Nested in the hills of Eastern Kentucky, Carter Caves is 2,000 acres of a mixed deciduous forest rich in plants, animals and geological formations, both above and below ground. The Park offers year-round guided tours of some of the region’s most impressive cave systems, including tours of Cascade Cave and X-Cave.

From Memorial Day to Labor Day Weekends, Saltpeter Cave can be toured by electrical light or by lantern light. A wild walking tour of Bat Cave and climbing tours of Saltpeter and Bat Cave are also offered during the summer. The Park has implemented decontamination efforts in an attempt to slow the spread of White Nose Syndrome, a disease that kills hibernating bat populations.

The park has close to 30 miles of trails highlighting many fascinating geological features, including natural bridges, arches, caves, sinkholes, cliffs and a boxed canyon. The trail system supports over 15 miles of multi-use trails that offer hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders a place to escape. There is an accessible area for experienced Rock Climbers and Rappelementing to “get on rope” while at the park.

Paddlers and anglers can enjoy some good water time on either the included 45-acre Smoky Valley Lake or along a stretch of Tygarts Creek, that borders a portion of the park. Other day amenities include a 9-hole regulation golf course, playground areas, tennis courts, a basketball court, picnic areas, and shelters.

Seasonally, visitors can enjoy guided horseback riding, a swimming pool with a diving well, a gem mine attraction, an 18-hole miniature golf course, guided Smoky Lake canoe trips, and summer recreation and interpretive or cultural programs. Special events are regularly scheduled throughout the year, including Winter Adventure Weekend, Pioneer Life Week, and the Fraley Mountain Music Festival.

Staying over for several days is made easy with several overnight accommodations available, including a 28-room stone lodge, 11 modern two-bedroom, and 1 modern three-bedroom vacation cottages. The campground provides many overnight options including RV sites, tent sites, bunkhouses and equestrian campsites. The Carbon restaurant, open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner, offers a wide variety of sandwiches and country dishes.

Trail Regulations

Trails are managed as part of the natural environment. Visitors must be prepared to meet and accept nature on its own terms. All plants, animals, and natural park features are protected by state law against removal, destruction and injury. For your safety, please stay on designated trails, wear proper footwear, and avoid hiking alone. All trails close at dusk.

Hiking Tips

As of the park’s trails are hilly, and many pass near high cliff areas. For your safety, stay on the marked trail and walk the trail only during daylight hours. Hiking at night is not permitted. Parents should accompany children at all times. For safety, wear comfortable shoes with non-slip soles, since all trails have natural surfaces that may be rocky or uneven. On the longer trails, a water supply may be needed since there are no water sources on any of the trails. Snakes are rarely encountered, but if they are, leave them alone. Carter Caves is home to two venomous snakes, the Northern Copperhead and the Timber Rattlesnake. It is illegal to harm any animal in the park, including snakes. Be aware of poison ivy; it is a common plant.
Carter Caves State Resort Park

STATE PARK NATURE PRESERVES

Two state nature preserves are located within the borders of Carter Caves State Resort Park. Both areas were dedicated into the nature preserve system in 1981 to protect several rare species and habitats.

Kline Hollow Trail - 8.8 mi
A multi-use trail that follows the eastern knolls of Kline Hollow, the scenic Stone Creek Valley, and old homesteads in Kline Hollow. This trail is steep and rocky in places. During designated hiking seasons, avoid the section of the trail or wear blue orange. Yellow blazes mark the trail.

Cave Branch Trail - 2.5 mi
This is a multi-use trail within Tugger State Forest that explores the petrified valley of the river, known as Camp Branch Creek. This creek flows underground through Bell Cave before it reemerges near the park entrance. During designated hiking seasons, avoid the section of the trail or wear blue orange. Blue blazes mark the trail.

Ridge Top Trail - 3.6 mi
This multi-use ridge trail enters Tugger State Forest - follows the beaches around a boulder field recreation project. During the warm season, users need to be prepared for tick and poison-ivy encounters. The trail provides some open overlooks, especially during the fall and winter months. During designated hiking seasons, avoid the section of the trail or wear blue orange. Orange blazes mark the trail.

Cave Passage Trail - 0.8 mi
This short multi-use trail connects the Carter Caves Trail System to the Olive Hill Trail Town System. From the end of this trail, there is a white blaze-painted rock that will lead you to the Depot, which is the heart of the Olive Hill Trail Town System.

MULTIUSE TRAILS

FOOT TRAILS

Three Bridges Trail - 3.6 mi
This popular trail highlights three of the Park’s natural bridges, including Smiley Bridge (the largest), Raven Bridge, and Pork Bridge. The trail overlooks many vistas of Sandy Valley Lake and townsite along many important sandstone cliffs. Red blazes mark the trail.

Raven Bridge Trail - 0.6 mi
This trail is the most direct and scenic route to the delicious, flat-topped sandstone arch, Raven Bridge. This narrow trail is fairly level and can be combined with the Three Bridges Trail to make a loop from the lodge. Blue blazes mark the trail.

Richterhouse Trail - 0.1 mi
This is a short connector trail between RTE 37B and RTE 37. The trail takes you along the scenic walking trails of the Richterhouse. Red blazes mark the trail.

Hone Hollow Trail - 1.5 mi
This trail leads you through a dense forest of familiar trees to the rim of Hone Hollow creek, where you see multiple cave entrances. This trail is especially rewarding during the spring and autumn seasons. White blazes mark the trail.

Natural Bridge Trail - 0.5 mi
This impressive limestone Natural Bridge is one of the landmarks of the area and may be considered unique in Kentucky. Why it is the only natural bridge in Kentucky that supports a paved highway, while Blue Blazes mark the trail.

Box Cannons Trail - 0.6 mi
This trail is one of the most scenic trails that supports several geologic features in the park, including the Cascade Natural Bridge, the Box Cannons, and the Wind Tunnel. The trail is fairly level and fairly difficult. Orange blazes mark the trail.

Carter Caves Cross Country Trail - 8.3 mi
One of our longer hiking trails that visits the Park’s backcountry. Two suspension bridges are found on this trail. Johnson Home place is a historical site that requires you to pay a permit. A short portion of this trail is within Tygart State Forest and allows equestrian and mountain bike use. During designated hiking seasons, avoid the section of the trail or wear blue orange. Orange blazes mark the trail.

TOPOGRAPHY & PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

Elevation contours are shown on aerial photographs, which indicates canyons and or forested areas.

Continues interval: 20 ft
100 vertical feet
Average Slope
100 horizontal feet
Elevation

TOOlS & TRAVEL SYMBOLS

HIKING TRAIL
All-Terrain Trail
Equestrian Trail
Continuing Trail
Open Trail
For example, the following 20 feet have been added to the trail: & another 100' have been added, 6.5 miles total. The following contains less than 100' of elevation change, is not considered a mountain bike trail.

TRAIL MAP

Welcome Center
Campground
Longs Creek Road
Smiley Bridge
Carter Caves State Resort Park

Map created by ashapeGIS mapping in July 2012 and updated May, 2015. GPS data provided by TV Department of Parks with additional data provided by Kentucky Division of Geographic Information and the United States Geological Survey. Projection: Kentucky State Plane Single Zone, MGRS E1.