



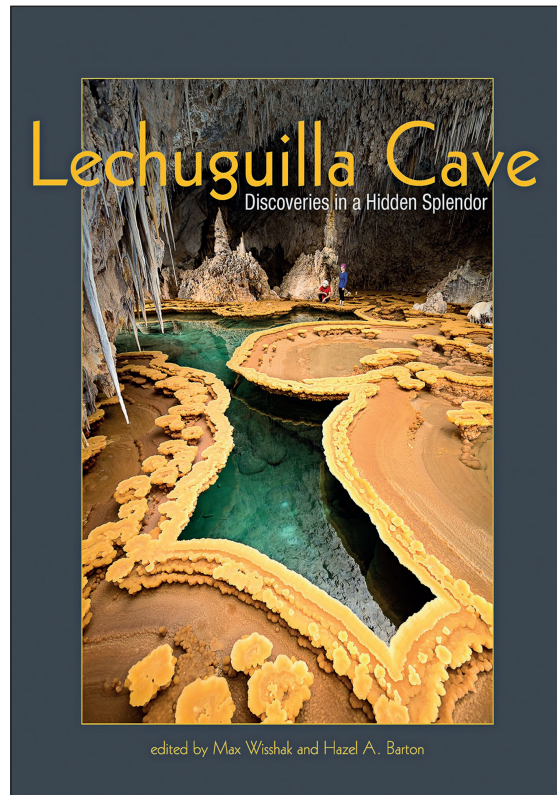
LECHUGUILLA CAVE: DISCOVERIES IN A HIDDEN SPLENDOR

Max WISSHAK and Hazel A. BARTON (Editors)

Speleo-Photo Editions, 2022, 240 pages, 258 colour photos and 7 graphs,
Double-foldout page with 3D model of the cave, 22.5 x 30.5 cm,
Hardcover, ISBN 978-3-9821714-2-5

Last year, we were introduced to the first publication of the young publishing house Speleo-Photo Editions, which under the guidance of the world-famous cave photographer Max Wisshak, publishes cave-themed books. In the first book, which he co-authored with his wife Stefanie, he devotes himself in detail to the karst world of New Zealand, revealing Max's fascination with this wonderful and mysterious land through superb photographic impressions. The book received numerous awards and, with its quality, certainly laid a solid foundation for all subsequent editions.

Even from the first book, we could foretell that the next one would be dedicated to another great project of Max's, the world-famous cave of Lechuguilla, and we were not mistaken. This time he tackled the book as an editor, and Hazel A. Barton, a great authority on the famous cave, also participated in this process. The texts and photos were contributed by many commendable researchers and excellent photographers.



Lechuguilla Cave is one of the most important caves in the world and is rightfully known to be a cave of all excesses. With a length of almost 245 kilometers, it occupies the ninth place among the longest caves in the world, and its deepest point reaches 484 meters deep. The entrance hall, in which guano was mined 100 years ago, hid the cave's continuation until 1986, when cavers managed to dig through the straits where a strong draft was detected.

Immediately after the discovery of the continuation, a strict protection regime of cave exploration was established, which still today preserves the cave in its original form. This preserves the biggest specialty of the cave – its extraordinary variety of speleothems and minerals. The reputation of these underground beauties is still undisputed today, and many special features have been discovered only in this cave.

The cave became widely known after the publication of an article in the magazine National Geographic, and ever since it has been considered the most beauti-

ful cave in the world. In this light, the first books about it were undertaken by the publishing house SpeleoProjects. Three renowned photographers, with the support of numerous assistants, created one of the most beautiful books with descriptor and subtitle, "Jewel of the Underground". It was released in 1991 and is still considered to be a reference issue today. However, in the last 30 years, there have been many new explorations and discoveries in Lechuguilla, and photographic techniques have moved from analog to digital.

The purpose of the new book, "Lechuguilla Cave: Discoveries in a Hidden Splendor", is not to replace the first, but to describe in a new form and in every detail the entirety of nearly 40 years of research, which we have been missing in recent decades. Throughout thirteen chapters, in both text and photographs, the book provides answers to all the questions we can ask about this cave.

With a doctorate in geological sciences, Max's professional background is an excellent basis for detailing the variety of topics covered in the book in a comprehensible way that is also accessible to a wider audience. In addition to the historical themes and survey of cave research, the narrators also present the cave to us from a geological, speleological and biological point of view. The chapters focused on caving are mainly devoted to the organization of demanding cave visits, staying in the cave for several days and dealing with the problems they may encounter. Among the major events was the caving accident in 1991, when a caver broke her leg in a remote part of the cave, and more than 170 cavers and rescuers were

involved in the rescue. A special chapter is also dedicated to photographing the cave, especially to a comparison of photography at the time of the first book and more recently in the age of digital photography. Also shown are lighting methods and examples of tests that illuminate how to make a successful shot.

One of the most important topics covered is definitely the surveying of the cave. The dimensions of the 245-kilometer-long cave are best seen on the 3D map, which reveals on double-foldout pages the incredible branching and complexity of the cave. A special chapter describes in detail the survey methods used, with a bunch of suggestions on making measurements during big cave projects. The book ends with a chapter on cave protection, statistical data, a bibliography, and brief introductions to all of the authors.

There is a considerable probability that you will never visit this cave in your lifetime. Undoubtedly, this book will make that fact a bit easier to accept as you walk through the cave and make your own discoveries through its texts, maps and photographs. "Lechuguilla Cave: Discoveries in a Hidden Splendor" reveals all the secrets of the cave, the answers to which we have not known until now.

The fastest way to get to the book is via the website <https://www.lechuguilla-cave.info/>, where, in addition to informative content about the cave and the book, all bibliographic data and their web links are available. The price of the book is EUR 59.90.

Peter Gedei