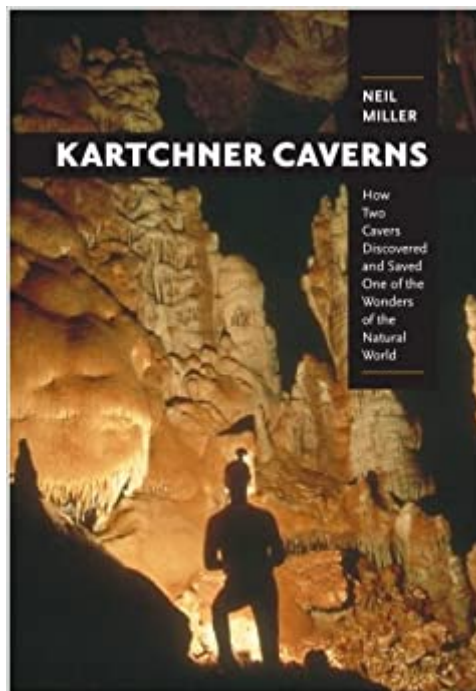




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# Kartchner Caverns: How Two Cavers Discovered And Saved One Of The Wonders Of The Natural World



## Synopsis

It was all routine even if hundreds of pounds of earth were pressing down on their heads, even though the ceiling might potentially collapse at any moment, even if they were surrounded by a sea of darkness and had no idea what lay in front of them. Award-winning author Neil Miller soon tells us that what lay in front of amateur spelunkers Randy Tufts and Gary Tenen was anything but routine. These young men had crawled into a virgin cave, a landscape untouched and unseen for hundreds of thousands of years. In cave terminology, this underground oasis was “living” water still seeped down the limestone walls, depositing minerals that slowly built up into stunningly beautiful formations. In a time when countless caves had been destroyed by vandals and looters who had defaced the walls and had broken formations, this pristine discovery was every caver’s dream. While duplicating that moment might seem difficult, this fascinating account of the fight to preserve Kartchner Caverns lends us the same sense of awe and urgency. In an arresting tale spanning the twenty-five-year period in which Tufts and Tenen struggled to protect their find, Miller skillfully weaves together personal interviews, biographical information, political maneuvering, and geological facts. Presented in full color with dazzling photographs showcasing the natural wonder of the caverns, this is an invitation to take in the mysterious, stunning beauty of a cave as if discovering it for the first time. The triumph of the conservationists and the opening of Kartchner Caverns as a state park are known to anyone who has visited the caves as a tourist. But this narrative offers a chance to go beyond the guidebooks with its revealing look at this unspoiled natural wonder and the science of cave conservation. With as much depth and colorful detail as the caverns themselves, this page-turning account will captivate anyone interested in caves and the preservation of natural wonders.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Publication of this book is made possible in part by a generous contribution from the Friends of Kartchner Caverns. "One comes away from Miller's page-turner with a reverence, almost an unalloyed love for Tenen, Tufts, and the Kartchner family that owned the land under which the young spelunkers discovered the cave." [Tucson Weekly](#) "This fascinating new book provides both exciting new details and breathtaking images in full color" [Tucson Citizen](#)

"Fascinating. . . seamlessly interweaves geological, biological, and historical details."

I purchased the book after taking my first tour through the caverns as after the tour I watched the 20 minute film that quickly covers the cave discovery, efforts to protect the cave from certain looting and destruction, and the clandestine efforts to make it an Arizona State Park in order to protect the caverns while allowing people to see them. I was intrigued and wanted to know the whole story, and I was not disappointed with the book. It's an easy quick read with some amazing historical pictures (the picture of the family that owned the land, covered in mud after secretly touring the caverns is my favorite of the book's pictures). Overall I was pleased with the detail level of the book, and I have no regrets with purchasing it. It is not going to be a best seller as it has no murders, crime, sex, or political intrigue, but a person who buys a book like this is likely, like I was, interested in learning more about the cave history, and the book did that for me.

