



COLOSSAL CAVE MOUNTAIN PARK

Strategic Plan, 2011–2014

Colossal Cave Mountain Park has been a Southern Arizona attraction since 1923. That was the year Frank Schmidt opened the Cave to visitors, taking them through the unimproved passageways with ropes, ladders, and lantern-light. Ladies were advised to wear bloomers for the tour. The Cave has continued to attract visitors from then to now, even during the several-year construction phase in the 1930s when the Civilian Conservation Corps put in the walkways, handrails, and lighting. The CCCs also installed a road, ramadas, and picnic tables in the surrounding 495-acre park, all used and enjoyed to this day. In the 1980s and '90s, the Park expanded to about 2,400 acres, taking in historic La Posta Quemada Ranch to the south of the Cave and adding trail rides, museums, research library, butterfly garden, trails, and more to its amenities. At this time, the Park was named to the National Register of Historic Places as a National Historic District. Pima County and the Pima County Parklands Foundation envisioned that the expanded Colossal Cave Mountain Park would “preserve the ecological, historical, archaeological, and recreational value of the land from the pressures of regional growth and development in the area.”

All this still holds true: we are a force for preservation as well as recreation and education in this region. We have a special and beautiful place under our care, with an enormous amount to offer our guests, something for just about anyone who visits.

Our Mission: Maintaining the unique balance of Colossal Cave Mountain Park—the land, its history, and its ecosystems—for this and future generations.

Our Vision: We will nurture the Park through conservation and responsible range management while presenting its wonders to the public through recreation and education.

Challenges

Growth, both in our neighborhood and in the whole Tucson basin, increases our challenge to preserve the Park's environment—for its own sake and the sake of the region, specifically the Cienega Watershed. The Watershed, which includes the Park, is an enormous wildlife corridor that runs from the Canelo Hills south of Sonoita to the Coronado National Forest Rincon Wilderness. In turn, it is part of an even larger corridor that stretches from Mexico to the Mogollon Rim. The Park's value to the Watershed is clear to us. We are also aware that if development encroaches too closely, the Park will still be valuable in and of itself, but it will lose its regional environmental value. It will be a beautiful artifact.

An extraordinarily difficult challenge has been and continues to be the current economy. This has come on the heels of a number of years of economic struggle that have resulted in an infrastructure in need of upgrades without the resources to do them.

OUR OVERALL OBJECTIVES, 2011–2014

- I. Create a 501(c)(3) for the Park.
- II. Increase awareness about Colossal Cave Mountain Park throughout Arizona, the United States, and beyond, so that Colossal Cave Mountain Park becomes a destination attraction for the region. Although we have concerns about the pressure of growth, we realize that the increasing population also gives opportunities for more people to discover the Park and all it has to offer, and to understand its value.
- III. Increase revenue, year after year; reverse the negative trend by the end of 2012 or before.
- IV. Continue to make improvements in the Park, using funds acquired through increased revenue, grants, bond monies.

The goals and actions listed under the following series of topics are generally presented in priority order.

MARKETING: *Explore new market segments and implement new strategies to make our marketing more effective*

Market Segments

- A. Define segments to target: Hispanics, military, retirees, academia, businesses, cave enthusiasts, tourists, school groups, churches.
- B. Partnerships:
 1. Seek co-ops and cross-promotions with other underground attractions, ranches.
 2. Seek co-ops with hotels, bed & breakfasts, other attractions.

Marketing Strategies

- A. Create an advertising mix: television, radio, Web site, social media, print, other.
 - *This is in process.*
- B. Start a Park e-newsletter.
 - *Ready to launch.*
- C. Revamp the Park Web site.
- D. Increase social media marketing.
- E. Recreate the Annual Pass as a Membership.
- F. Create a user survey with a coupon to collect feedback and database information.

CAVE OPERATION: *Increase the profitability of the Cave operation*

- A. Increase tour ticket prices to \$13.00 for adults and \$6.50 for children.
- B. Continue to increase Adventure Tour business.
- C. Explore and implement on-line ticketing.
 - *Waiting to see if we can be part of the Attractions Alliance package.*
- D. Increase staff engagement with guests, greeting, interpreting the area, and helping with gift shop sales.

RANCH HEADQUARTERS: *Increase the appeal of the Ranch as a destination for our guests when in the Park; increase its profitability*

- A. Revamp Headquarters House flow
 - 1. Consolidate gift shop to two rooms to allow for Desert Spoon seating indoors.
 - *In process.*
 - 2. Revamp museum space to allow for better use of Big Room for meetings.
 - 3. Revamp Ranch Museum displays.
 - 4. Set up a fee schedule for the use of the Park's Archive Collection.

GIFT SHOPS: *Increase the appeal and profitability of Park gift shops*

- A. Carry more items unique/local to region; carry more items with our logo.
- B. Improve signage: identify mineral, origin, other unique characteristics of items.
- C. Train guides about the merchandise, how to sell.
- D. Rotate merchandise to coincide with current season, event, or presentation, especially at the Ranch.
- E. Institute a Web gift shop.

PARK FOOD SERVICE: *Increase the appeal and profitability of Park food service*

- A. Contract entire food service out
 - 1. Create more menu choices, expanded and seasonal menus.
 - 2. Create better signage.
 - *This goal is complete.*
- B. Convert the first room of the gift shop for inside seating for the Desert Spoon.
 - *In process.*
- C. Increase Cowboy Cookouts, parties, weddings, special events.
 - *In process.*

BARBECUE AREA: *Rejuvenate the barbecue area to attract more group parties and weddings* The Barbecue Area, with its big ramada and serving area, is in demand for parties and events, and is in use at least weekly for Cowboy Cookouts following Sunset Trail Rides. This use can be increased with a more attractive, more efficiently designed facility.

