

# Shark Bridge East Caverns

This is the smaller of the two groups of caverns set in the sides of the fissure below Shark Bridge, which along with the West Caverns and the three Towers built atop the Bridge itself, form a stronghold for the Kachaya of Ellenge Province. The Shark Bridge area is on the sea-bed some 350 miles (560 kilometres) off the coast of Errynor in northwest Alarius. The East Caverns, like the West ones, lie a little below the base of the great arch supporting the Bridge, so the floor of the Main Entrance (Area 1 on the map) is approximately 50 feet (15 metres) below that arch-base. The Bridge top is *circa* 1,500 ft (460 m) above the Caverns, while the water depth at the Caverns is about 3,150 ft (960 m), thus all here is in perpetual darkness. Sunlight penetrates to only around the upper 660 ft, 200 m, depth of sea water.

Many folk of Ellenge Province elsewhere, if they know of them, tend to refer to the Shark Bridge communities as a single place, though the reality is the two groups of Caverns are more like neighbouring villages, loosely linked by the “military way” of the Bridge and its Towers far above. The line of the Bridge is the most direct route between the Caverns, so does tend to be followed by those less familiar with the area, given the separation between East and West Caverns, and the width of the fissure here, is around 3,000 ft (920 m).

Initially, the various elements of the stronghold were run on purely military lines, and that military aspect remains the more dominant still. However, as the communities have grown and developed, each part has become a little more self-sufficient and independent, seeding and harvesting deep-water corals and other sedentary animals as food, supplemented by hunting nearby for more free-swimming creatures. Spare food is also now starting to be exported, notably to the Province’s capital Ellenge, roughly 20 miles (30 km) along and beyond the fissure line to the south-southwest. Additionally, substantial corundum gemstone deposits have been mined and exported from the West Caverns for some years, with similar deposits, so far on a much smaller scale, having been very recently located in the East Caverns too. These form an important resource for the Province, and a key source of income for the Shark Bridge communities. Although valuable gems like rubies and sapphires are among the kinds recovered, the chief use of the mined corundum is as an abrasive for stone working and carving (only diamond is a harder kind of mineral), since metals like iron, which might be used for such work on land, do not long survive in usable forms beneath the sea. Better-quality corundum gems, once cut, are used in jewellery and as an exchange medium, together with gold. Those from the Shark Bridge Cavern mines are though predominantly of smaller or less perfect forms, which makes them ideal for use as cutting and abrading tools.

The Caverns here are not wholly the creation of the Kachaya. Many areas are at least partly natural, if often with some places cut, enlarged or altered by them. However, other spots remain much as they were found, including the double stone doors that form the main accessway into the East Caverns. Those doors can be physically sealed shut from inside, with their original strong, stone bolts. From outside, the doors are perfectly camouflaged to look like simply part of the normal basalt cliffs, a crafted excellence that on land might well be attributed to Dwarfs, for all Errynor’s seas contain no known ocean-living Dwarven folk now. No clues have ever been found as to who made the doors or first used the Caverns. Whether such folk may have had a link with whatever the Unknown

Something the Kachaya believe may reside deep within the fissure nearby, is equally mysterious. Whatever that is, if real, appears to be held in-check still by some unidentified power. Nothing of this Unknown has been definitely detected within the Caverns. It is however the chief reason the three Watch Towers on Shark Bridge were built.

The map provides a plan view of the East Caverns, the adjoining fragment of the fissure and its cliffs, together with an indication of where the 40 ft (12 m) wide Bridge high above is in relation to the Caverns. Labelled features on the map are detailed below in numerical order, after some further notes regarding the Kachaya.

