

Luray Caverns

A Planned Adventure or Arbitrary Mishap...

Written by: **Shelby Calhoun**

Photography provided by Luray Caverns

Luray, Virginia

Imagine yourself digging for a cave opening, finding a small crevice, sliding down a rope and finding you're in a dark, damp cave. With only a candle to light your way, you move the small light around to expose a marvel rarely, if ever, seen by anyone else. That's what happened on August 13, 1878, when 5 men in Luray, Virginia, found and explored what has since become known as Luray Caverns, the largest caverns in the Eastern United States. The first spectator illumination took place on November 6, 1878, using tallow candles, and Luray Caverns has been open for public tours every day of the year since.

Formed millions of years ago by underground rivers and seepage of acid-bearing water through layers of limestone and clay, stalactites, stalagmites, stone columns, shimmering draperies and crystal clear pools seem to go on forever. In time the clay washed away, leaving only the limestone shell. Luray Caverns is an "active" cavern; its formations continue to grow at the rate of one cubic inch every 120 years.

Luray Caverns was designated a Registered Natural Landmark in 1974. On-going upgrades have made the hour-long walking tour leisurely and comfortable. The thousands of candles that were used until 1881 are now electric lights, its dirt floors covered with planks are now a conveniently paved path that takes you through several tiers of galleries, with the vertical depth from the highest to the lowest being 164 feet. New for 2019, Luray Caverns realized a decades-long goal of eliminating the remaining steps on the 1.25 mile tour route. The steps leading into the caverns have been bypassed by excavating a 164-foot corridor into the hillside adjacent to the Entrance Building. A looping covered walkway connects the existing building to the new entrance.

Just a few of the subterranean attractions are:

The Great Stalacpipe Organ which is the world's largest musical instrument. It literally makes stalactites sing by gently tapping them throughout three acres of the caverns.

Located in Giant's Hall, at a height of 47 feet, the **Double Column** is a classic example of the two basic cave formations, the stalactite and the stalagmite, coming together as one massive wonder of nature.

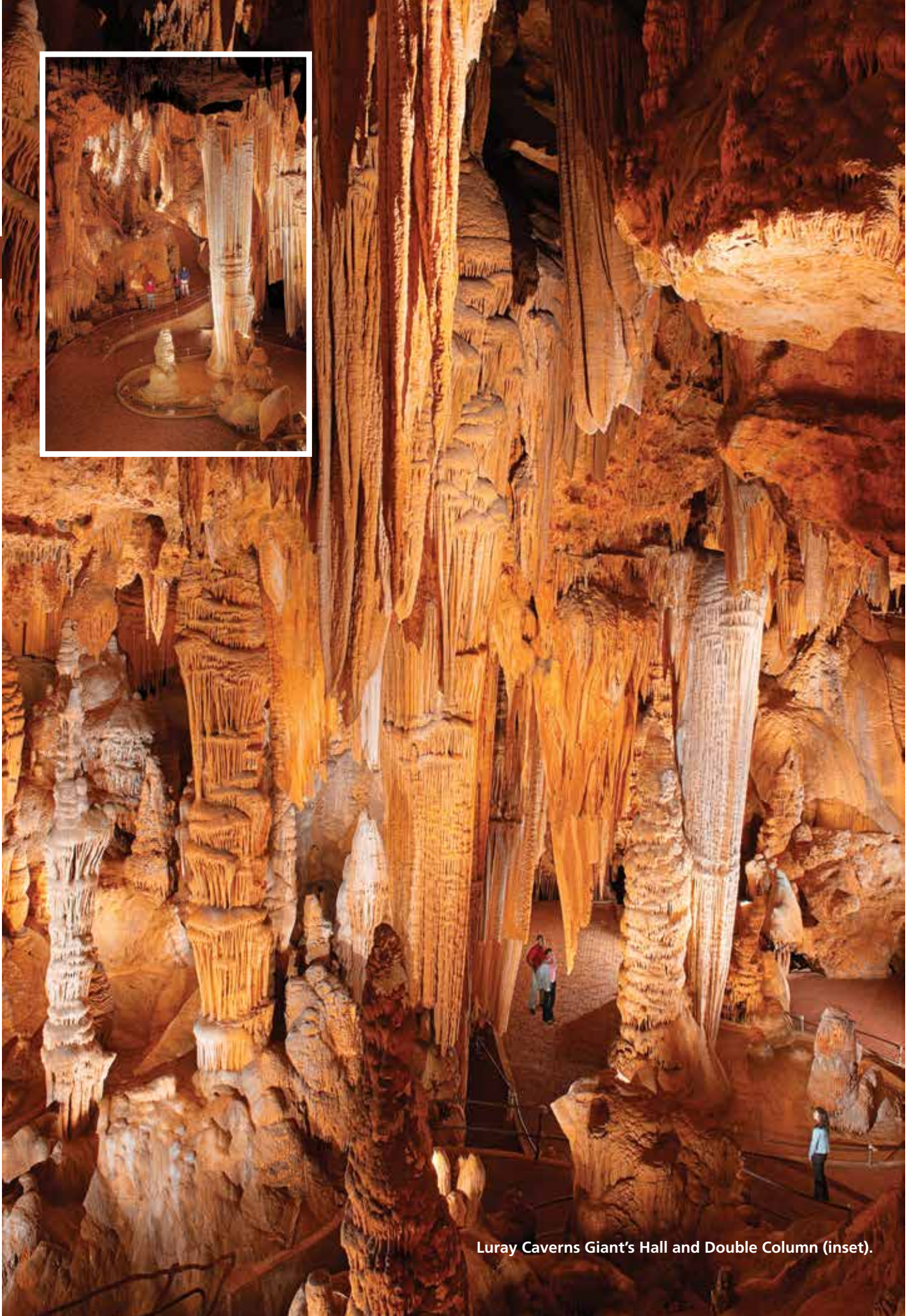
All formations in the caverns are calcite, a crystalline form of limestone. Calcite in its purest form is naturally white.

