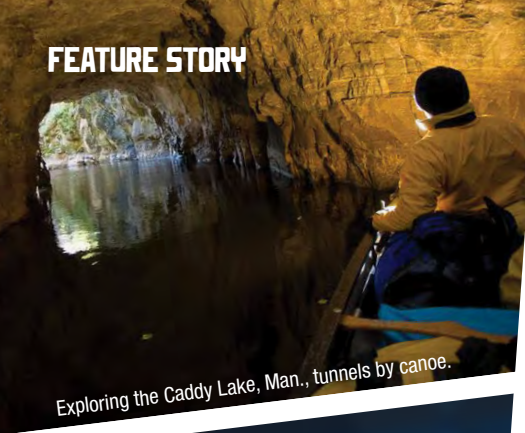
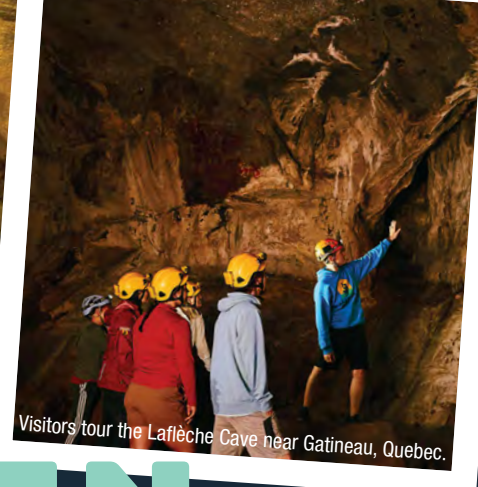


FEATURE STORY



Exploring the Caddy Lake, Man., tunnels by canoe.



Visitors tour the Lafleche Cave near Gatineau, Quebec.

DUG IN

Illustrations by David Namisato

There are interesting caves and pits all over Canada. Some are natural. Others were made by people. All have stories of the past to tell.

STORING FOOD

If you didn't have a freezer, where would you keep food so it didn't spoil? For thousands of years, Inuit in the Far North have known the secret. Toward the end of summer, early Inuit dug into the earth to make natural freezers where they stored fish and meat they had harvested.

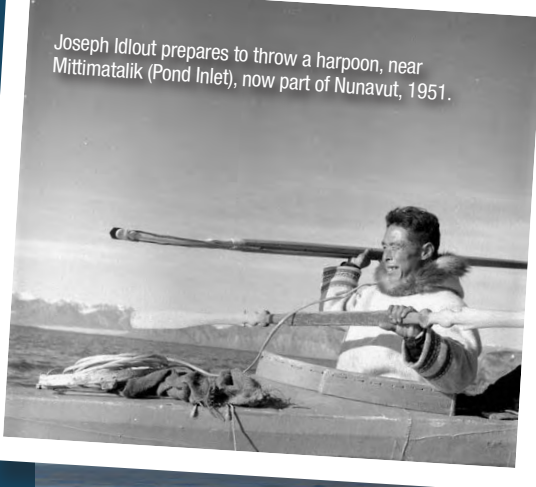


PERMAFROST IS GROUND THAT STAYS FROZEN ALL YEAR ROUND.

At first, families in Tuktoyaktuk, N.W.T., dug their own storage pits in the permafrost, known as ice houses.

In the 1960s, some of Tuktoyaktuk's men hacked and chiselled out an ice house that would be available to everyone. People reach it by going into a small shed and opening a hatch in the floor. Then they climb nearly nine metres down a ladder to an open area underground. Three corridors connect 19 small storage rooms, each with its own number, where families store fish and game over the summer.

Joseph Idlout prepares to throw a harpoon, near Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet), now part of Nunavut, 1951.



Tuktoyaktuk, N.W.T.



A hunter in the Arctic, 2008.



A HOME IN THE GROUND

Many Indigenous peoples created simple dwellings known as pit houses. These were especially common in the area between the Coastal Mountains and the Rocky Mountains in what is now British Columbia. Pit houses were built in sheltered areas for winter use. There were different ways of making them, but the basic design involved digging a pit up to two metres deep and 12 metres across. Poles above the ground were covered with bark, grass or boughs, with the dug-up dirt often packed in on top. The first pit houses were smaller, with dozens built near each other. Later, the houses were made bigger for several families to share. The peoples of this Plateau region used pit houses for more than 3,000 years.

HIDEOUT HOLES

There are lots of tales about outlaws slipping north across the American border to hide in caves in the Big Muddy Badlands of southern Saskatchewan. The most famous one tells of Sam Kelly (also spelled Kelley, also known as Red Nelson, real name Joseph Erving Kelly). Originally from Cape Breton, N.S., he spent the 1890s with an American gang, stealing horses and cattle and robbing trains. He eventually left his life of crime and fled to Alberta to try farming. The Sam Kelly Caves are on private property, but you can visit if you book a tour.

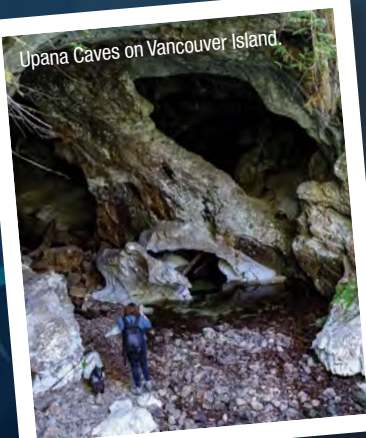


DEEP DISCOVERIES

Caves have long provided ready-made homes for animals and humans. Three small caves in the northern tip of the Yukon hold signs of what are likely the first people to live in what is now Canada. The Bluefish Caves contain animal bones that suggest humans may have lived there 25,000 years ago. Archaeologists also found ancient tools and handprints on the walls of the Rat's Nest Cave near Canmore, Alberta.



Upana Caves on Vancouver Island.



Plants, insects, animals, dirt and more get trapped and preserved in caves over time. From them, scientists can learn what the environment and climate were like. For centuries, non-scientists have also explored caves for fun. This activity used to have the excellent name spelunking but is now usually known as caving.

Canada's national park system started with a cave. Generations of Indigenous people knew about the amazing hot springs before three railway workers stumbled on their location near Banff, Alta., in 1883. The Canadian government took over the site to protect it, and in 1887, created our first national park there. The Cave and Basin National Historic Site is in what's now Banff National Park.