## **The Kachaya**

The Kachaya are of a generally humanoid form and Human-like size, thus have a body with four limbs and head, all of which are scaled, with hands and feet also similar to those of Humans, but rather larger, with sharp claws instead of nails, and webbing between their fingers and toes. Roughly 1 in 200 is born with four usable arms instead of two; typically, they grow to be taller than the average. Males and females are physically similar, though females are more commonly magically proficient. All have small control fins on their arms, legs and back. Their heads are ruggedly square by Human norms, their faces flattened, with large, dark, forward-facing, fish-like eyes, a mouth full of robust, sharply pointed teeth, and spines around the edges of their faces which can look like horns, partly hence their common name of "Sea Devils". They are all able to breathe freely above or below the water, though they can breathe air for only quite short periods. They prefer to live in deep, quiet waters, which is where they are more liable to be encountered, and hence their own name for themselves of "The Quiet-Water Folk". Their communication is largely telepathic when undersea, within eye-to-eye range (they have a normal vision range even in the darkness of the deepest oceans, albeit seeing only in black-and-white unless some light is present), or vocal speech in air, though they can use either at any time. They have a bioluminescent patch above each eye that they can show or hide at will too, which can be used to communicate over greater distances in the dark. They are also able to use a sonic attack when in water from time to time, over typical hand-to-hand combat distances. Kachaya leaders tend to be physically and/or magically strong individuals, and although they have an aristocracy of sorts, their leaders do not necessarily come from it. Such leaders usually survive only as long as their strength and success lasts. They pair-bond and maintain loose family structures, giving birth to live young that mature to adult forms in 8-10 months, young that are able to feed and look after themselves independently from birth. While social standing can be determined by heredity, aptitude and forcefulness are more important, because although adults can live to be 50 or so, most die younger, often by violence or accidents. (The Kachaya are loosely similar to the Sahuagin of D&D.)

Ordinarily, around 100 Kachaya call the East Caverns home, though the number is variable, as about two-thirds are military personnel, whose duties involve changing stations with crews at the Bridge Watch Towers, and with some of those at West Caverns, or elsewhere on occasion. Transport convoys always involve a military escort, and can depart from here to any number of places within Ellenge Province beyond the Shark Bridge environs too. Most Kachaya are usually armed with at least a simple dagger or short-sword-sized bladed weapon - often used as a tool additionally - while the military troops commonly have one or more extra weapons to-hand, such as spears (with multiple, generally barbed, tips quite often), nets and crossbows. The blades and tips are normally

of sharpened bone or stone, including obsidian, with hafts predominantly of wood or bone. Nets are made from reused rope, or woven from preserved skins and cartilage, and softened bone.

The military, and overall East Caverns leader, is of captain rank, together with a senior priestess, who deals with spiritual and magical matters. As roughly one-third of the population here is involved with agricultural food production, there is also a farming leader based at East Caverns, whose activities include directing agricultural works across all parts of the Shark Bridge settlements, so is of essentially similar standing to the military captain-ranked leaders at Shark Bridge. Each leader has a number of assistants to help them carry out their roles. A small group of miners has recently arrived at East Caverns to investigate the discovery of fresh corundum deposits, similar in nature, if not yet extent, to those found in West Caverns. They come under the direction of the mining leader based at West Caverns, though in day-to-day matters, the East Cavern's Captain is responsible for their welfare.

## **Features of the East Caverns**

**1. Main Entrance:** A pair of double stone doorways, whose doors pivot out of the Caverns, allow access to the complex. The doors are set at the internal floor level. Each is around 12 ft tall (3.7 m). Despite being deep underwater, their design means they can be opened or shut easily by a single humanoid creature of typical Human size. Each pair of doors opens and closes together, even if only one is physically operated. As noted above, they can be firmly closed and bolted shut from inside, while their handles and hinges are accessible only from the interior too. From outside, when shut, it is extremely difficult for those unfamiliar to notice there are doors here at all, albeit the coral growths around and below the level of the doors is a clue that there is something unusual, since few corals are found elsewhere along the fissure's cliffs.