Titania's Veil is a pristine example of a calcite formation in its finest purity.

Luray Caverns **Wishing Well** is a large subterranean pool of water over 6 feet deep. Since 1954 visitors have tossed millions of coins into the well providing donations to notable organizations including the American Heart Association, the Muscular Dystrophy Association and the American



The Great Stalacpipe Organ is the world's largest musical instrument.



Luray Caverns Giant's Hall and Double Column (inset).

Cancer Society. Once a year the sparkling pool is drained and its coins are removed and cleaned by a unique system using a cement mixer filled with a solution of sand and water. Dried by a flame thrower on a wire mesh screen, the coins are hand sorted and counted, bagged and deposited in a special bank account for future distribution to charitable organizations.

Other attractions on-site and included in the General admission ticket prices are:

- **Caverns entrance fee** with a **guided tour**.
- Self-guided tour of the **Car and Carriage Caravan** – Adjacent to Luray Caverns this exhibit displays the history of America in more than 140 items related to transportation, such as restored cars, carriages, coaches, and costumes dating from 1725.
- Access to the **Luray Valley Museum** – Celebrating the region's early Shenandoah Valley culture is a complex with several 19th century structures and the main museum building which displays artifacts and their history in chronological order from the 1750s through 1920s.
- **Toy Town Junction** – A recently acquired massive toy collection showcasing several thousand toys and train related artifacts.

Attractions for a separate admission fee:

- **The Garden Maze** – At Luray Caverns, over 1,500 Dark American Arborvitae, eight feet tall and four feet wide, create a half-mile pathway. The twisting pathways lead past fountains and into a cave. At 40 points, the challenger must choose a direction to solve the riddle and emerge from the maze. An elevated platform provides relief for those hopelessly lost.
- **The Rope Adventure Park** – An activity the whole family can experience together, this challenging two-level rope course consists of a series of real and imaginary obstacles designed to maximize the excitement of personal development. Each moment is rich in discoveries, whether a person is climbing, supporting “on belay,” or finding an effective way to encourage a companion.
- **Stonyman Mining Company Gem Sluice** – It's an interactive history and geology lesson – pioneer style. And it's the perfect opportunity for kids and adults of all ages to roll up their sleeves, get their hands wet, and discover a truly good time.



Top to bottom: One of the vehicles in the Car and Carriage Caravan is a 1913 Stanley Steamer. The Luray Valley Museum is a complex of several structures including the Dunkard Church and Blacksmith Shop. The half-mile pathway, Garden Maze at Luray Caverns. The Rope Adventure Park is an activity the whole family can experience together.



Top photo: Caverns Country Club Resort overlooking the Shenandoah River with the Blue Ridge Mountains backdrop.

Inset: Kids and adults enjoy sluicing for gems at the Stonyman Mining Company Gem Sluice.

- **Caverns Country Club Resort** – Overlooking the fabled Shenandoah River, these 6,499 yards of gently rolling fairways seem to touch the mountain foothills. Vistas of nearby farmlands, large trees and greens complement this 18-hole, par 72 golf course.

Nearby Attractions:

- **Luray Singing Tower** – Erected in 1937 in memory of Belle Brown Northcott. At 117 feet in height, the Singing Tower contains a carillon of 47 bells. The largest bell weighs 7,640 pounds and is six feet in diameter. The smallest weighs a mere 12-1/2 pounds.
- **George Washington National Forest** – minutes from Luray.
- **Shenandoah National Park in the Blue Ridge Mountains** – Just 10 minutes away.
- **Shenandoah River** – minutes from Luray.
- **Skyline Drive** – Traversing the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains for 105 miles within the park, convenient overlooks provide panoramic views of the Shenandoah Valley 4,000 feet below.
- **New Market Battlefield Historical Park with Hall of Valor Museum** – just 15 miles to the west.

Luray Caverns attracts one-half million visitors annually from throughout North America and more than 70 countries and is conveniently located on U.S. 211, 15 minutes from Interstate 81, Exit 264. For GPS or Google Maps use 101 Cave Hill Road, Luray, VA. For more information, call (540) 743-6551, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily or see the website at www.luraycaverns.com.

Visit Luray Caverns where history, education, and science are all wrapped up in fun.