

The intriguing history of the Catacombs of Paris

The Catacombs of Paris is an underground ossuary which was organised in a renovated section of the city's huge network of underground tunnels and caverns in the late 18th century. It became a tourist attraction on small scale from the early 19th before being opened to the public on a regular basis from 1867.

The story of the catacombs is a fascinating one. In the late 17th century most of the cemeteries belonging to Paris' churches were saturated to the point where nearby residents were falling ill with disease, due to the contamination resulting from improper burials and mass open graves. Eventually, after almost a century of ineffective decrees condemning the cemeteries, in the late 18th century it was decided to create three new large scale suburban cemeteries in the disused Parisian quarries and to condemn all the existing cemeteries within the city limits.

One of the main reasons people continue to visit the awe inspiring catacombs is due to the graffiti that has coated the walls of the tunnels since the 18th century, chronicling the intense history of the suburban ossuary. In 1871 communards killed a group of monarchists in one of the chambers, while during the World War II the tunnels were used by Parisian members of the French Resistance. German soldiers also established an underground bunker in the catacombs.

While the catacombs have proved to be a popular and profitable tourist destination, the various tunnels and chambers have long posed a problem for construction in Paris. Quarries sometimes cave in, resulting in a hole in the ground above and causing damage to buildings. To prevent this, IGC, or General Inspection of the Quarries, was established in 1777 by the government in order to monitor the current quarries and prohibit the digging of any new ones. The IGC did dig tunnels of its own, however, in order to monitor and repair the consolidated quarries.

The monitoring work in the Paris catacombs continues to this day. Extra caution must be taken when new construction is attempted due to the plethora of quarries and subway, train and sewer tunnels now in existence, as well as the softness of the stone involved. However, no major problems have occurred in recent times and the catacombs remain a popular Paris tourist destination, with many nearby [hotels in Paris](#) filled with travellers eager to witness the fascinating chambers and tunnels and anxious to learn the history behind them.

About the Author

Victoria Cochrane is a freelance writer for both online and print media. She lives with her husband and son, and enjoys travelling when not writing.

Source: <http://www.tntarticles.com>