**2. Sharks, Guards & Transport:** This long cave is home to the sharks used for riding and towing cargo sleds by the Kachaya, along with guards on duty by the doors of the Main Entrance. At least four such guards are present here at all times. A series of transport sleds (each symbol on the map indicates places where several are usually stacked, up to 6 or 8 in a pile) are kept here too. Each sled consists of a wood or bone framework strung with netting and cargo ties, designed to hold and transport cargo in containers of various forms. Each can be towed using special harnesses by 4-6 Kachaya or one to two sharks, once loaded. They can be moved at a similar pace to a laden, towed wagon on land. Empty sleds are lightweight and easily moved - even in multiple-sled piles - with little effort, yet remain sturdy. The sled design is such they can still pass through the double doorways when laden and under tow. The sharks swim freely here, and are kept well-fed to avoid "accidents". Normally, there are around 20 to 30 present, or more if a large convoy is being prepared. The cavern is relatively regular in shape and height, clearly crafted to be so in places, probably by whoever built the Main Entrance doors, as the work is distinctly superior to most Kachayan stonework. The ceiling is relatively level, at around 25-30 ft (7.6-9 m) above the lower floor here. Nearer the wall by the fissure, the floor is significantly higher, reducing the headroom to just 15 ft or so (4.6 m). The long, shadowed floor line indicates where the 10 ft (3 m) sheer drop occurs. Two vertical stone-bar portcullises that can be easily raised by hand into the ceiling, prevent the sharks from passing into Area 4 and the long, largely natural, passage to Area 3 and beyond. The

small annexe cave at the southeast corner of this cavern is sometimes used as a rest area, since the narrow entryway is too small for most of the sharks to pass through.

**3. Saddlery:** The long tunnel north from the south end of Area 2 leads to two smaller, irregular caves where a number of large wood and bone containers stand on the floor, holding a variety of shark and Kachayan harnesses for use in towing the cargo sleds in Area 2. Spare materials and tools are kept here as well for making and repairing the harnesses and sleds. Shark harnesses are kept in the more northerly of the pair. When in use, either area may be lit by bioluminescent-liquid lanterns, or bioluminous creatures held in small, netted containers, especially when any fine working is needed. Both caves are roughly 12 ft high (3.7 m), while the passages connecting with them are approximately circular in cross-section, so are generally as high as their mapped widths.

**4. Storage:** A substantial, eclectic collection of storage containers are placed and stacked across the floor of this irregularly-shaped, partly natural, cave. Some have been rescued and reused from shipwrecks, others constructed by the Kachaya from pieces of wood and bone, often strung with netting sides, or with a net door or top. An equal variety of non-food tools and materials are kept mostly in these, although some containers are empty, and some items simply lie on the floor loose. The items are for use either at this settlement or elsewhere. If the latter, they are often packed, or in the process of being so, for export by cargo sled at a future time. The ceiling varies between about 8-18 ft high in parts (2.4-5.5 m), though the floor is relatively level with that in the northeastern corner of the adjoining Area 2 (a stone-bar portcullis that can be raised by-hand into the ceiling at the junction prevents access by any inquisitive sharks). The narrowest part of the northern extension to Area 4 sees the ceiling descend to just 4 ft at its end (1.2 m). Although the Kachaya are unaware of the fact, this more northerly segment of the Storage cave is nearly identical in shape and size to the bulk of Area 5 west of the passage along that cave's eastern side. A very careful examination of the more northerly wall here will reveal extremely ancient, and exceptionally weak, traces of residual magic. Aside from the accessway to Area 2, three open, more-or-less circular-section passages lead away from here, two to the south, one to the east, while a heavily-netted opening leads off the northeastern end into Area 8.

**5. Guards:** Four to six Kachayan guards can be found here most of the time, half resting, half on duty to watch and listen for incursions down the narrow vertical tube that leads up to the surface by the Bridge's top (Area 6). This cave is unusually low, with a maximum floor to ceiling height of only 8 ft (2.4 m); the seemingly natural, western dead-end, narrow passage is even smaller. See Area 4 above for more on this western section's similarity to part of that Storage cave. The walls of the western tip radiate comparably weak, hard to detect, signs of ancient magic too. Roughly circular cross-section passages lead in from the rest of East Caverns to the north, and out south to Area 6. This southern passage leaves by the ceiling of Area 5, and rises steadily (as shown by the arrowed line on the map) to the floor level of Area 6.

**6. Vertical Tunnel to Surface:** A narrow tubular passage, whose width varies remarkably little up its entire length. The tunnel passes vertically through the rocks to the sea-bed's surface a short way southeast of the east end of Shark Bridge, roughly 1,500 ft (460 m) above the East Caverns. It is normally unlit and unoccupied.

