

# Upana Caves Self-Guided Tour

To safely explore the caves you should carry a reliable source of light. A good light will help you to see the cave features and to watch your footing on uneven ground. While in the caves, watch for low ceilings and slippery conditions. A hard hat and sturdy boots with rubber soles are recommended. For the more adventurous hands and knees visitors, additional protective clothing is also recommended. The Upana Caves are a year-round experience. No matter what the weather is doing outside, the temperature inside the caves averages a chilly 7° Celsius (45° Fahrenheit)... so bring a sweater or jacket!

## Code of Conduct

While on self-guided tours, follow these basic rules and the appearance of the caves can be maintained for future visitors:

- Keep to established trails & underground routes
- Do not litter or mark the caves
- Do not disturb crickets, spiders or other forms of cave life
- Do not touch delicate formations
- Refrain from smoking and lighting fires

## 5 Most FAQ's about Vancouver Island Caves & Caving

### 1. **How are caves formed?**

Very briefly, limestone solution caves are formed by the action of water which has combined with carbon dioxide to produce a weak solution of carbonic acid. This acid, upon entering the underground, slowly dissolves the limestone to form passageways.

### 2. **What living things are found in caves?**

There are a number of animals which can spend part of their lives in caves. Salamanders, frogs, crickets, and harvestmen (daddy long legs) are examples.

### 3. **How many caves are known?**

There are about 1,050 known caves on Vancouver Island (and counting). Most of these are found in the Quatsino Formation limestone deposits of Northern Vancouver Island.

### 4. **What is a spelunker?**

The term spelunker is often used in the United States to describe a recreation cave explorer. The term comes from the Latin word "spelunca", which means cave. Canadian cave explorers are known as cavers.

### 5. **What is the longest known cave?**

## Upana Caves Self-Guided Tour

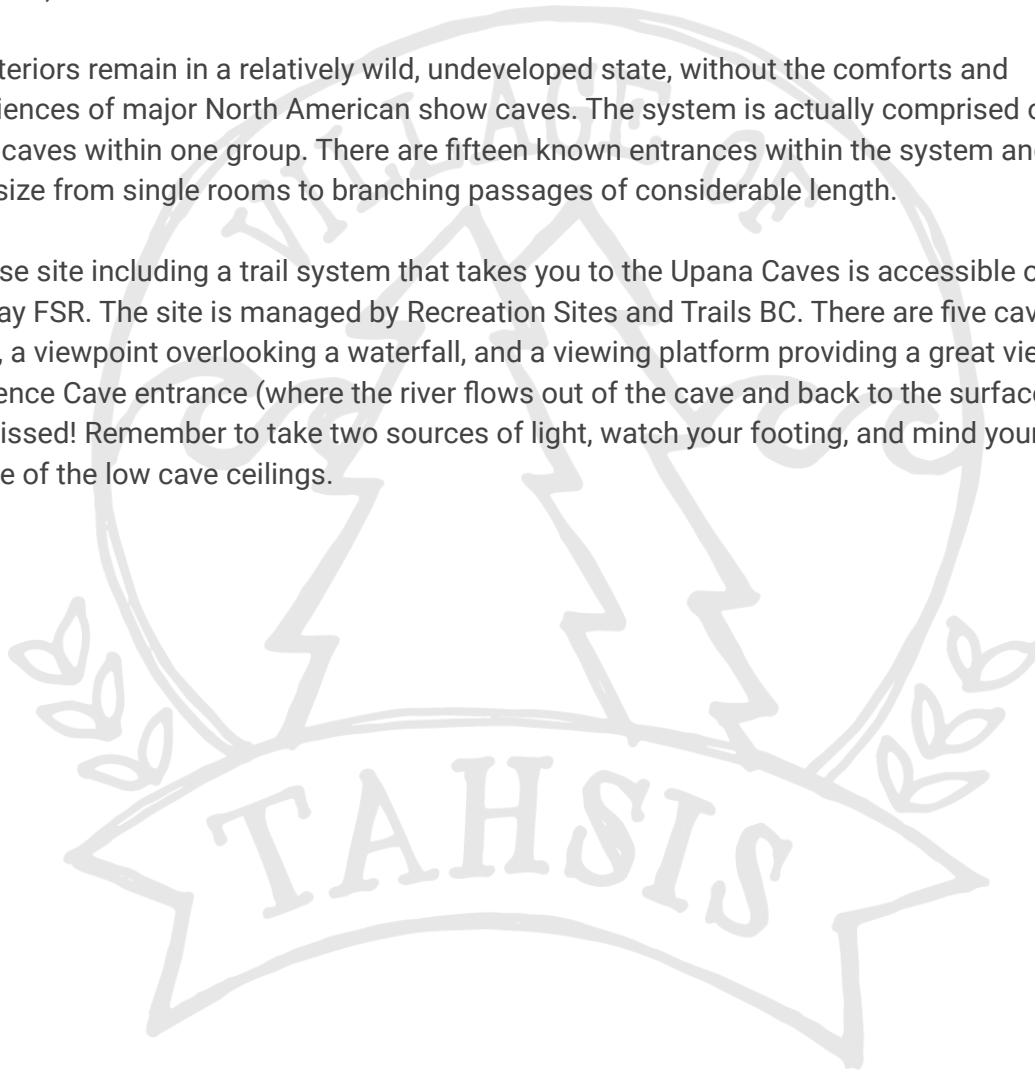
The longest cave on Vancouver Island is the Thanksgiving Cave with a mapped length of 7.6km (4.7 miles). The Thanksgiving Cave is located in Weymer Provincial Park near Tahsis. Several other Island caves exceed 2kms (1.2 miles) in length.

