

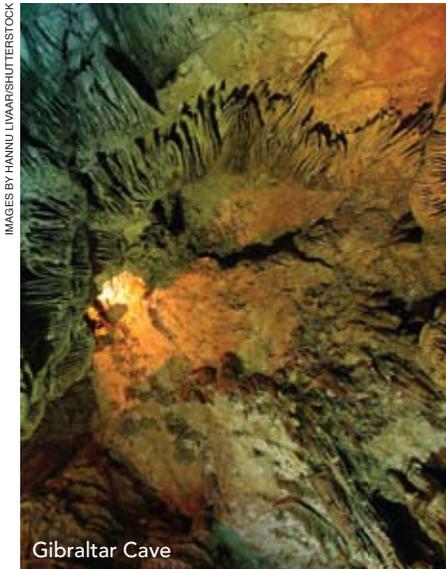
Underground Gibraltar

What's above ground in Gibraltar is both anomalous and obvious: nearly 1,400 feet of limestone rising out of the Mediterranean Sea. Equally intriguing is what lies below: natural and manmade formations that reveal the Rock's history and mystery.

One of the two Pillars of Hercules, Gibraltar boasts more than 150 caves, the most spectacular of which is St. Michael's Cave, long rumored to link with Africa via underground tunnel. No such passage exists, though it remains part of the Rock's strange mythology as does its ancient nickname, *Mons Calpe* — "Hollow Mountain."



Cathedral Cave



Gibraltar Cave

The natural grotto boasts splendid stalactites and stalagmites, dramatically lit throughout. The cave consists of an Upper Hall, where a network of passages winds through halls and chambers, eventually reaching a depth of 250 feet. This deepest area of the cave was prepared, but never used, as an emergency hospital during World War II.

The lower portion of the caves descends into a small lake and the magnificent Cathedral Cave, now a performing arts venue with unparalleled acoustics, giving the term "surround sound" a new definition.

You could travel for miles underground here, but then you'd miss the nearly 30 miles of passageways that comprise the Great Siege Tunnels on the north side. Hollowed out during 1779-1782, the tunnels are a remarkable feat of engineering — and serendipity.

Frustrated by repeated attacks by French and Spanish troops, Gibraltar's governor offered a reward to anyone able to haul the guns to the Notch, a projection on the north face of the Rock that presented a premium vantage point.

A Soldier Artificer (forerunner of the Royal Engineers) suggested boring tunnels through the rock, and the work began in 1782. The original

plan did not call for mounting guns in the gallery — the goal was always to reach the Notch — but this is where accident meets design. Constantly overcome by gunpowder fumes, the miners broke through the tunnel wall to create an outside air vent; immediately they saw a natural embrasure for the guns and potential for creating an impenetrable garrison that remains one of the most ingenious defense systems in military history.

By the time the siege ended, the tunnel was 370 feet long with four guns mounted in it. Post-siege tunneling continued throughout World War II, and today it is a labyrinth with such idiosyncrasies as the Holy Land Tunnel, so named because of its precise due east orientation toward Mecca.

The site includes Victorian-era guns, an original 18th-century cannon, wax models and installations depicting life inside the Rock. —L. B.