



## THE HISTORIC FAIRY CAVES FLOURISHED IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

The Historic Fairy Caves, an attraction within Glenwood Caverns Adventure Park, was a thriving tourist destination in the 1890s, thanks to Charles W. Darrow, a pioneering Glenwood Springs attorney. Darrow and his family homesteaded the top of Iron Mountain, including the cave entrance. Today, visitors can tour Historic Fairy Caves as a part of the Cave Tour. Darrow opened Fairy Caves to visitors in 1895. At that time the known extent of the cave was about 800 feet. Today Glenwood Caverns, including Historic Fairy Caves, has more than 16,000 known feet. When the Fairy Caves opened to the public, visitors could get to the caves by walking up a trail, by riding a horse or burro, or by being transported in style in a horse-drawn carriage. Visitors today to the Historic Fairy Caves travel on the Iron Mountain Tramway.

Darrow installed a pathway up to the cave, and by 1897 Darrow had wires strung up the mountain from the hydroelectric plant in the town of Glenwood Springs. Glenwood Springs was a popular tourist destination during the late 1800s and was one of the first cities in the United States with electric lights. Because of the progressive citizens of Glenwood Springs, Fairy Caves became one of the first caverns in the world to be lit by electricity. Today, visitors can see the holes in the walls of the cave where the electric lights were installed more than a hundred years ago.



In 1897 Darrow blasted a tunnel from the innermost part of the known cave to the open air looking down on the Roaring Fork Valley and the Colorado River. Visitors today can stand on the same platform that Darrow built and named Exclamation Point. Visitors get to this balcony by walking through Historic Fairy Caves and stepping onto an outdoor platform on a steep cliff high up on Iron Mountain. The view is breathtaking and extends for miles both east and west.

The town of Glenwood Springs rapidly developed when the railroad arrived in 1887. The hot springs pool, the *Natatorium*, opened in 1888, and the deluxe Hotel Colorado opened in 1893. The Hot Springs Lodge & Pool is now a year-round destination spa. The Hotel Colorado is a massive structure modeled after the Villa de Medici, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian mansion. This opulent Victorian hotel has hosted many important visitors, including Presidents William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt. Teddy Roosevelt brought a large party to hunt in the woods surrounding Glenwood Springs. According to local legend, Teddy Roosevelt returned from the hunt one day empty-handed. The hotel maids stitched together a small bear from scraps of cloth and presented it to the President to lift his spirits. Thus was born the Teddy Bear, named by a local reporter.

At the time Darrow was developing the site as a tourist destination, the scientific community knew little about the preservation of caves. Unfortunately, when heat and outside air are allowed into a cave as was done with the portion of the cave known as the Fairy Caves, the cave stops growing and living.

Darrow's sons operated the cave until 1917. On the eve of America's entry into World War I, the Darrows closed the caves to the public. The Historic Fairy Caves were closed for 82 years until the Beckleys, using all contemporary scientific cave preservation methods, opened them to the public in 1999. Today's visitors will experience both Historic Fairy Caves and the *living* Glenwood Caverns sections of the cave that have been protected and preserved by the current owners, Steve and Jeanne Beckley. The *living* caves are moist, maintain a constant 52 degrees and continue to grow the stunning crystalline formations. Although the Historic Fairy Caves had been damaged by neglect, since the Beckleys have owned them and applied rigorous preservation methods, they are beginning to grow again.

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- ✓ Two black-and-white historic photos are available to illustrate this information.
- ✓ Acknowledgement for his work and thanks to Jim Nelson, Glenwood Springs historian, author of *Glenwood Caverns and the Historic Fairy Caves*.

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