**7. Gem Store:** A *circa* 12 ft (3.7 m) high cave holding low, scattered piles of corundum-rich nodules and uncut gemstones, brought here from the new, small Mine (Area 9). This is not an ideal location for such a store, but it was the only free area of suitable size available following the recent discovery that corundum was available here as well as in the West Caverns. Some of the stones were originally from West Caverns, brought here for use as tools, but which have been left in this cave to help train novice miners in what features to look out for. When sorting or packing for export is underway, there are bioluminous lights here. Otherwise the cave is in darkness. Corundum colours include grey, blue (such as gem-grade sapphires), pink to red (rubies), green and yellow to brown. There are too few expert miners available in the West Caverns to spare for working here, beyond short spells for training novices from the East Caverns, so much of the sorting and processing of corundum recovered from here is carried out at West Caverns instead presently. A single opening to the north connects with the circular-section tunnels linking to Areas 4, 8, 11 & 12.

**8. Live Food Store:** This connected group of vertically-enlarged caverns hosts the stock of many types of live sea creatures used as food for the settlement, some kept in netted containers, most left to swim freely until required. Two 10-foot-high (3 m), heavily-netted, round entrances allow access for the Kachaya, nets they can open readily from either side. In the Food Store, the greatest, gradual, floor to ceiling separation is achieved over the regions of darker shading on the map; at maximum, around 30 ft (9 m). One or both of the entrance nets can be removed completely if desired, or moved to block the narrower internal crossways, such as when a major restocking is underway. The narrower places illustrated are of roughly circular cross-section.

**9. Gem Mine:** Recent exploration and fresh tunnelling off the western side of the western Barracks cave (Area 10), part of a move to enlarge the settlement, has led to the discovery of an apparently similar source of corundum to that already heavily exploited in the West Caverns. It is substantially below the general cavern floor levels nearby, with the winding tunnel leading in and down to it having a continuously-increasing height towards the freshly-cut drop-line at the beginning of the Mine itself (indicated by that line, and the area of textured floor to its north on the map). Starting at Cave 10 with a circular cross-section, the passageway to the Mine becomes vertically oval in form, around 25 ft high (7.6 m), by the time it reaches just south of the drop-line. The Mine cave itself has a height of around 20 ft (6 m) north of the drop-line, decreasing to 10 ft (3 m) and less into the cave where the "9" label is on the map. Scatters of loose nodules and uncut gems lie on the floor in patches, awaiting removal to the Gem Store (7). The corundum deposits seem to continue down from the current level, and out beyond the cave's walls. Spoil is removed and laboriously carried off through Areas 10, 11, 4 (by the broader, southern tunnel only) and 2, either to await packing and removal for use in building projects elsewhere, or simply to be dumped into the fissure well to the northwest of the Main Entrance and the line of the Bridge. As with the deposits in the West Caverns, those here are also found within the normal black sea-floor basalt rock. Some of the handful of miners at the East Caverns can be found working in here part of the time, as there are still too few to allow more continuous working as yet. When they are present, there are always bioluminous lamps here, and the area can be noisy and have poor visibility due to fine spoil released into the water by fresh digging.

**10. Barracks:** A linked pair of 15 ft high (4.6 m) caverns form the living quarters for most of the inhabitants of the East Caverns. The western cave is occupied by the military and the few mining personnel, while the agricultural workers use the eastern cave. Southerly passages/accessways connect both with the Armoury (11). A winding passage runs down west from the western Barracks cave to the Mine (9), and a circular-section narrow tunnel leads down from low in the eastern wall of the east cave to Areas 16 & 17. There are always some Kachaya present in both caves, and both are used sometimes when larger community meetings are held for news, orders and instructions to the bulk of the populace. Some bioluminous lighting is apparent in both places most of the time.

**11. Armoury:** Four large “cabinets” made from reused pieces of wood, bone and netting are set on the relatively level floor of this up to 16 ft high (5 m) cave, set back towards the walls to leave a clear “corridor” through the middle, as this area is also part of the settlement’s main thoroughfare. The cabinets hold spare weapons and tools, including those weapon types not carried ordinarily. One contains a small number of spare mining tools. Most of the other tools are for agricultural or craft activities, and quantities of materials suitable for making and repairing all of these, and weapons, are also maintained in the containers. A few Kachaya are likely to be in here, engaged in making or repairing items, much of the time, when there will almost always be some sort of bioluminescent illumination as well. The cave connects to the north with both Barracks’ caves (10), and to the south with the Military and Farm Leaders’ Quarters (13 & 12 respectively). The ceiling lowers to around 12 ft (3.7 m) towards the cave’s southern end.