### More Information

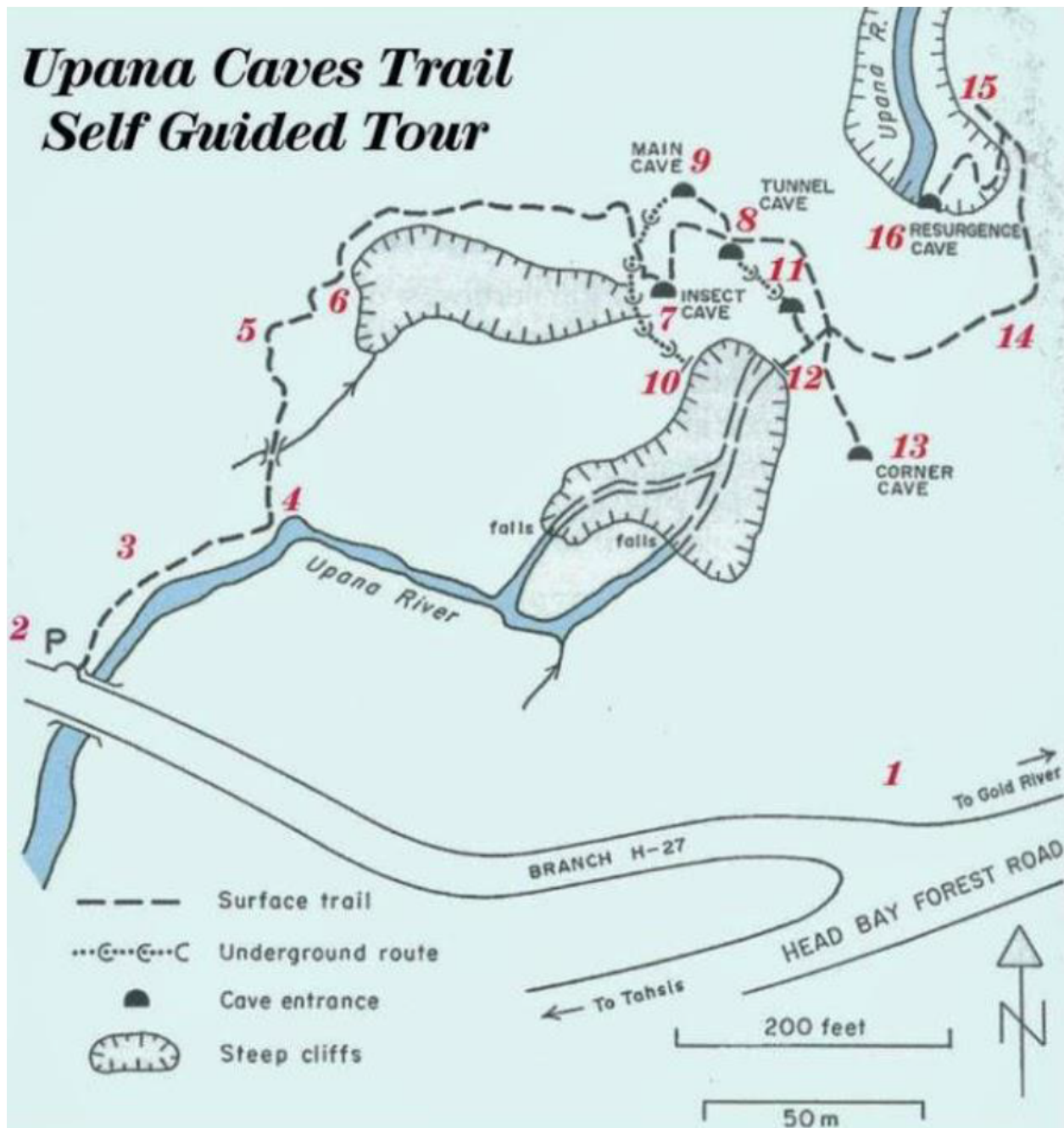
First discovered during nearby road building and harvesting in 1971, the Upana Cave systems were explored and mapped in 1975 by recreational cavers. Named for the river that runs through the system, the caves have since attracted thousands of visitors.

