

Bluespring Caverns Introduction

By Katy Key (Grades PreK–8)

****This is a guide for a classroom teacher/group leader to use before coming to the caverns. The following items are information about Bluespring Caverns that can be used as a small factual lesson about the cave.**

Formations:

–Stalactites: These formations grow down from the ceiling of a cave. You will see several of these on your tour.

–Stalagmites: These formations grow from the floor of a cave. You won't see many stalagmites on the tour of Bluespring Caverns because most of the floor area is covered by the underground river.

****A good way to remember the difference between stalactites and stalagmites is that stalactITES hang TIGHT to the ceiling, and stalagmites come up from the ground and MIGHT reach the ceiling.**

–Flowstones: This type of formation forms when water flows down a wall and deposits the mineral calcite. We have 3 large flowstones in Bluespring Caverns that you will see along the boat tour.

–Soda Straws: These are formations that you will see at the very beginning of your tour. They are long, thin formations that have a hollow center that water drips through, making them look like drinking straws.

Wildlife:

–Northern Blind Cave Fish (Scientific name: *Amblyopsis Spelaea*): The northern cave fish is only found in caves located near Kentucky and southern Indiana. The fish is white and almost translucent, and has no eyes. They eat isopods (small microscopic creatures that live at the top of the water). These fish are listed as an endangered species.

–Blind Cave Crayfish (Scientific name: *Orconectes Inermis*): Crayfish are scavengers. They will feed off of many things that are in the cave including the isopods, and dead fish or creatures that have washed into the cave. The crayfish also have the white, translucent color.

–Bats: There are several species of bats that you may see living in Bluespring Caverns. The most common is the Indiana Brown Bat. We also occasionally see Eastern Pipistrelle and Large Brown Bats. Seeing a bat in Bluespring does not happen nearly as often as seeing the blindfish or blind crayfish. Two reasons for this are that bats can become frightened by the occasional flooding of the river during very rainy times, and the amount of people coming in and out of the caverns.

–Insects: The only insects that are native to our cave are the cave crickets and beetles. Generally, the crickets live near the entrance area of the cave. The beetles are very small, and live in the mud banks of the cavern.

–Other Visitors: Sometimes animals from the surface will find their way into the caverns. They often are washed in by the many springs and the White River that filter into the cave. You may see frogs, land crayfish, other river fish, or salamanders.

River Passage:

–You will be traveling in a boat throughout the cave tour, on the longest navigable underground river in the United States. The boat will take you about a mile and a quarter round trip, and you will see many amazing formations and animals in the cave. The river is fed by several different sources. One of these is the White River. The other sources are several small springs that we can see filtering into the cave underwater, but no one has been able to trace their origin. This is why we call the river "The Mystery River".

After using this guide, you can have your students complete the "What Did You See" sheet. They can complete this during/directly after their boat tour.