hours of digging to finally reach the cave.

A large number of volunteers were needed to keep such a large project

moving forward. Oddly, the majority of the volunteers traveled more than 4 hours to reach Bloomington Cave. Matched with the great amount of



Before and after photos of graffiti being removed

snow and rain, some weekends were extremely lean with only 3 to 4 people showing.

The project came with many costs. Amazingly, cavers contributed approximate 90% of the project's total cost. The equipment, such as the air compressor, generator, miles of hose and electrical cords, lights, and repairs, were estimated donation of \$65,000! The volunteers donated over 1,000 hours or estimate value of \$18,000! In the end, the total project costs were estimated at \$85,000!

The main consumed expense was the sandblasting media. Even being able to recover and re-use about half of the media, 40 buckets were needed at \$55 per bucket – that's over \$2,000 in sandblasting media alone! This cost was covered by the funding received by the St. George BLM Office, Kolob Care and Rehab, Color Country Grotto, and Outdoor Outlet.

With all things said, the sandblasting was extremely effective in removing the graffiti.

The 7 weekends were only able to remove the graffiti from the main trail from South Entrance to the bottom of the Big Room. Much graffiti still exist in the northern part of the cave, so future efforts are being planned. Battery operated angle grinders have been purchased to remove the isolate graffiti throughout the remote parts of the cave.

Currently a management plan is being written to outline the future management actions for the cave. The installation of cave gates are being planned to reduce vandalism.

The graffiti removal efforts and the creation of this kiosk made possible through a joint venture between St. George BLM and Timpanogos Grotto. You too can also help by reporting violations, picking up trash throughout the cave, and becoming an active voice in supporting the proper management of your public lands.

For further information or to report violations

St. George BLM Field Office
345 E. Riverside Drive
St. George, UT 84790
(435) 688-3200

Law Enforcement Hotline
(800) 227-7286



Proper Caving Gear

Helmet and Headlamp
protect your head and provide hands-free lighting

Gloves
to protect your hands

Ropes
to aid in making those tricky climbs

Padding
Kneepads are great protection in crawls. Elbow pads are great for tight climbs and belly crawling

Sturdy Boots
for good support and traction to aid in climbing



is reached. Quickly, the most difficult point along this route is reached. The "Slot" (White #19-18) is a tight 10-inch vertical crack that drops about 10 ft to a crawl below. The Slot is easier to navigate going down than up.

The Slot can be easily bypassed by taking the long flat wide crawl (Left of Green #19) then heading down a hidden climb to pop out at the Lunch Room Junction (Green #13).

Continuing along the normal route, another downclimb (Green #17-16) is reached. This climb is a bit exposed and slippery. The climb is easily negotiated by traversing along the ledge in the middle and then down. Climbing straight down leads to a long reach to a slippery point. This climb can be bypassed by continuing along the crawl at the top of the climb (Green #19) into the Lunch Room (Green #13).

After the climbdown (Green #16), the Lunch Room can be reached following the flagging by crawling through a small crack (Green #15-14). The flagging in the middle of the room (Green #13) is the junction with the Pink Route (Pink #23) and the Slot's Bypass. There are a few flags to show the way through the vertical crack passage.

The route continues across the room working its way up through the cracks. Follow the flagging carefully for there are lots of tight cracks leading nowhere to be sucked into. After going through a tight 12-inch crack the route leads into a room. From this room the route continues up through a spiraling stoop way (Green #9-6). Crawling along the flat

bedrock floor, you should start feeling the cold entrance air coming in. One can continue along this crawl (Green #6-5) all the way to the North Entrance (Green #0); however, the flagged route winds its way following the easiest path.

Pink Route

Boundary Route - Big Room to Outer Limits

This route is the longer entrance to entrance route. The route has lots of crawling and a bit of interesting climbing. This route uses both the White and the Green routes to make the loop so one should be familiar with these two routes before trying this route. This route is the most committing with the highest chance of getting seriously lost.

The pink flagging starts by traversing the flat bottom of the Big Room (White #11) to the north. This passage will quickly turn into a crawl and the pink flagging (Pink #1) will begin. The route will follow a long series of small traverses and climbs. Use caution, since the flagging can be a bit hard to follow through this highly-mazy section of the cave. When successfully followed, you will pop out into the long low Raceway passage (Pink #18-20).

The end of this passage continues up and up. A crack in the floor allows visitors in the Lunch Room to be heard below. From Pink #23 a short-tight 10-inch pitch leads into Lunch Room Junction (Green #13) and the Green Route.

Continuing up following the flagging on the normal route, the Hub (Green #6)

is reached and the green route can be followed south to the North Entrance (Green #0).

Orange Route

The Miseries - Lunch Room to Big Room

This route connects the Lunch Room to the bottom of the Big Room. The route has slippery traverses on high-angled slopes with respectable exposure. The odds of slipping are higher than the Big Room, but the results would be a fast out-of-control slide, rather than Big Room's straight-out fall. The route starting near the Lunch Room is very mazy; use caution not to lose the flagged route.

The route starts from Green #16 where the orange flagging leads down the easiest route down into the lower room. The route then zigzags through the room's boulder field and then starts a steep descent into the cave. The first climb has a handline that other explorers left behind; however, the flagging shows an easier way to chimney down by using the ceiling and the floor to avoid the spacious short drop.

The route continues down with some interesting high pitching passages to follow. Good shoes will show their benefits through here. This type of traversing and climbing continues to keep you in the easier wider passages until a real bottom is reached. At the end of the route, you easily walk into the bottom of the Big Room (White #11.) Follow the white route to the South Entrance (White #0).

Yellow Route

Northern Exposure - Lunch Room to Crystal King Hall

This route goes into the northern section of the cave. It is fairly easy with only a few sections of steep easily-navigated slopes. The route can be reached from the Orange or Green Routes.

Enter the Yellow Route by descending the crack near Green #12. Once through the crack the passage widens. Follow the flagging down the slope to Yellow #4. This point is where the Yellow Route will complete its loop. Follow the flagging down into the Game Room (Yellow #5). This is a nice flat-floored room with nice size passages going off in all directions.

Follow the flagging or take the direct climb down to next room (Yellow #7). After leaving this room, traverse the large sloping passage to a stoopway. Scramble up through the breakdown to the base of a long slope. At the top of the slope (Yellow #14), a horizontal passageway is reached. Staying on this level, the passage is quickly traversed back to Yellow #4.

Once back at Yellow #4, the route can be followed to the intersection of the Orange Route. Follow the easy horizontal route. After an easy squeeze between two boulders, the route runs into the orange flagging (Orange #3 and 4).

Additional routes are being considered. For up-to-date route descriptions, maps, 3D views, and project reports visit the Timpanogos Grotto website (www.caves.org/grotto/timpgrotto/)