

Cienega Valley-Empire Ranch Reserve



Colossal Cave Mountain Park Expansion

Fee lands: 464 acres
Cost: \$2,277,092
Acquired: Between August 13, 1999 and August 7, 2006
Fund: 1997 and 2004 Bond Funds
Partner: Arizona Land and Water Trust

Background

Pima County’s first efforts to conserve Colossal Cave began in 1944, when the County leased almost 500 acres from the State Land Department for purposes of a park. Using 1986 voter-approved bond funds for park land acquisition, the County began to establish the mountain park to protect the cave in 1989 and a Pima County park was formally established in 1992. Acquisitions included the historic Posta Quemada Ranch, which is also the site of a 120-year old stagecoach station. Colossal Cave Mountain Park (CCMP) supports habitat for almost half of the bat species in the State of Arizona, including the endangered Lesser long-nosed bat. CCMP also protects large segments

of lush riparian vegetation along Agua Verde Creek, a major tributary to Cienega Creek.

Using both 1997 and 2004 voter-approved bond funds for open space acquisitions, the County purchased 5 additional properties, expanding upon the Park boundaries and connectivity with the County’s Cienega Creek Natural Preserve.

1997 Open Space Bonds

Akers/Dailey and Bradley Properties:

The Board of Supervisors approved acquisition of the Akers/Dailey parcels totaling 158 acres for \$1,122,720 in August 1999, and the 40-acre Bradley property for \$266,036. The significance of the acquisitions is not only the protection of natural floodplain functions, an Important Riparian Area and wildlife corridor, but also building a link towards the County’s Cienega Creek Natural Preserve, ensuring connectivity between the two areas.

Alpher Property:

In January 2000, the County purchased the 147-acre Alpher property for \$514,412. The property expanded the Park’s eastern boundary, protecting water sources upstream and habitat for the endangered Lesser long-nosed bat.

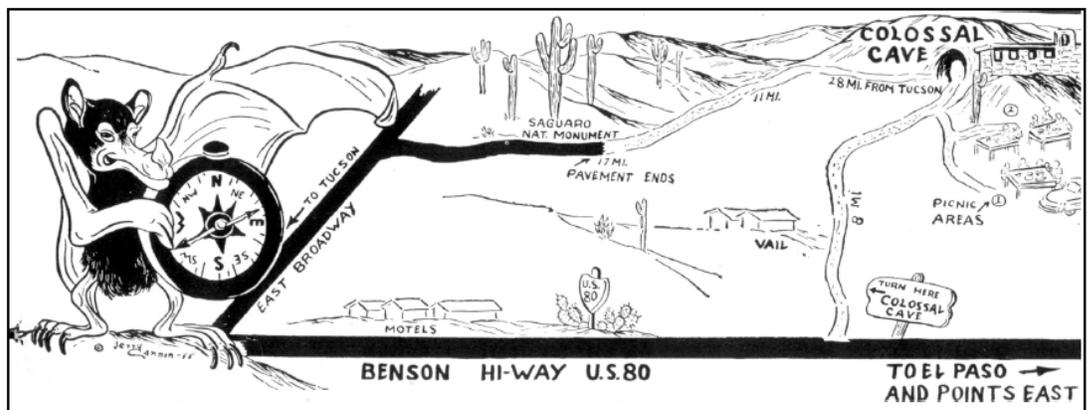
2004 Conservation Bonds

Cates Property:

The County purchased the 39-acre Cates property for \$132,957 in May 2006. The parcel’s location south of CCMP and its proximity to the County’s Baker property acquired for Cienega Creek Natural Preserve, made it a strategic acquisition. It supports habitat for Lesser long-nosed bat and Mexican long-tongued bat.

Knez Property:

The 80-acre Knez property was acquired in August 2006 for \$240,967. This property essentially connected the Cates



The way to Colossal Cave in 1950 according to Arizona Highways

property, expanding conserved lands adjacent to CCMP, and expanding the connection between CCMP and the Cienega Creek Natural Preserve.

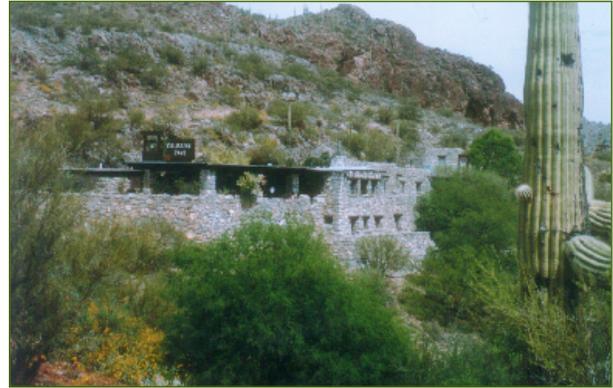
The significance in these acquisitions is the expansion of the link between Colossal Cave Mountain Park and Cienega Creek Natural Preserve.

Management

All of these properties are managed as open space and buffer lands for the larger Colossal Cave Mountain park complex. While they are managed as part of the larger CCMP complex, they are not included as part of the Colossal Cave lease property agreement the County has on management of the cave site and associated public recreation area. At the present time, limited public access exists to the properties and no public use infrastructure is available. The properties are monitored for vandalism or recreational activities resulting in land or watershed degradation.

Recreation

In 2007, Colossal Cave Mountain Park was visited by over 100,000 guests. The portions of the Colossal Cave Mountain Park complex developed for the public allow hiking, equestrian rides, camping, wildlife watching and a caving experience. Currently, the newly acquired properties are used for dispersed hiking and limited equestrian use. The Arizona Trail goes across the Colossal Cave Mountain Park property and crosses the southeastern portions of the properties adjacent to Cienega Creek.



Colossal Cave entrance. Photo by Colossal Cave Mountain Park



Mountain biker in Colossal Cave Mountain Park. Photo by Steve Anderson

Ongoing Property Improvements

- Previous developments and residences on the properties have been removed and the disturbed site footprints are being rehabilitated.
- Water has been provided for wildlife utilizing developed and natural sites.
- Security fencing and gates have been put in and are routinely monitored.
- A 163-acre property acquired by the Bureau of Reclamation adjacent to the Alpher property (Rancho del Cielo) is being managed by the County under a Cooperative Management Agreement. The property supports the wildlife corridor linkages between Colossal Cave Mountain Park and the adjacent National Forest lands.