**12. Farm Leader:** The quarters and office for the Shark Bridge agricultural overseer. A salvaged chest contains tools, regalia and records relating to the various farming duties involved. Most of the agricultural workers are based in East Caverns, but their duties involve helping to grow and provide suitable sedentary animal foods, such as corals and hydrozoans, at and for all parts of the Shark Bridge communities. The Farm Leader is of equivalent rank to the military captains, and in matters pertaining to food production and transport, has the final say. The cave here is around 10 ft high (3 m) at most, connecting with the broad through-way passage for the settlement via an 8 ft (2.4 m) high arch. The Leader and/or one or more senior assistants is present here at all times, and there is almost always some form of bioluminescent light here as well.

**13. Military Leader:** The East Caverns’ captain-ranked military commander’s quarters. This is a smaller cave off the south end of the Armoury (11), accessed by a short, roughly 6 ft diameter (1.8 m), rounded tunnel. The cave is about 9 ft high inside (2.7 m). A chest containing personal effects, records, ceremonial regalia and a pair of magical, metal-bladed, swords is in an alcove at the base of the western wall. The Captain is in charge of all military personnel based here, and is in nominal charge of the few miners as well, in the absence of a dedicated mining leader as yet at East Caverns. As with the Farm Leader in the neighbouring cave, the Captain or at least one senior assistant is likely to be present much of the time, handling administrative tasks. The cave is illuminated by bioluminous lanterns when occupied.

**14. Shrine:** Well-separated from the rest of the caverns here, this area is dedicated to Kachayan religious observances. As both sets of Priests’ Quarters (15) are directly connected to this chamber, it is common for the leading Priestess and one or more of her acolytes to be present in the Shrine cave, when not engaged in other activities elsewhere.

The main focus of the Shrine is a life-sized statue of the main Kachayan military deity Elvass, in the classic upright stance, set on a circular plinth, a creature of Kachayan form holding an offerings bowl at chest height with both hands. Much of the north wall and ceiling is carved with coloured bas-reliefs of many other deities from the pantheon, including a prominent, near-central, depiction of Coraline, a gigantic, free-swimming, polypus deity of oceanic fertility, closely associated with agricultural works. Moves are afoot to have a similarly-sized statue of Coraline to that of Elvass added alongside the Elvass figure, but carved from clear rock crystal (she is envisaged as near-transparent by the Kachaya). This is due to the increasing importance of agriculture to the Shark Bridge communities, and East Caverns especially. It has become a source of some friction with the previously-dominant military here. Some bioluminescent light sources are present in the Shrine almost all the time, more when a major ceremony is in progress. Several non-priestly Kachaya may be here along with the priests at most other times, as it is a particularly quiet, peaceful area.

The whole Shrine area and the passage connecting it to the rest of East Caverns slopes up steadily west to east from the crossway just north of Area 5, as the map-arrow indicates. Although much of the central floor in the Shrine cave itself - for some 10 ft or so (3 m) to either side of the Elvass statue - is fairly level, the remainder of the cave has a clear upslope too. The eastern areas, could they be seen through the intervening rock, are roughly a maximum of 35 ft (11 m) higher than that crossway junction, for instance. Most of the linking passages around and to the Shrine are of approximately circular cross-section. The Shrine cavern itself expands to about 25 ft high (7.6 m) in its central section, however.

**15. Priests' Quarters:** Five priests, including the leading Priestess, share these two caves, the Priestess in the larger of the pair further to the east. Each cave has a salvaged chest containing ritual items, sacred texts and other records, on its floor. Either cave may be occupied by one or more religious staff at any time, though the easternmost is usually only completely empty when a ceremony is underway in the Shrine (14). As noted among the Shrine comments earlier, the whole religious section of the complex slopes up west to east, so the more westerly of this pair of caves is somewhat lower than the eastern one, for all their neighbouring walls may seem almost adjacent on the map. The western cave is roughly as tall as it is wide across its middle, while the naturally-variable ceiling height in the eastern cave reaches a maximum of 12 ft (3.7 m) towards its southern end, though it averages nearer 9 ft (2.7 m) overall. Narrow, near-circular openings give access to each.

