

ABSTRACT
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Sandstone Caves in Wisconsin

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Sandstone caves account for about 30% of Wisconsin's 250 recorded and mapped caves, yet they are consistently under-appreciated and underestimated. Most are formed in Cambrian aged sandstones in the southwestern part of the state, although others have developed in pre-Cambrian sandstones and by the collapse of Ordovician sandstones into cavities in underlying dolostones. Some of the caves have developed through stream meandering, waterfall undercutting or exterior erosion, but over 40 have formed through dissolution by groundwater, predominantly within the upper Jordan Sandstone where groundwater flow is focused downward through the overlying Oneota dolostone. The transitional Sunset Point member has recently been recognized as an important locus of speleogenesis. Although the longest sandstone cave is nearly 100m in length, most are much smaller, and a large number have not been recorded or mapped. Some are joint-controlled, while others are enlarged along bedding planes. Processes other than dissolution are involved in their development. Many of southwestern Wisconsin's fragile rock formations may also actually be cave remnants. Some of the sandstone caves are significant sites of pre-European Native American artwork, including petroglyphs and pictographs.