

Cathedral Gorge

Cathedral Gorge is located in Central/Eastern Nevada near the small town of Panaca. “Gorge” is somewhat an inappropriate term since the ravines do not exceed a depth of much more than fifty feet. The unique formations are clay and volcanic ash remnants of an ancient lakebed. As the landscape changed and water drained from the lake, the wind and rain caused erosion of the soft bentonite clay. The result was brightly colored cliffs and spires with many narrow crevices at the edges of Meadow Valley. The caves are not true caves but two to three foot crevices that extend inwards for up to 100 yards. The walls tower high overhead giving the effect of being underground. These caves are formed when rainwater runs off land nearby and is channeled down shafts eroding the clay and silt.

Cathedral Gorge is now a state park preserved for visitors to enjoy. During the 1920s, it was the backdrop for open-air plays and vaudevilles. In 1924, Governor James Scrugham designated the area as a park, and in 1935 the area became a state park. The park, once home to the Fremont, Anasazi, and Southern Paiutes, covers about 1,600 acres.

Biological soil crusts, formed by living organisms and their by-products, are a common feature of the landscape. These bumpy patches are usually darker than the surrounding soil. This is due in part to the color of the mosses and lichens found there. The microbiotic crust is fragile and if damaged, takes over 100 years to recover.

Small animals are common in the park and deer may be seen in the Gorge during the late fall and winter. During spring through fall, several species of non-poisonous snakes and lizards may be seen. In summer, the Great Basin rattlesnake may also be found. Birds are plentiful, and a red-tailed hawk or golden eagle may soar above the gorge. Occasionally, a fortunate visitor will catch a glimpse of the mountain bluebird, Nevada’s state bird.

Discussion Questions

- Describe how the crevices, “caves,” were formed.
- Why are visitors asked to stay on the paths when visiting the park?
- List three reasons why state parks are valuable?

Sources

- “Cathedral Gorge State Park.” *parks.nv.gov*.
- “Cathedral Gorge State Park.” *stateparks.com*.
- “Cathedral Gorge State Park.” *americansouthwest.net*.
- “Cathedral Gorge State Park.” *lincolncountynevada.com*.
- “Introduction to Biological Soil Crusts.” *soilcrust.org*.