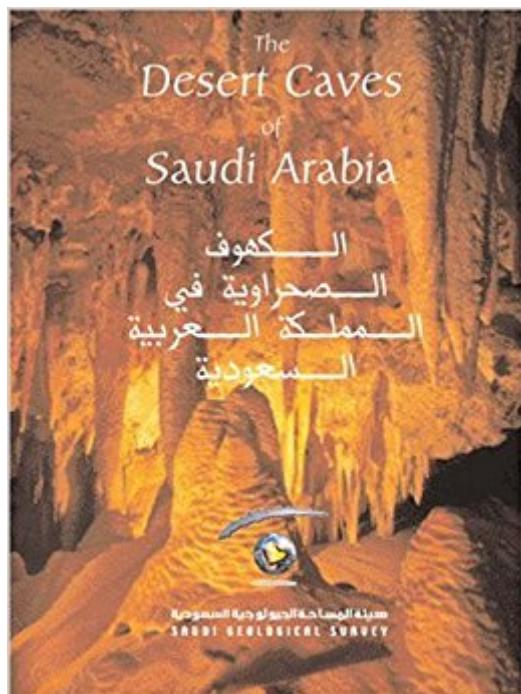


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The Desert Caves Of Saudi Arabia



Synopsis

Beneath the harsh deserts of Saudi Arabia lie dark chambers and complex mazes filled with strange shapes and wondrous beauty. Ever-so-slowly formed over hundreds of thousands of years, these impressive cave formations could be damaged or destroyed in a matter of seconds by a careless visitor. The author and photographers of this book present these pictures to all those who dwell in this desert land, in the hope that they will join in an effort to protect and preserve a beautiful but hidden part of Saudi Arabia's parsimony.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John Pint and his wife Susy have been exploring Saudi Arabia's caves since 1981. In the year 2001, they teamed up with Maher Idris and Mahmoud Alshanti and began a Kingdom-wide study of caves for the Saudi Geological Survey. This study has already benefited researchers in many fields, including speleology, hydrogeology, biology, anthropology, and even studies of ancient weather patterns on the Arabian peninsula.

I thoroughly enjoyed this introduction to the caves I never knew existed in Saudi Arabia. It isn't a heavily scientific discussion, more a narrative of the discovery and exploration of a variety of caves that exist deep under the Saudi deserts. Included in the narrative is the author's interaction with the royalty and ordinary people of the country. By the time you finish this book you will give up any idea that the only interesting thing under the Saudi Arabian sands is oil. This book introduces caves that hold not only a fascinating geological history, but also stories of the people and animals who used

them to get water, to escape from the unrelenting heat of the desert, and, in the case of some animals, as homes. Also, since I've never gone caving (and never will) the discussion of methods used is fascinating. No, not in a dry technical way - just consider that part of the discussion involves driving a vehicle up to the mouth of the cave and using a rope on that car to lower your way into a tiny unexplored hole in the ground - and that's just one of the adventures the author describes of his exploration of the unknown. Getting into the caves is just the beginning. If you thought the Saudi Arabian desert wildlife consisted of camels and a few spiders, be prepared to meet an impressive variety of wildlife - in a cave, with no immediate way out. It's fun, fascinating, and makes me glad that someone did this and wrote this book because I will never do it myself. Mr. Pint describes the animal life, and the geological treasures well, and for the layman, not the scientist. Another side of this book is the introduction to the bedouin life and the amazing talents these desert dwellers display in navigating through their environment. You will see the generosity of the people, the ability to survive in an environment that is more than inhospitable. Seeing the interaction between the author's team (which included in many cases his wife) and the bedouin was fascinating. Life in Saudi Arabia, for a woman, is not something the average american can imagine - but Mr. Pint gives us a tiny glimpse into the life of these women. It's a very small glimpse, because the book is about caves, not women in Saudi Arabia - but it's fun and interesting. This book was fun to read, interesting, varied enough to appeal to the average reader, and provided a little insight into many areas - caving, the life and talents of the Bedouin, interaction with Saudi Royals and local leaders, creative problem solving, and the wildlife hiding out of view under the desert. It was a short book, but well worth the money, and the time it took to read it.

This book introduces us to an unexpected natural wonder: the cool, dark, mysterious caves that underlie the deserts of east-central Saudi Arabia. Our guide is John Pint of the Cave Exploration Unit at the Saudi Geological Survey. This large-format book showcases the dramatic photography collected over the past two decades during the exploration of limestone caves, caverns, sink holes and tunnels in the Umm-Er-Radhumah formation, many of them located at the edge of the Dahna Desert, on the Summan Plateau. Pint, whose subterranean wanderings have been featured in Saudi Aramco World magazine, tips his hat to a long line of explorers who preceded him, including Aramco's Max Steineke and Tom Barger. But Pint deserves credit for pioneering the systematic exploration of these caves, and for promoting the protection of these amazing subterranean locales for future generations of Saudis and others. Pint chronicles with lush photographs and spare English and Arabic text more than 20 years of cave exploration in Saudi Arabia. He begins with Dahl Sultan,

one of many caves near the town of Ma'aqala northeast of Riyadh. The first indication of this cave was a rush of warm, humid air blowing from a dinner-plate-sized opening in the ground on a hard-packed plain near the edge of the red Dahna dunes. When the opening was widened and explorers entered, they found a bell-shaped room and a labyrinth of seemingly endless horizontal passages, filled with stalactites, stalagmites, columns and other formations of dazzling beauty and variety. Dahl Sultan may eventually prove to be the biggest cave network in the Kingdom. Not all Saudi caves are entered through narrow sinkholes. A fair number present huge circular pits, hundred of feet across, set in the desert floor. One of these, featured in the book, is Abu al-Hol ("Father of Fear"), a dramatic deep pit brought to Pint's attention by a Saudi Aramco wellsite inspector. The book has chapters on eleven major caves, including Ain Hit near al-Kharj, a sinkhole that leads to a vast aquifer, where divers have encountered what they claim is the clearest water seen anywhere in the world. Pint also highlights the joint cave exploration project of King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals and the Austrian Academy of Sciences. That project studied some 58 caves in the Summan Plateau area. [A version of this review appeared in Saudi Aramco World, Sep/Oct 2003.]

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