Cave interiors remain in a relatively wild, undeveloped state, without the comforts and conveniences of major North American show caves. The system is actually comprised of several caves within one group. There are fifteen known entrances within the system and caves vary in size from single rooms to branching passages of considerable length.

A day-use site including a trail system that takes you to the Upana Caves is accessible off of Head Bay FSR. The site is managed by Recreation Sites and Trails BC. There are five caves to explore, a viewpoint overlooking a waterfall, and a viewing platform providing a great view of the Resurgence Cave entrance (where the river flows out of the cave and back to the surface) - not to be missed! Remember to take two sources of light, watch your footing, and mind your head on some of the low cave ceilings.



# Upana Caves Self-Guided Tour



Please note: all activities and routes described in this guide are followed at your own risk. Visit [www.wildsafebc.com](http://www.wildsafebc.com) for safety information when adventuring in wildlife country and [www.adventuresmart.ca](http://www.adventuresmart.ca) for more.

**By following this guide, a tour of the caves takes about one hour.**

**1. Are we there yet?**

Turn off the Head Bay Forest Service Road onto the Branch Road H-27 to the parking area. When driving to and from the Upana Caves, be prepared to pull over to let industrial traffic by.

**2. Parking and preparation**

Car headlights off? Caving headlights work? Extra light source? Don't forget your spare light, hard hat, flash camera and warm clothing if you plan to go underground.

**3. An old forest**

Leaving the road you walk down the trail through an old growth forest of western white pine, western hemlock, and yellow cedar. Many of these trees are over 200 years old, even though their height and diameter may make you think otherwise. Fires and smoking are prohibited in the area during fire bans.

**4. New directions?**

At this viewpoint both the trail and the Upana River take sudden changes in direction. The river turns right following a fault in the rock. We go left.

**5. A young forest**

Some of this area was harvested in 1980 and planted in 1981 with over 6,800 western hemlock, amabilis (balsam) fir and yellow cedar seedlings. Is it a successful plantation?

**6. Karst topography**

For all the rain and snow that falls here, over 2,500 mm per year, you won't find water in the gully on your right. You are entering a landscape where sinking streams, caves and sinkholes have developed through the action of water on the limestone bedrock. This is called karst topography.

**7. Insect Cave**

Don't be put off by the name to try out your first cave! Crickets and spiders prefer the cool, wet darkness to your collar or pants anyway! The crickets spend part of the life cycle underground - from November to June.

**8. The Keyhole**

At the bottom of the hill, head left through this limestone tube into the large entrance room of the Main Cave.

**9. Main Cave**

When was the last time you did the duck-waddle? There are numerous passages to explore here if you are well equipped. Remember, this is basically a wild cave like all the rest, so you are on your own.

**10. Disappearing act**

If you've followed the main underground route, you're now looking at the Upana River siphon. Swimming is not recommended! Here the river follows an underground course for thirty metres before reappearing in the Resurgence Cave. Now return back through the keyhole to the main trail.

## Upana Caves Self-Guided Tour

### 11. Tunnel Cave

This large tube is a longer version of the keyhole. Called a phreatic tube, it was formed when water filled the entire passage and dissolved the limestone in all directions. If you enter, notice the karst window in the ceiling.

### 12. Waterfall viewpoint

This sunken area is best viewed during a typical west coast downpour. At one time the river may have flowed along the surface to where you are now standing.

### 13. Corner Cave

A side trail takes you to this cave which, if you're prepared, is fun to explore.

### 14. How old are these trees?

Count the branch whorls to estimate their age!

### 15. Canyon viewpoint

Here the Upana River reappears below the ten metre high entrance of Resurgence Cave. At one time the river was underground for the full length of this canyon before the passage collapsed and dissolved.

### 16. Resurgence Cave

Down the stairs and just inside the cave entrance brings you to the last stop of the tour. Here, heat and pressure have transformed the limestone into a smooth, white marble.

