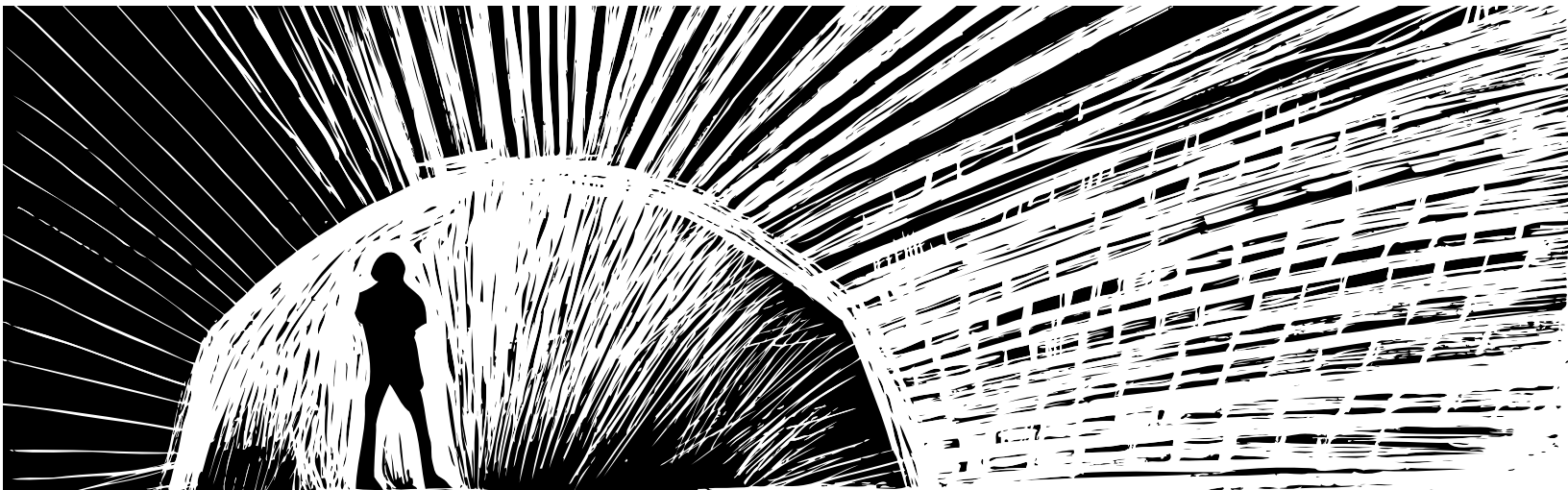
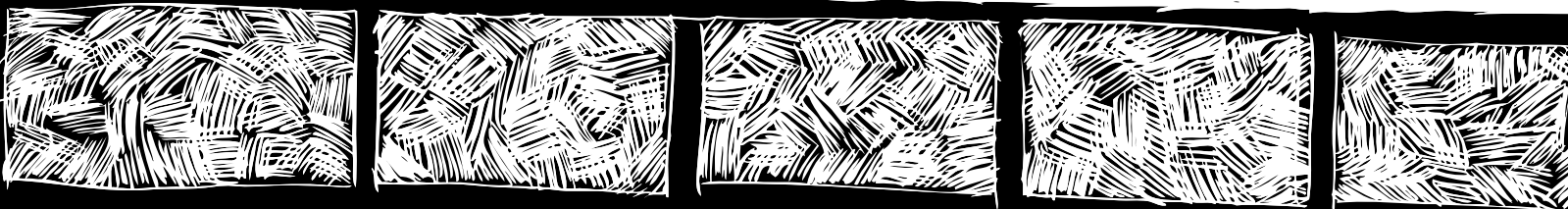


IOWA CITY UNDERGROUND

By Sofie Lie & Lucy McGehee





Following a descent down a narrow ladder, a brick arch marks the entrance to the network of dim, compressed tunnels and caves that can be found far underneath oblivious feet walking to their destinations. Built during the 1850s in Iowa City, these historic networks made from stone and brick are not widely known.

"No one knows about [the tunnels], which makes them so mysterious," Esmé Rummelhart '17, frequent downtown visitor, said. "They're under our city. People walk on top of them every day and probably all the time. They're just down there and nobody knows."

The network, which lies 20-30 feet underground, was built in various ways. The tunnels were constructed with five-foot, hand-cut slabs of stone while the beer caves were made using stone arches and brick ceilings. Architectural historian Marlin Ingalls has been excavating the tunnels and caves underneath Iowa City for years, and has led multiple tours.

"I have been in tunnels and caves from Greece to China to Central America and numerous towns and cities including Iowa City here," Ingalls said. "I like that [the network] is underground, so it's not an easy-access thing."

The network of both tunnels and caves were constructed primarily to be used as part of a sanitary sewage system, but evolved into extra storage room for breweries and restaurants during prohibition-era Iowa, as the caves were the perfect temperature for storing beer, consistently staying 55 degrees throughout the year. Now, there is speculation about the possibility of more public tours of the historic network.

"We live in Iowa City; it

could be pretty educational [to use tunnels to attract tourism]," Rummelhart said. "Potentially, this could be something people will be interested in."

Mark Stevenson is the owner of Decorum, an antique shop just a block away from Brewery Square, where the only accessible entrance to the tunnels resides. Stevenson had the opportunity to tour the tunnels during the October Brew Fest two years ago.

"The place was down [underground], and it's dark all the time. At one time, there was a lot of activity down there," Stevenson said. "It has a lot of potential."

Ingalls agrees that the tunnels and caves could be an opportunity for Iowa City tourism.

"I get asked all the time to do tours of the tunnels," Ingalls said. "Various institutions and organizations are trying to work that into a cultural, architectural tour of Iowa City."

La James International college located in Brewery Square makes use of the network with an elevator leading to a cellar underground. Ingalls believes that the network could be utilized even further.

"This could be linked to historical foods and beer," he said. "I would suspect that would make a lot of money."

However, opening the tunnels and caves to the public comes with drawbacks. Ingalls has experienced firsthand the danger and fear associated with them.

"If you go on the tour of Iowa City's tunnels, you can't be afraid of the dark or confined spaces," Ingalls said. "You have to weigh less than 250 pounds, and be able to ascend and descend a 7 foot ladder."

Ingalls' experiences with tunnels and caves go beyond Iowa City. When sent to investigate a tunnel in Cedar Rapids, he entered the tunnel through a sink-

hole, equipped with an oxygen sensor and infrared cameras.

"I knew I had a 99.9 percent chance of getting out of it, but I will say that I did not like it down [in the tunnel in Cedar Rapids]," Ingalls said. "I felt closed-in and trapped."

Ingalls recalls the feeling when first entering the underground network.

"Just going in [one of the tunnels] and you feel the air blasting, you go, 'Oh, gee, I'm really heading into something,'" Ingalls said.

The 160-year existence of these tunnels continues to intrigue and educate residents. Solving minor drawbacks for safety could lead to another cool (literally) place to visit in Iowa City.

"It's cool to know that you could have had relatives that participated in some way in historical events or historic sights that are here," Rummelhart said. "I think that history is really underrated, and learning about it in ways that are interactive that are around your city is awesome. It's as good as it gets."

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