

Recreation Opportunity Guide



EL CAPITAN CAVE INTERPRETIVE SITE

DESCRIPTION: Free guided tours are offered during summer months to see and experience this magnificent cave. The cave site includes restrooms, two picnic sites, a dock for boaters or float plane arrivals, and a guide station where tour participants receive safety gear and begin their tour.



LOCATION: The cave site may be reached by vehicle, boat, or plane. By road, watch for signs to El Capitan Cave and follow Forest Road 20 to Forest Road 15 and take a left; follow this for a about a mile to the cave parking area. From Thorne Bay, it's an estimated 2.5-hour drive. There is a Forest Service dock for use by boats and planes, but **boats and/or planes cannot be left unattended.**

CAVE ACCESS: The entrance is accessed by a somewhat strenuous 1,100-foot hike up a steep 367-step stairway to an elevation of 250 feet and a platform at the mouth of the cave. About 200 feet inside the cave a steel gate (with bat access) has been installed to prevent vandalism and



inadvertent damage to cave features. Guided cave tours beyond the gate are available in summer months by reservation (contact Thorne Bay Ranger District 907-828-3304).

- **Make reservations at least two days in advance**
- **Tour groups are limited in size to six people**
- **No babies in packs or carriers are allowed, nor children under seven years of age**

SPECIAL FEATURES: From the standpoint of geology and prehistoric interest, the most compelling cave on Prince of Wales island is El Capitan. With more than 13,000 feet of passageways, it is the largest known cave in Alaska and is one of the longest mapped caves in the Americas.

Recent archeological discoveries in El Cap, as the cave is called locally, have stimulated tremendous scientific interest. According to Jim Baichtal, Forest Geologist, in the early 1990s, black bear skeletons were excavated in a newly discovered passage and found to be almost 12,300 years old. These findings suggest that the El Capitan valley was ice-free by at least 12,300 years ago. It was previously believed that ice covered the land to the continent's margin with only peaks higher than 3,000 feet exposed. Discoveries in the caves have spawned subsequent extensive research into the prehistory and paleoecology of southern Southeast Alaska.

PRECAUTIONS:

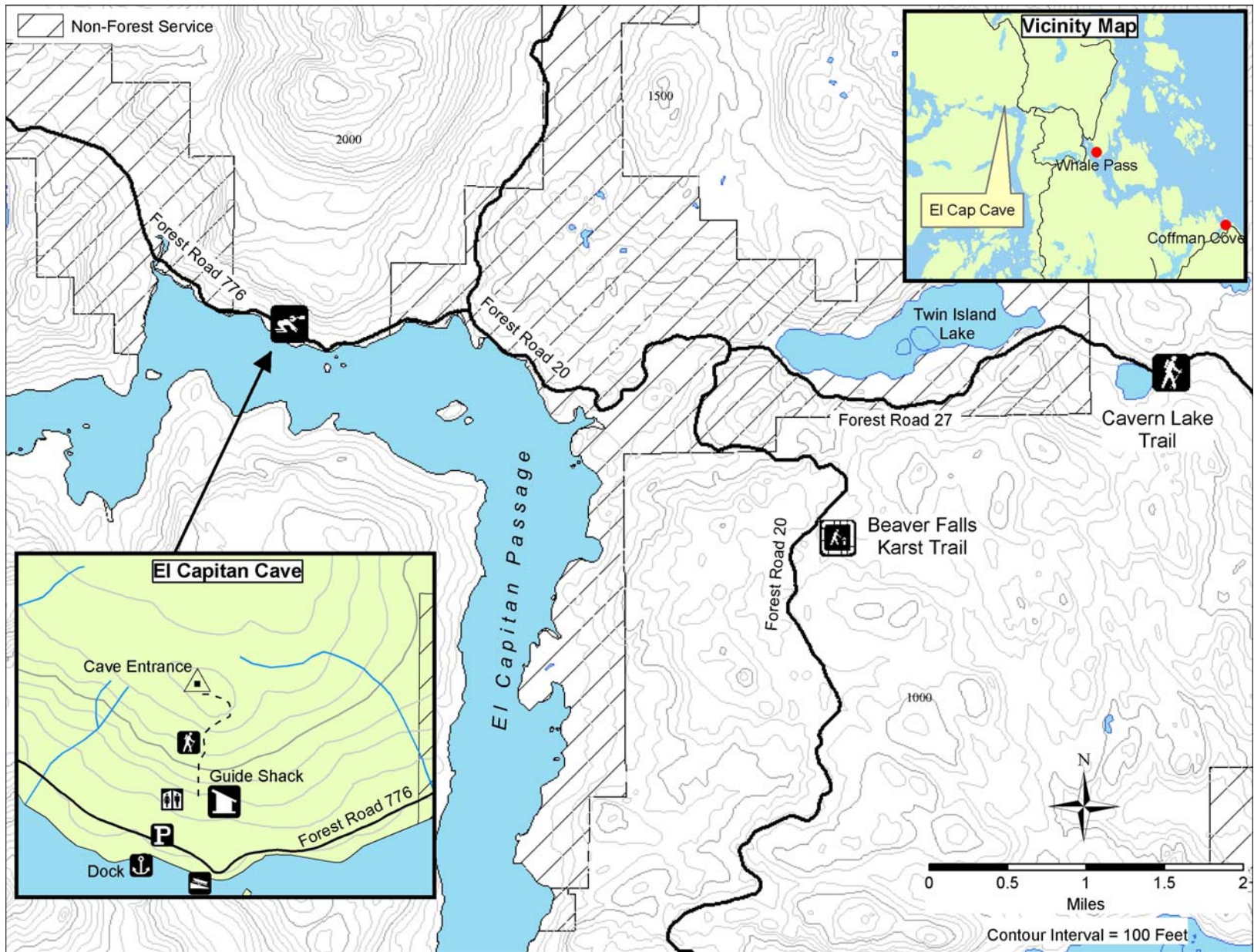
- There are no trails or lighting in the cave. Hazards include low ceilings, pits, and slippery, uneven ground.
- Cave temperature stays a constant chilly 40 degrees
- Wet and muddy conditions are the norm



RECOMMENDED TO BRING:

- ✓ At least one flashlight per person
- ✓ Extra batteries
- ✓ Sturdy footwear
- ✓ Warm clothing and raingear
- ✓ Hard hats are required and are provided at the site by the Forest Service





The Forest Service cannot assure the reliability or suitability of this information for a particular purpose. Original data was compiled from various sources and is the most current data available. Spatial information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This information may be updated, corrected, or otherwise modified without notification. For additional information about this data, contact Tongass National Forest, Thorne Bay Ranger District Office.

Plan ahead and prepare
Pack it in, pack it out
Leave what you find



Minimize campfire impacts
Be considerate of others
Respect wildlife