CAVES, SINKHOLES, AND STREAMS

When viewed from the air, the land surrounding Spring Mill looks more like the surface of a golf ball than the familiar rolling hills of southern Indiana. Round depressions pockmark the surface in a type of topography known as karst—a landscape underlain by limestone where natural sinkholes connect to an underground drainage system.

Donaldson Cave

The stream that exits Donaldson Cave is fed by a sinking stream to the south. Water flows underground through the Twin and Bronson Caves before passing through Donaldson Cave.

Spring-Powered Gristmill

Water from a spring at Hamer Cave flows north into a trellised flume to power the restored gristmill at the Pioneer Village.

Karst Topography

One of the many sinkholes that occur throughout the park, making it a world-class example of karst topography.

Karst Geology

The rich history of Spring Mill State Park is matched by its impressive array of natural features that define the Mitchell Plateau region. Sinkholes, caves, and springs typify the classic karst landscape that formed over millions of years as parts of the limestone bedrock slowly dissolved.
Donaldson Cave System and Hamer Cave

Donaldson Cave and Hamer Cave are two major caves in the park. Located on the southern portion of the loop road, both caves emerge as springs at the head of steep-walled valleys. Their entrances were formed by the collapse of the cavern roof and erosion of fallen debris. It is possible the collapse may have started below the junction of Hamer and Donaldson Branches of Mill Creek. As the water dissolved the rock layers and the caves continued to collapse farther upstream, weathering and surface erosion widened and smoothed out the valleys where the lake and Pioneer Village are located.

To the south along Trail 3, Bronson Cave and Twin Caves exemplify a feature known as a karst window, which forms when a cavern roof collapses and exposes karst groundwater to the surface. Both of these cave entrances provide a glimpse of the stream that flows northwest through Twin Caves and Bronson Cave and exits at Donaldson Cave. You can explore the unique biology that exists underground in Indiana caves on the boat ride at Upper Twin Cave.