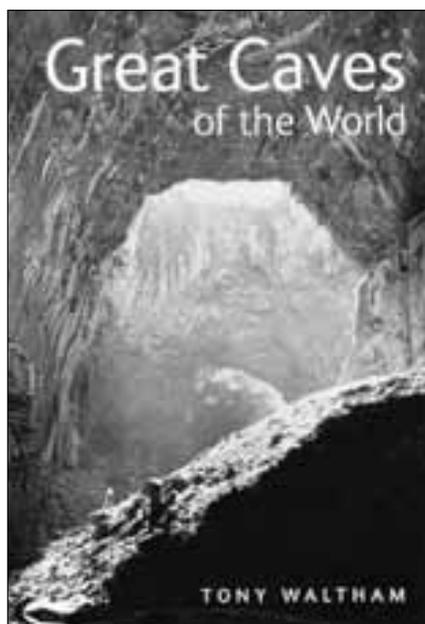


WHICH ARE »GREAT CAVES OF THE WORLD«?



The answer can be found in the new book of a large format (25 x 27 cm), 112 pages, recently published (**September 2008**) by the **Natural History Museum** (London) with the title **Great Caves of the World** written by **Tony Waltham**, a well known karstologist, speleologist and caver famous all over the world owing to his travels on karst all over the world and taking excellent pictures of karst surface and underground. This impressive book is one of the results of his knowledge and visit of the “great caves of the world”.

And which caves did the connoisseur of so many caves from all the continents choose to be the “great caves”? The longest, the deepest, the greatest volumes, the oldest, the nicest, the most visited? Let us see.

On 100 pages the author describes and presents through excellent colour photos (32 normal and 42 of them full-page, some even greater!) 28 caves from five continents. Without doubt among the “great caves” the largest ones found their place too. These are Mammoth Cave, world’s longest cave system, Carlsbad Caverns, the largest show cave, Kazumura Cave from Hawaii being the longest lava cave, Sistema Sac Actun (Yucatan), the longest underwater cave, Krubera (Georgia), the world’s deepest cave, Tri Nahacu cave (Iran), the greatest cave in salt, Caves of Mulu (Sarawak), the largest caves, and Di-

feng Dong (China), the cave with the largest entrance in the world.

Then there are “special” caves if it can be said so, not so important by their dimensions but for the sake of something else: Sof Omar Cave (Ethiopia) is a maze river cave, Castleguard Cave (Canada) lies beneath an icefield, in Quashies River Cave (Jamaica) there is an underground “staircase” of waterfalls and lakes, Gruta do Janelão (Brazil), windows (the name means just “Cave of windows”) into a giant cave, Tham Hinboun (Laos) is the great underground boat ride, Naré (Papua New Guinea) is a deep shaft leading into a huge river cave, Nullarbor Caves (under the plateau of the same name in Australia) are tunnels under the desert, Alpine Ice Caves (these are Eisriesenwelt and Dachstein Eishöhle, Austria) are underground glaciers, and Škocjanske Jame (Slovenia) is a giant river cave (should be “caves” as noun Jame is in plural).

Some caves are cited among the world’s great caves due to their biological, (pre)historical or cultural importance: Cueva de Villa Luz (Mexico) is an acid cave “crucible of life”, Waitomo Caves (New Zealand) are glow-worm grottoes, Sterkfontein Cave (South Africa) is the cave of man’s earliest ancestors, Perak Tong (Malaysia) is a Buddhist holy cave, and Grotte Chauvet (France) as a Stone Age art gallery.

To laymen's repeated questions to speleologists which is the most beautiful cave in the world there is an answer in the Waltham's book. According to the author the world's most beautiful cave is Lechuguilla Cave, New Mexico. But in the book there are also Pinega Caves (northern Russia), beautiful ice caves in gypsum, beautiful show cave Akiyoshi-do (Japan), and beautiful cave lakes in Križna Jama (Slovenia) as the author is not only professor and well known karstologist, he is also speleologist and sport caver. So it must not surprise that among the great caves there are also Gaping Gill (England), classic Yorkshire pothole and Gouffre Berger (France), the world's classic sporting trip. Especially the last mentioned caves are the proof that the selection of "world's great caves" cannot be other than a subjective one. But Tony Waltham is without a doubt a competent judge to whom one can trust to make the best choice of great caves.

Great Caves of the World is not a tea-table photo book, in spite of so many, so large and so nice photos, which alone deserve to be published, from giant gypsum (Lechuguilla Cave) and salt (Tri Nahaču Cave) stalactites, Pinega's frozen water channels, enormous cave entrance of Difeng Dong to crystal-clear lake in Weebubbie Cave of Nullarbor Plain. On the other hand the book is neither a guide book to the great caves of the world. As shows the choice of advised reading, the text tries to be a compromise between serious, erudite, academic text and humorous ramblings on cavers' adventures. The book is nice to be put on the book-shelf, it is attractive to look, and it is interesting to read. What more can a book offer?

The book can be ordered through sales@franceslincoln.com, ISBN 978 0 565 09216 0.

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