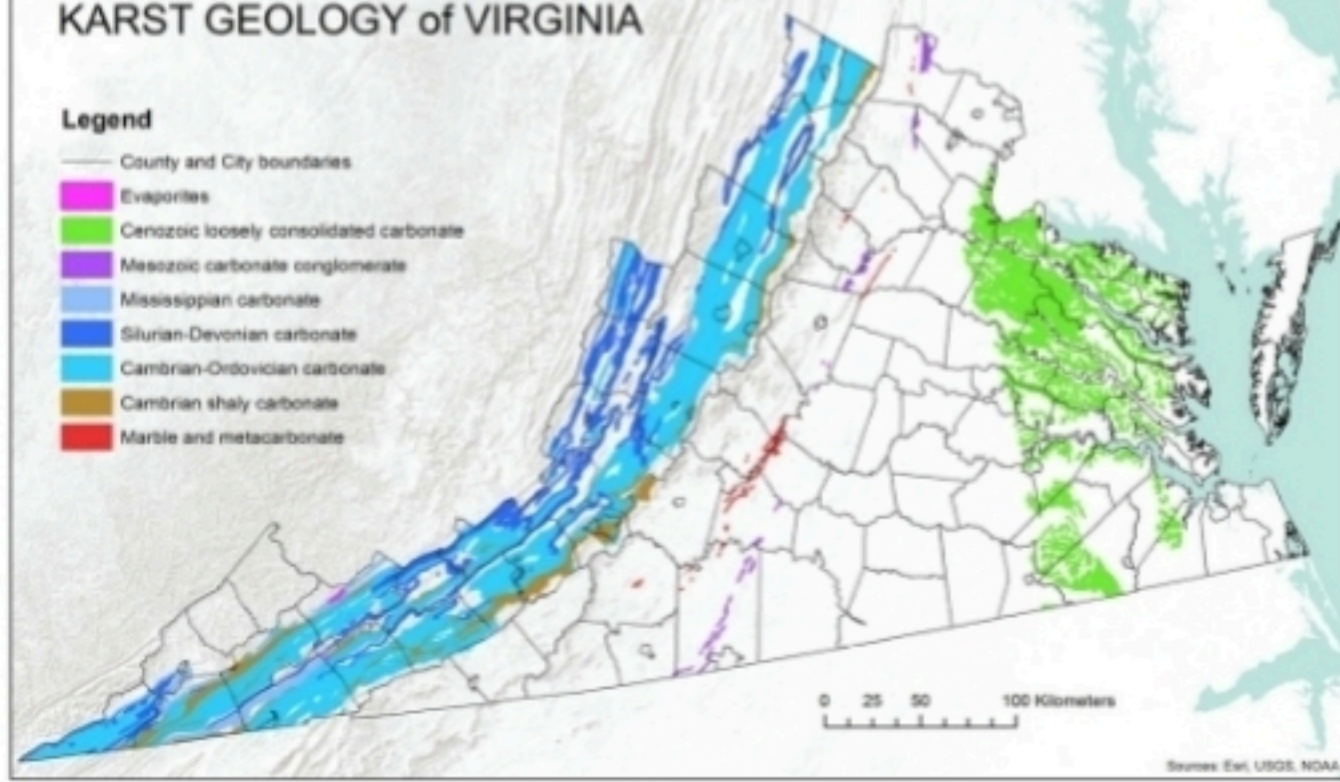


KARST GEOLOGY of VIRGINIA



Visit The Virginia Cave Board And Learn About Our License Plate:



A world beneath our feet

Caves figure prominently in Virginia's natural and geologic history. More than 4,400 have been documented here, and many harbor delicate natural communities with a diversity of species. Caves were mined for saltpeter during the Civil War, designated as bomb shelters during the Cold War, used as speakeasies during prohibition, developed as tourist attractions, and used to store food and supply water. Caves continue to be discovered, explored and studied by explorers. Scientists and conservationists in particular focus on caves and natural resources inside them.

Why is karst important?

Karst landscapes are characterized by sinkholes, sinking streams, springs and caves. Karst is found in areas where mildly acidic groundwater has dissolved soluble rock, such as limestone, dolostone, marble and gypsum. Virginia is rich in karst resources, and they play an important role in water quality and supply. Tens of thousands of Virginians depend on karst aquifers for clean drinking water but, because karst landscapes are porous, groundwater can easily be contaminated by surface runoff. Conservation of karst landscapes and education about their sensitivity to pollution are imperative.

Learn about geology

The geologic processes that produced Virginia's karst landscapes began more than 500 million years ago when a shallow tropical sea, abundant with life, covered much of the North American continent. Many organisms in the sea secreted hard shells and other protective body parts made of the calcium carbonate minerals calcite and aragonite. For much of the next 200 million years, their remains fell to the sea floor and mixed with other sediments to form layers, or strata, of the rocks limestone and dolomite more than 10,000 feet

thick. Between 325 and 260 million years ago, the strata were uplifted and deformed by tectonic forces into the folded and faulted rock strata of the Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachians have been uplifted and eroded at least twice since then and continue to rise, producing the mountainous landscapes we see today.

The weathering processes that formed Virginia's present karst landscapes occurred over millions of years. Many karst features, such as sinkholes and caves, were destroyed by erosion as new ones formed, but occasionally evidence is found in the karstic "pockets" of the Earth of how long these landscape features have persisted.

The Virginia Cave and Karst Trail

The trail has more than 20 stops where visitors learn about and appreciate outstanding caves and karst features. The trail is meant to educate people about these sensitive environments and to promote their protection.

About a dozen caves in Virginia have been developed into show caves. These caves attract visitors from around the world, contribute to local economies and provide visitors amazing views of caves they wouldn't otherwise see. The Virginia Cave and Karst Trail features eight show caves.

Most stops are in Virginia's scenic Ridge and Valley province. Each offers visitors a unique experience such as an interpretive program, a scenic view or fee-based tour. A few stops have trails or self-guided tours.

With a bit of planning, several stops can be covered in a day. Be sure to contact commercial sites for information about admission fees and hours of operation.

How many Virginia Cave and Karst Trail sites can you visit?

- 1. Abrams Creek Wetland Preserve
- 2. Augusta Springs
- 3. Cowpasture River Trail
- 4. Dixie Caverns
- 5. Endless Caverns
- 6. Falling Spring Falls Overlook
- 7. Falls Ridge Preserve
- 8. Gap Cave
- 9. Grand Caverns
- 10. Hupp's Hill Civil War Park
- 11. Luray Caverns
- 12. Museum of the Middle Appalachians
- 13. Natural Bridge State Park
- 14. Natural Chimneys
- 15. Natural Tunnel State Park
- 16. New River Cave Nature Preserve
- 17. Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve
- 18. Rockland Park
- 19. Shawnee Springs Preserve
- 20. Shenandoah Caverns
- 21. Skyline Caverns
- 22. The Caverns at Natural Bridge
- 23. The Cedars Natural Area Preserve
- 24. Virginia Living Museum
- 25. Wildwood Park