**16. Glowing Wall Symbol:** Expansion of the East Caverns remains ongoing, as indicated previously. A few years ago, examinations of the eastern wall of the east Barracks cave (10) led to the discovery of a low, well-concealed, blocked passageway at and below floor level. After opening this up, the very winding, apparently completely natural, series of cavern-passageways that slope continuously downwards to the east was located (Area 17). These passages have a generally upright-oval form, roughly one-and-a-half to twice as high as their mapped widths, expanding in places where fresh caves open out - sometimes with sharp drop-lines, as shown - to between two to three times as tall as they are wide. The western part of this system seems little different to the rest of East Caverns. However, east of Area 16 brings a distinct change, as detailed below (Area 17). At this point, there is a large symbol inscribed into the northern cave wall, which glows with a permanent pale blue bioluminescence. The symbol radiates a definite, but so far indefinable, magical aura, and appears to be of non-Kachayan creation many centuries ago. The appearance of

the symbol is inconstant, and has defied attempts to copy it accurately to date. Subtle shifts occur even if one glances from it only momentarily. Most Kachaya feel at least slightly uncomfortable in its presence, and some, especially non-miners, shun even going close to the entrance to the passage leading here in the Barracks cave, albeit for reasons they cannot define. Attempts by the clergy to identify or remove the symbol magically or physically have as yet proven wholly ineffective.

**17. Inscribed Caves:** The physical nature of this winding, descending series of small caves and its linking passageway were described under Area 16 above. East beyond the glowing wall symbol at Area 16, there are frequent carved inscriptions scattered, liberally in parts, across many of the rock surfaces - floors, walls, ceilings and the sheer faces of the common drop-lines. The pit-like structure just below-left (southwest) of the "17" label has its near-vertical sides especially heavily inscribed. These carvings appear to be primarily texts, cut into the rock in characters quite unrecognisable, and which have yet to prove identifiable or translatable even using magic. Attempts to do so have been few however, as those who have been able to pass beyond the Area 16 symbol repeatedly have found it abnormally hard to concentrate for long within the inscribed caverns. The cause of this is unclear, although a weakly magical aura is apparent in several places. Occasionally some of the inscriptions have the form of geometric shapes, perhaps diagrams or illustrations, none of which appear to be pictorial representations of anything identifiable. The northernmost cave shown on the map has not been fully explored, and it is possible these Inscribed Caves may continue beyond it, perhaps concealed much as was the entrance to these known caves in Area 10.

**18. Bridge (High Above):** This is merely a projection of where the east end of Shark Bridge and its supporting arch are in relation to the Caverns. The top of the Bridge is around 1,500 ft (460 m) above, while the base of the arch is roughly 50 ft (15 m) above the floor of the Main Entrance doorways (1).

**19. Corals:** Realising that natural corals were taking advantage of the Kachayan waste passing out of the Caverns near the Main Entrance doors from soon after the Kachaya took up residence, more have been seeded by the agricultural teams nearby since. Ironically, these have been more successful on Shark Bridge and by the doors to the West Caverns than here so far, probably because both places have greater suitable surface areas closer to where most such coral-food is liable to drift-by or fall. Despite this, several crops have been harvested even by the East Caverns in most years.

**20. Luminous Jellyfish:** Seemingly also attracted by the edible waste generated at the settlement, numbers of bioluminous jellyfish have taken to congregating nearby from time to time as well. Their numbers have increased over time. They are not good to eat, but as they produce a reliable, moderate level of steady illumination, the Kachaya do catch them for use as lights. Although their luminosity fades during longer periods of captivity, if released, they seem to quickly regain their previous lustre. They appear to originate from somewhere deeper in the fissure. A few suspect they may have some connection with the Mysterious Unknown believed to lurk in the fissure's depths too.

**21. Fissure:** The eastern edge of the Clawmark fissure. It drops in a near-vertical cliff to unknown depths below.