

Tales from the depths of Howe Caverns ...

THE TROPICAL REEF



Bryozoans in ceiling

As the marine waters of the stromatolite reef began to deepen as the sea rose or transgressed, a beautiful reef complex developed. The tropical waters were warm, much like those of the Bahamas or Florida Keys - just with fewer evolved species. New life forms took hold in a near-shore environment. The upper Manlius limestone in Howe Caverns has preserved this fossil reef well. Perhaps the best place to see and be surrounded by the reef is in the Vestibule area and just across the bridge leading to the Man Made Tunnel. Here, we can look up and see branched bryozoans (*Monotrypella? arbusculus*) in the ceiling. These moss-like, colonial, animals lived amidst a type of primitive coral or sponge that resembles a cabbage in cross-section - the Stromatoporoids. Some of the very best fossil *Stromatopora* “coral-heads” are just over the bridge going out of the Vestibule. These animals are now extinct.

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