This reasonably priced book is a thoroughly researched history of the discovery and development of Kartchner Caverns, with most emphasis on things up through the purchase of the property by Arizona State Parks. The cave was discovered by Randy Tufts and Gary Tenen in November 1974 and kept nearly secret until the Arizona state legislature voted to acquire the cave in April 1988. After the discovery, Tufts and Tenen, recognizing that the cave could not be preserved forever by secrecy, the traditional means of cave conservation among Arizona cavers, soon decided that making it into a show cave offered the best route to preservation, despite the compromises that required. They spent years, in conjunction with the Kartchner family, trying to figure out how to develop the cave privately. During this period one gets the impression that they were obsessed

CIA-wannabes, operating under assumed names and an out-of-state mailing address, as if even the knowledge that they were from Arizona would blow their cover. When plans for that fell through, they ended up getting the state of Arizona to buy the property, using parliamentary maneuvers that kept most of the legislature ignorant of what the money was for until the very last minute. All this takes up 135 of the 165 pages of the main body of the book. The development of the show cave took a lot longer than anticipated, because of studies done and measures taken to protect the environment. I had at the time the impression that approximately equal amounts of effort were going into conscientious development and making a show of how conscientious the development was, and that impression isn't contradicted by the book. Tufts and Tenen remained involved during this period, although perhaps not as involved as they would have liked. Part of the cave was finally opened to the public in November 1999. The writing is what can politely be called enthusiastic, as might be expected from the title, but I got used to it. The book includes a list of the dozens of people interviewed and notes on sources of the facts, nicely done in a way that doesn't clutter the text with lots of footnotes or endnote numbers. There are many color photos of the living speleothems in the cave. The photos tend to be printed a bit dark and flat for my taste, but they do show what all the secrecy and subsequent excitement were about.--Bill Mixon

Excellent condition, was super surprised to find it had been signed by the author and one of the caves discoverers!!

Terrific book. Certainly cheaper than at Kartchner Caverns gift shop.

For people who love caves this is an excellent book and a great true story!

Lots of people have heard of Carlsbad Caverns and Mammoth Cave, but few would suspect that Arizona, home to four of the great deserts in North America, would have a wet, living cave that is still making formations. That's because most people don't know that Arizona was once covered in shallow seas that formed layers of limestone, or that our desert soil, so rich in minerals, also has pockets of underground water. Two people who did know these things were Randy Tufts and Gary Tenen, amateur cavers who followed a hunch. KARTCHNER CAVERNS, by Neil Miller, tells the story of how these two men discovered and preserved one of the great natural wonders of Arizona. The story is full of twists and turns, much like the cave itself. We learn that caving clubs in Arizona are a secretive bunch for very good reasons: caves, like fossils, Indian artifacts, and petroglyphs,

are the targets of considerable greed and destruction. This book documents some of that, illustrating the ticking clock that threatened Kartchner Caverns once it was discovered. Yet even Tufts and Tenen were surprised by just how long that clock ran - 25 years slipped by while they plotted, planned, and recruited allies, including the family that owned the land. At any point in this story, someone could have revealed the secret and doomed the cave. Why this never quite happened is the reason this book is just as much a thriller as it is the biography of a cave and its champions. Randy Tufts and Gary Tenen were two very different people who were united in their love of a cave and their passion to both share and preserve it. Their differences could have driven them apart and doomed the cave, but instead those differences balanced their partnership and made them an excellent team. My take on the situation after reading this book is that there were some essential qualities that made it possible for Kartchner Caverns to become a state park: passion, dedication, and patience as infinite as the patience of a cave that turns dripping water into beautiful formations, ion by ion. The book is lavishly illustrated with photos of the cave and the people who loved it. It also contains a timeline and a bibliography. Deftly blending science with Arizona history, KARTCHNER CAVERNS, like the place itself, is something you'll want to visit again and again.

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