

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



El Malpais National Monument

Big Skylight Cave



© Kenneth Ingham 2013

The entrance, with cavers approaching the skylight area.

Big Skylight is immense; its massive size has to be seen to be appreciated. It and contains more than just a picturesque window to the world above; the cave includes perfectly preserved lava benches, a pahoehoe flow floor, and delicate “moon milk” minerals. These features, and the moss gardens under the skylight, need to be protected and not touched or trampled. Look, admire, photograph, but please respect all these fragile formations and areas.

Drive to Cave – Moderate to Difficult/Impossible

After leaving Hwy 53, the roads to the cave are unpaved and can be impassible after rain or snow. High clearance vehicles are often needed.

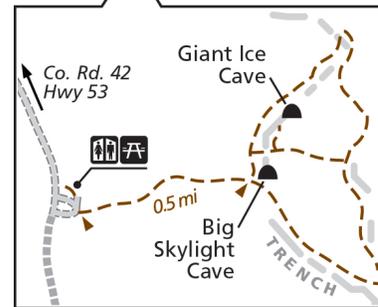
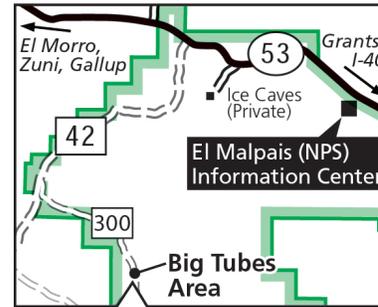
Hike to Cave – Difficult

The route is marked by cairns (rock piles) and is approximately 1-mile round-trip over rugged lava flows. A short climb is required to get down into the cave's entrance.

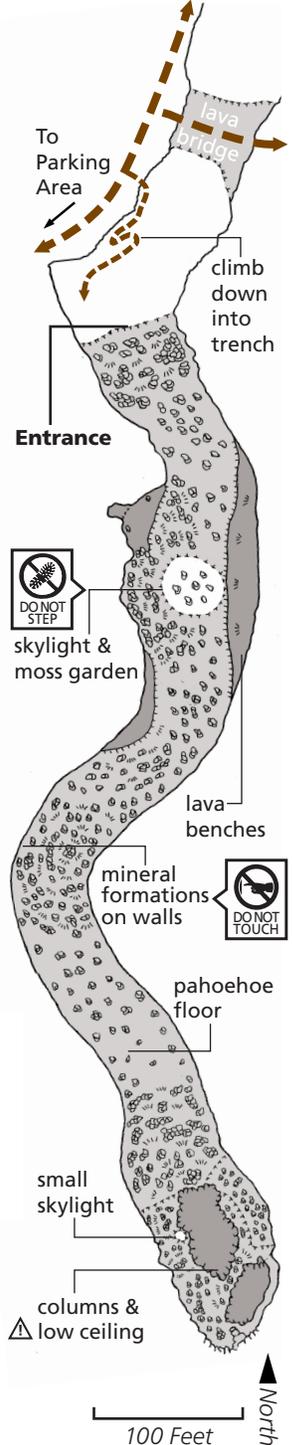
Caving Difficulty – Difficult

There is no established trail through the cave. Scrambling over large, unstable boulders is required in some areas.

Directions



Cave Map



From Highway 53, take Cibola County Road 42 (unpaved) south to Forest Road 300 and follow the road to the Big Tubes parking area.

Hike the cairn trail a half mile to the flow trench. Look for a route down to the cave from the edge, just south of where the trail crosses a natural lava bridge over the trench.

Caution

Caving, and hiking in remote areas, are inherently dangerous. Loose footing, difficult terrain, disorientation, extreme heat and cold, and falls are common risks. Cave ceilings can be low and cause serious head injury. See a park ranger for a caving permit and more information.

For more information, visit www.nps.gov/elma or contact:

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