



Photos by Eric Riesch

...the **underside** of a reef

“**THIS IS IT**,” our guide Fritz repeated, in response to my “you’ve-got-to-be-kidding-me” glance. Urging us to take a break from diving Bonaire’s celebrated coral reefs for an excursion to one of the island’s not so famous land caves, Fritz had promised a surprise. A short drive followed by a brisk walk along a narrow, scrub-lined goat path led us to an unimpressive metre-wide hole, from which an aluminium ladder protruded. Peering into the void below, I felt a wee bit of apprehension, and a little naive about what I’d expected.

Inching down the rickety rungs, my husband Ned planted below to steady my descent, I recalled a childhood visit to a commercial Florida cavern with its machine-graded entrance ramp, sturdy handrails, and bright illumination.

Shaky-legged and nervously chattering after my graceless climb, I stopped mid-sentence as Fritz’s torch lit the ceiling, revealing the near flawless relief of an ancient coral reef. The scalloped underside of brain and star corals complete with worm-tubes stared down. Buried under sediment, uplifted over geological time, and slowly leached free of its original limestone underpinnings by seeping water, the dramatic image provided a vivid reminder of Earth’s primal marine heritage. ^{SD}

Anna DeLoach, videographer

