The Cave of Crystals
BURIED a thousand feet below Mexico’s Naica Mountain, lay a cave filled with crystals. The shiny ice-like beams emerge from all sides of the caves including the floor, making it look spectacular. In 1910, in Naica, a group of miners discovered a cavern beneath the Naica mine workings. It was named the “Cave of Swords”. In April 2000, while miners were excavating a new tunnel, drilling through the Naica fault line, they discovered another cave named the “Cave of Crystals” or “Giant Crystal Cave”.

The Cave of Crystals is a natural marvel in Chihuahua, Mexico known for its extraordinary crystals and their slowest growth rate ever. Some crystals may have taken as much as a million years to form, growing by the width of a hair each century. The largest crystal in the mine is 11 m (36 ft) in length, 4 m (13 ft) in diameter and 55 tons in weight.

The cave is extremely hot, with air temperatures reaching up to 58°C (136°F) with 90 to 99 percent humidity. It is so hot that visitors have to wear protective suits and carry backpacks of ice-cooled air in order to survive for just a few minutes.

The main chamber of the cave houses selenite crystals gypsum, some of the largest natural crystals ever discovered. Geologists report that these natural crystal formations are incredibly complex, yet so simple. The crystals were formed by hydrothermal fluids emanating from the magma chambers below. An underground magma chamber below the cave heated the ground water which was saturated with sulphide ions. Cool oxygenated surface water contacted the mineral saturated heated water, but the two did not mix due to the difference in their densities.

The oxygen slowly diffused into the heated water and oxidised the sulphides into sulphates. The hydrated sulphate gypsum crystallized at an extremely slow rate over the course of at least 500,000 years, forming the enormous crystals found today. The constant presence of water inside the cave gave rise to pillars of crystal beams crossing each other. The crystals are massive but fragile and even a scratch can damage them. The cave has now been fitted with a heavy steel door in order to protect this beautiful wonder.

This subterranean spectacle is undoubtly one of the world’s most incredible displays of natural mineral formations.