



Deep beneath the Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico lies a remarkable feature: the world's largest underground lake. Known as Dragon's Breath Cave Lake, it is located about 100 metres below the surface. The lake itself stretches for 4 hectares (about 40,000 square metres) and is estimated to hold more than 4 million cubic metres of water. To put this into perspective, if you filled standard 2-litre bottles, it would take 2 billion bottles to hold all of the water in the lake.

The cave was discovered in 1986 by explorers who noticed warm, humid air rising from cracks in the rock. The name "Dragon's Breath" comes from this hot, misty air. Despite its size, the surface of the water is rarely disturbed. Scientists believe the water remains so calm because the cave is sealed off from wind and weather.

The temperature inside the cavern is a steady 22°C all year round, slightly warmer than the average surface temperature of 18°C in the surrounding desert. The water is also warmer than expected for an underground lake, averaging 24°C. This suggests that heat from deep inside the Earth plays a role in regulating the temperature.

Exploration of the lake is extremely difficult. Only a small area has been mapped so far, because divers must descend through narrow passages. Some of these tunnels are less than 1.5 metres wide, and equipment has to be carefully measured to fit. One diver reported travelling 250 metres before turning back due to lack of oxygen supply.

Scientists are especially interested in the lake because it may contain unique microorganisms. Since sunlight never reaches the water, any life inside must rely on other energy sources. Similar life forms have been found in deep-ocean vents, where organisms survive on minerals instead of sunlight.

Currently, Dragon's Breath Cave Lake is not open to the general public. Only scientists and specially trained cave divers are permitted to enter. Authorities worry that tourism could damage the fragile ecosystem.