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# Living Inside the Earth

by Guy Belleranti

Caves are more than dark holes in the ground. Some contain beautiful formations, running rivers or small lakes. Most caves also contain something else: living creatures using them as homes.



Bats are one of the most well known cave dwellers. In winter the bats are sleeping. However, when warm weather arrives the bats leave the cave at nightfall in search of food.

New Mexico's Carlsbad Caverns National Park offers free bat programs on summer evenings. Shortly before sunset a park ranger talks about the cave and the bats living within it. Then, as the sun sets, the bat flight begins. First there are just a few dozens, then slowly the numbers grow. Soon hundreds and then thousands of bats fly out of the cave. It is an amazing and unforgettable sight.

Other animals also use caves as homes. Some, like the cave beetle, millipede and cave cricket only stay in the cave part of the time. Other part-time cave residents include spiders, cave swallows, raccoons and even bears.

Then there are the animals that never leave their cave home. Most of these are colorless and even blind. Eyeless fish and shrimp, flatworms and the blind Texas salamander are a few examples.

People, too, have lived in caves. Prehistoric man sought out caves for shelter from heat and cold. The caves also provided protection from predators.

Native Americans of the American Southwest sometimes made homes in shallow

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cliff-side caves. Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado provides several fine examples of this.

Today, some people still live in caves. China, France, Spain and Turkey are just a few of the places where caves are used as homes. There are even Americans still living in caves.

Some religions have used caves for services. And in some places people were buried in special caves.

A cave was even used as a hospital. In the 1800's, sick people were moved to Mammoth Cave, a huge cave in Kentucky. The sick people had tuberculosis, a lung disease. Some medical people thought the cave air would help the people breathe. But it didn't. The people only grew sicker, so the experiment was stopped.

Yes, caves are more than dark holes in the ground. They have been, and still might be, someone's home.

- Originally published by Kidz Wonder in June 2009.

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1) Why did the author start his account with bats?

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2) List a few purposes for which caves have been used according to the passage.

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3) Name some part-time cave residents and some that never leave their cave homes.

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4) What purpose did caves serve human beings the first time they lived there?

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5) What was a medical misconception about caves?

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1) Why did the author start his account with bats?

**The author starts his account with bats because bats are the creatures that predominantly use caves as their homes.**

2) List a few purposes for which caves have been used according to the passage.

**Caves serve a number of purposes; they have been used as homes, as hospitals, as places to conduct religious services and even to bury the dead.**

3) Name some part-time cave residents and some that never leave their cave homes.

**Some animals like the millipede and cave cricket, spiders, raccoons and even bears are part-time cave residents, while the eyeless fish and shrimp, flatworms and the blind Texas salamander are examples of animals that never leave their cave homes.**

4) What purpose did caves serve human beings the first time they lived there?

**The Prehistoric people used caves as a shelter from heat and cold. The caves also provided protection from predators.**

5) What was a medical misconception about caves?

**Some medical practioners in the past thought cave air could cure sick people. But the experiment failed and people grew sicker.**