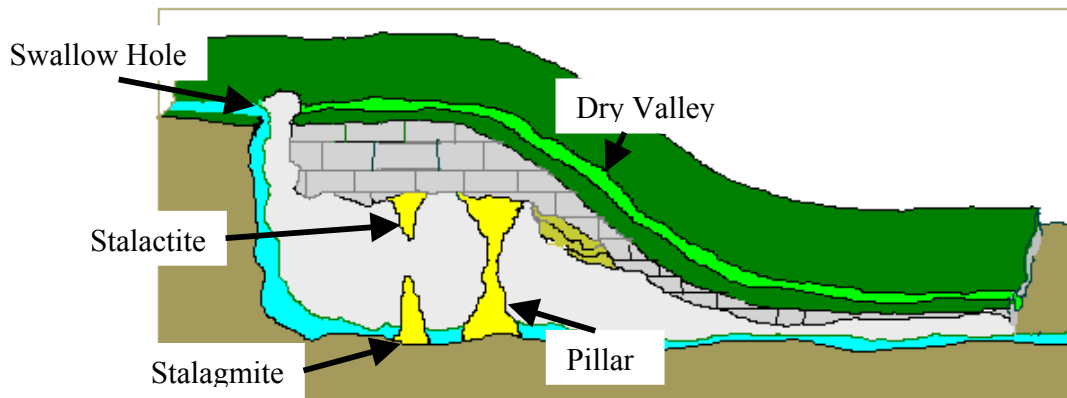


## LIMESTONE CAVES



This diagram shows some of the typical features associated with limestone caves such as the Ailwee Caves in the Burren in North Co.Clare.

Limestone is a soft sedimentary rock. It is made up of the shells of sea creatures. When these creatures died, they fell to the ocean floor. Layer upon layer built up until they were compressed to form rock.

### Swallow Hole

Limestone is easily eroded by the weak acids found in river water. Eventually a river will erode down through the limestone. This creates a **SWALLOW HOLE**. Sometimes a **PLUNGE POOL** is formed where the river meets the floor of the cave.

### Dry Valley

This is the channel that the river once flowed through. Since the valley no longer contains the river water, it is called a **DRY VALLEY**.

### Stalactites and Stalagmites

Limestone is **PERMEABLE**. This means that water can move through the **JOINTS** and **BEDDING PLANES** in the rock. When this happens, drops of water containing dissolved limestone reach the ceiling of the cave. Here the water evaporates leaving the limestone behind. Over a long period of time and icicles of limestone called **STALACTITES** will form on the ceiling.

Sometimes the water drips to the floor of the cave. In this case, mounds of limestone will form to create a **STALAGMITES**. When a both of these join together a **PILLAR** is formed.

### Curtain

Sometimes water containing dissolved limestone will run along the ceiling of the cave creating a limestone **CURTAIN**.

### Did you know?

The international symbol for limestone rock looks like a brick wall. The vertical lines are the joints. The horizontal lines represent bedding planes. Bedding planes are the spaces separating different layers of limestone.

Limestone caves a fascinating and fun to visit. If you visit a cave, do take care. The floor of the cave is often wet and slippery.