

# THE GIANTS OF JIITA CAVE

## Stalagmites & Columns of Jiita

الأعمدة والصواعد الكلسية الضخمة الموجودة في مغارة جيتا لها ميزتان: أولاً هي شاهد على محطات اكتشاف هذه المغارة وثانياً هي علامات فارقة تتيح للمستكشفين التأكد من مواقعهم خلال عملية الاستكشاف الحولية.

Ces formes géantes de stalagmites et colonnes de carbonate de calcium cristallisé témoignent et tracent les événements historiques qui ont abouti à la découverte et à l'exploration de la grotte de Jiita, et servent toujours de points de référence pour les nouveaux explorateurs et les aventuriers de cette grotte extraordinaire.

FROM THE TIME YOU SET FOOT INTO THE AMAZING CAVE OF JIITA YOU ARE CONFRONTED WITH GIANT CALCITE FIGURES IN THE FORM OF STALAGMITES AND COLUMNS. THOSE GIANT FIGURES HAVE BEEN AND STILL ARE BENCH MARKS FOR DISCOVERERS AND EXPLORES OF THIS AMAZING CAVE. HISTORICALLY CAVERS USED THEM AS REFERENCE POINTS DURING THEIR CAVING ENDEAVORS THAT STARTED AS EARLY AS 1873 AND CONTINUED TILL LATE 70'S. THEY HAVE WELL MARKED THEM ON THEIR MAPS AND CLEARLY DOCUMENTED THEM IN THEIR REPORTS. RECENTLY AFTER THE 1990'S CAVERS USED THEM AS REFERENCE POINTS FOR LOCATING THEMSELVES DURING THEIR LONG VENTURES INTO THIS MARVELOUS CAVE. THIS SHORT SYNTHESIS HIGHLIGHTS SEVEN OF THOSE GIANT FIGURES THAT TAKE THE FORM OF EITHER STALAGMITES OR COLUMNS.

The first of those giants is Maxwell Column located in Salle de Maxwell some 400 meters inside the lower water section of this cave. This calcite monster was named after W.J. Maxwell in 1873. He was the leader of a party of four: D.D. Bliss, W.G. Huxley and R.W. Brigstock who explored the first 800 meters of this cave in year 1873. The leader was part of a group of engineers who were trying to find an exploitation method to bring the water of the dog river (Nahr el Kalib) to Beirut. The following extraction from the report that was written in 1875 by Jas. Robertson unraveled the historical monument.

*"At this time however, an object of imposing grandeur arrested their progress and claimed their admiration. It was an immense column, some fifty feet high... ....A shoal at the base of the column offered a convenient resting place for luncheon, and the leader of the party was compelled, amid ringing cheers, to allow his name to the central attraction of this cave."*

Fig. 1  
The Maxwell's Column.  
(Photo by Marwan Zgheib)

## THE MAXWELL COLUMN



## THE BLISS BOTTLE STALAGMITE (BOUTEILLE DE BLISS)



The second of the giants is the Bliss Bottle stalagmite. This calcite giant foot like stalagmite stands 5 to 6 meters tall in the Pantheon in the middle of the water way approximately 600 m inside the water section of this cave. It was discovered in the 1873 by the same group of four lead by Maxwell and a bottle was placed on top of it by D.D. Bliss, one of the team members. However, the name was given to this growing calcite giant by the Ward and Thompson expedition in 1927 when they discovered a calcified bottle on top of this stalagmite and Ed Thompson a journalist for the Times and Sphere magazine wrote in his report following that expedition:

*"In it is an island, which rises to a peak, icy in pallor and in slipperiness, on whose summit is the bottle containing the names of the first explorers, placed their more than fifty years ago. It stands in an incessant rain and now a solid part of the rock; we could not shake it in the least."*

Since that time the stalagmite was known as the Bliss Bottle Stalagmite. Although the bottle now is totally covered with calcite the stalagmite still bears the name and holds amazing history in it.

Fig. 2  
The Bliss bottle stalagmite.  
(Photo by Johnny Tawik)



The third of those giants is the Crusader Column. This giant 20 meters calcite column greets you at the entrance of the Chaos some 800 m inside the cave. This area was the focus of much exploration during the years before 1940. But it was not been tagged by any name until the 1940's when Le Clan Lyautey reached the Chaos on the way to extend the discoveries in this cave and named it as the Crusader Column. On the rough schematic map of the cave drawn by A. Anavy in 1950 this column is well noted. Although it has been a giant figure in the Chaos that cannot be missed and a station for explores since the time of its discovery it has not been photographed until the 21 century.

Fig. 3  
The Crusader Column.  
(Photo by Issam Bou Jaoude)

## THE CRUSADER COLUMN



## THE OBELISK STALAGMITE (OBELISQUE DE L'AIGLE)



Fig. 4  
The Obelisk stalagmite.  
(Photo by Issam Bou Jaoude)

The fourth of these giants is an eagle shaped calcite stalactite located in the Thompson cavern area of the cave some 2000 m from the entrance of the lower wet section. This stalagmite stands some 15 meters high and was given its name by explorers during the Ward-Thompson's expedition in the year 1927.

