

# The Washington Post

## Natural treasure: Diggers searching golf course sinkhole for underground caves

March 22, 2016



Although the term “treasure” usually brings to mind images of pirates, gold-filled wooden chests and that one guy on the beach with a metal detector, Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris and his dig team think they may have a different kind of treasure under their feet in Missouri.

Last May, a sinkhole opened up at the golf course at Big Cedar Lodge’s Top of the Rock Ozarks Heritage Preserve after heavy rainfall. Nobody was injured and the initial plan was to fill it up with massive boulders, smooth it over and get back to hacking away on the green. That’s when Morris stepped in.

Morris has something of a fascination with hidden, underground caves in the area — his interest dates back to 1993, when he uncovered a formation described by National Geographic as “an underground chapel” after

five years of searching. After it was noted that water sprung up from Top of the Rock's sinkhole, Morris had the notion that the two could possibly be connected via a long underground cave system, so he and his team stepped in. Per the course's website:

*"A treasure hunt is underway and we hope to one day discover a new natural wonder lying below," said Johnny Morris, who has been overseeing the big dig. "It's been an exciting few months here at Top of the Rock and we hope the best is yet to come."*

Not only did they prevent the filling of the hole, they have expanded the site considerably since its first appearance. The sinkhole is now 12 times larger than it was 10 months ago, as it measures 200 feet wide, 170 feet long and 100 feet deep.

The crew has not found a cavern similar to that which Morris found 23 years ago, but he has been pleased with the work that has gone on so far and will continue the dig in hopes of uncovering the system.

*"I am very excited about our chances to find a great cavern, but whether we find a cave or not, the incredible formations we have already uncovered have made the effort worthwhile," said Morris.*

Despite all the dirt and digging, Top of the Rock is still a functioning golf course and will be holding the PGA Tour's Bass Pro Shops Legends of Golf Tournament later this year.