- A. Take out the asphalt under the ramada and replace it with a cement slab that continues under the cooking, bar, and serving areas.
 - *The money for this goal is in an earmarked fund held by the Pima County Parklands Foundation.*
- B. Revamp the serving area and replace the bar top.
 - *This goal is finished.*
- C. Finish replacing the fence and gates.
 - *This is in process as an Eagle Scout project. (The replacement of the first section of the fence was also an Eagle Scout project.)*
- D. Put in more native trees; plant native shrubs and vines along the fence line and at the ramada pillars.
- E. Replace the lights under the ramada; put in strand lights at the pillars and roofline.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH: *Utilize the education department more fully for in-house training, outreach, and events*

In-house Training

- A. Do Park orientations immediately upon hiring.
- B. Create more in-depth training for new guides; institute a continuing education series for guides.
- C. Train guides to interpret desert discovery kits for guests waiting for tours.
- D. Train appropriate guides in in-house and outreach presentations.
 - *All four goals are in process or already implemented.*

Outreach

- A. Increase outreach to schools, clubs, assisted living facilities.
- B. Create and distribute a booklet of available outreach programs.
 - *In process.*
- C. Library, school outreach: find or train staff, volunteers to do some of this.
 - *Partially implemented.*

Events

- A. Revamp Sunday in the Park: this includes getting a permanent source of funding, utilizing more staff for presentations, revisiting marketing/advertising.
 - *Partially implemented.*
- B. Revisit Ha:san Bak and possibly reconfigure into a new program.
- C. Remodel and streamline birthday parties; train staff and volunteers to do them.

RANCH HEADQUARTERS OUTDOOR AMENITIES: *Ensure that the outdoor amenities are attractive and educational*

Improve signage overall

This will allow guests to have a clear idea of where they are and what they are seeing, making their experience more enjoyable and educational.

- A. Replace the big sign with an overhead structure like those at the Park and Ranch entries.
 - *We are in line for the donation of poles from TEP for this goal.*
 - 1. Meantime, revamp the existing sign.
 - a. Give it a fresh coat of paint.
 - b. Reorganize the small signs, eliminating unnecessary or confusing ones.
- B. For other sign changes and additions, see individual topics.

Revamp tortoise habitat to make it more interesting for guests

At this point, the tortoise habitat is problematic for guests because the tortoises are so often not in evidence. Either they are hibernating, which they do for about six months of the year, or they are underground out of the heat. The steps described here will make it easier for guests to see the tortoises, and good signage will provide information about desert tortoises and their life cycle even when they can't be seen. In addition, this project will improve the tortoises' diet and involve neighborhood volunteers in their care.

- *All the funds for this objective have come from guest donations: several goals are complete, including raising the height of the habitat wall, which was an Eagle Scout project. All the rest is in process.*
- A. Improve guest education and enjoyment:
 - 1. Install interpretive signs around the perimeter of the habitat: Desert Tortoise physiology, threats facing the species, information about the Park's tortoises.
 - 2. Install mirrors to help guests see the tortoises in dark spots such as under vegetation or inside burrows.

- B. Improve security
 - 1. Increase the height of the habitat wall to deter predators and vandals.
 - 2. Install a motion camera aimed across the habitat to prevent theft and vandalism.
- C. Maintain robust tortoise health
 - 1. Install a motion camera at burrow entrance to monitor our tortoises.
 - 2. Plant more natural forage in the habitat, especially grasses.
 - 3. Develop a scheduled and monitored feeding program.
 - 4. Increase access to the tortoise burrows for physical exams and educational outreach.
- D. Create opportunities for neighborhood and volunteer involvement.
 - 1. Reactivate the Desert Tortoise Helpers Program, which utilizes local volunteers in the care and maintenance of our tortoises and their habitat.

Spruce up Butterfly Demonstration Garden

- A. Create signage explaining the butterfly life cycle and how the garden contributes; include a list of butterfly-attracting plants and how butterflies utilize each kind.
- B. Replace drip system.
 - *This goal has been tapped by a Boy Scout as his Eagle project and includes the donation of additional plants and a bench.*
- C. Have new Analematic Sundial sign made and installed.

Rebuild the gemstone sluice

The gemstone sluice is a popular amenity at the Ranch, and gives guests an idea of how miners sluiced for ore—and it makes money and it's fun for them. However, it is over ten years old and the weather has taken its toll. It needs to be rebuilt with explanatory signage.

- A. Continue partnership with Ace Hardware and the Federal prison to get the sections of the sluice built and installed.
 - *This goal is in process and should be complete by June 1.*
- B. Install an informational sign about what a sluice is and how it is used.

Replace grass in front of Headquarters House

- *This objective is in process.*
- B. Experiment to see if the Bermudagrass is dead.
 - A. If not, apply herbicide.
 - B. Research native mixes, such as buffalograss and grama.

Caboose

The caboose is an intriguing object for visitors and it stands on rails that were on the Southern Pacific line when the train robberies occurred. It would be a wonderful display for guests to walk through and a terrific place for children's birthday parties. However, there is asbestos in the flooring and possibly the ceiling, making it currently unusable.

- A. Revamp or replace signage explaining what a caboose is and how trains fit into the Park's history.
- B. Find and apply for an asbestos abatement grant.
- C. Remove or encapsulate the asbestos.
- D. Restore the interior.