Ed. Thompson a journalist for the Times and Sphere magazines joined the 1927 expedition and wrote the following in his report on the expedition:

*"Since we were in the mood of naming, when we held our breath in delight at a snowy pillar, rising 40 feet from a base 30 feet above the stream, Ireland called out, 'I suppose we call this Thompson's Pillar.' 'Carried by acclamation,' he announced, after my generous comrades' agreement. 'No,' said du Bois, a few yards further on. 'Obelisk is a better word.'"*

## GIANT STALAGMITES & COLUMNS IN SALLE DU DOME



Fig. 5  
The three stalagmites that make up 'the Totem' in Salle du Dome.  
(Photo by Sami Karkabi)

Instead of having a single fifth giant in this cave the area located some 3000 meters inside holds a nest of them. This collection of giant calcite figures was named by the 1950 Lebanese explorers led by S. Karkabi as Stalagmites and Columns of the Salle du Dome in relation to the dome shaped chamber they are located in. They vary in diameter but reach heights of more than 15 m.

This group of giants greets you when you enter the Salle du Dome. They signal the start of a series of elongate humongous connected dry chambers that extend some 600m.

This is an extraction from the report written by Issam B. after the 2007 Jiita expedition "One cannot count the number of times members of the SCL have sat down under those giant stalagmites and columns in the Salle du Dome to catch their breath and snake before continuing on their venture into the cave or on their way out. The material left their stands witness of that and it also reminds us on the effect humans have on this fragile environment."



## GIANT STALAGMITES & COLUMNS IN THE PALAIS MILLES ET UNE NUIT

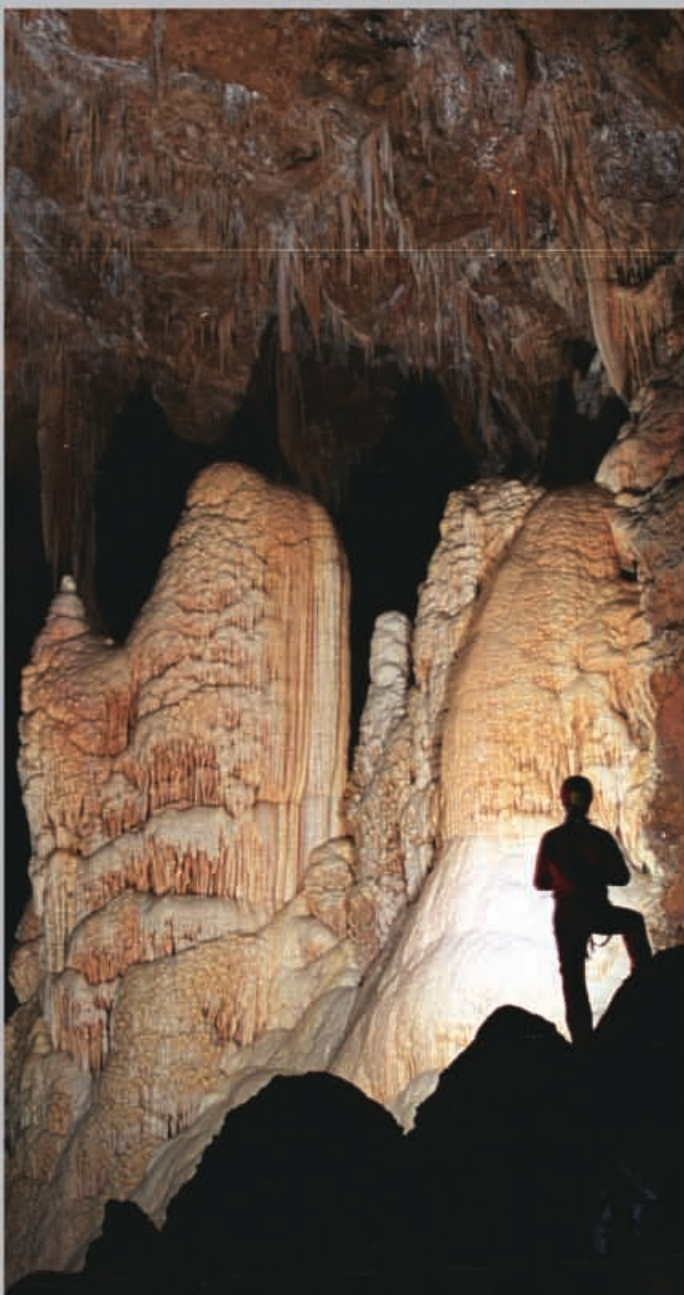


Fig. 6  
Stalagmites at the Palais Milles et Une Nuit.  
(Photo by Issam Bou Jaoude)

Another collection of giants, the stalagmites and columns in the Palais Milles et une Nuit are located some 3300m from the entrance. Those giants are in a room called Palais Milles et une Nuit named by the 1950 Lebanese explorers led by S. Karkabi. Those stalagmites and column stand tall more than 15 meters high sometime touching the roof in an area that is quite rewarding in its beauty. They are the sixth giant group figures inside the cave.

## THE ICING COLUMN



Fig. 7  
Icing Column, Jiita Upper Gallery.  
(Photo by Issam Bou Jaoude)

The seventh of those giant calcite figures is located in the upper dry gallery of Jiita cave. Although when you enter the upper dry cave from the touristic tunnel you are confronted with amazingly large number of beautiful stalagmites and columns, one giant calcite column some 100 meters inside stands out. It is almost 20 meters high and fully decorated with icing shaped calcite features. Although the area was discovered in the late 1960's it has not been given a name until recently in the 21st century when it was nick-named the Icing Column.

### REFERENCES

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- S. Karkabi, 1990. Cinquantenaire de la speleologie Libanese, Al Ouatuat.