

Elphinstone

Text and photos by JP Bresser

Grand Canyon of Southern Egypt

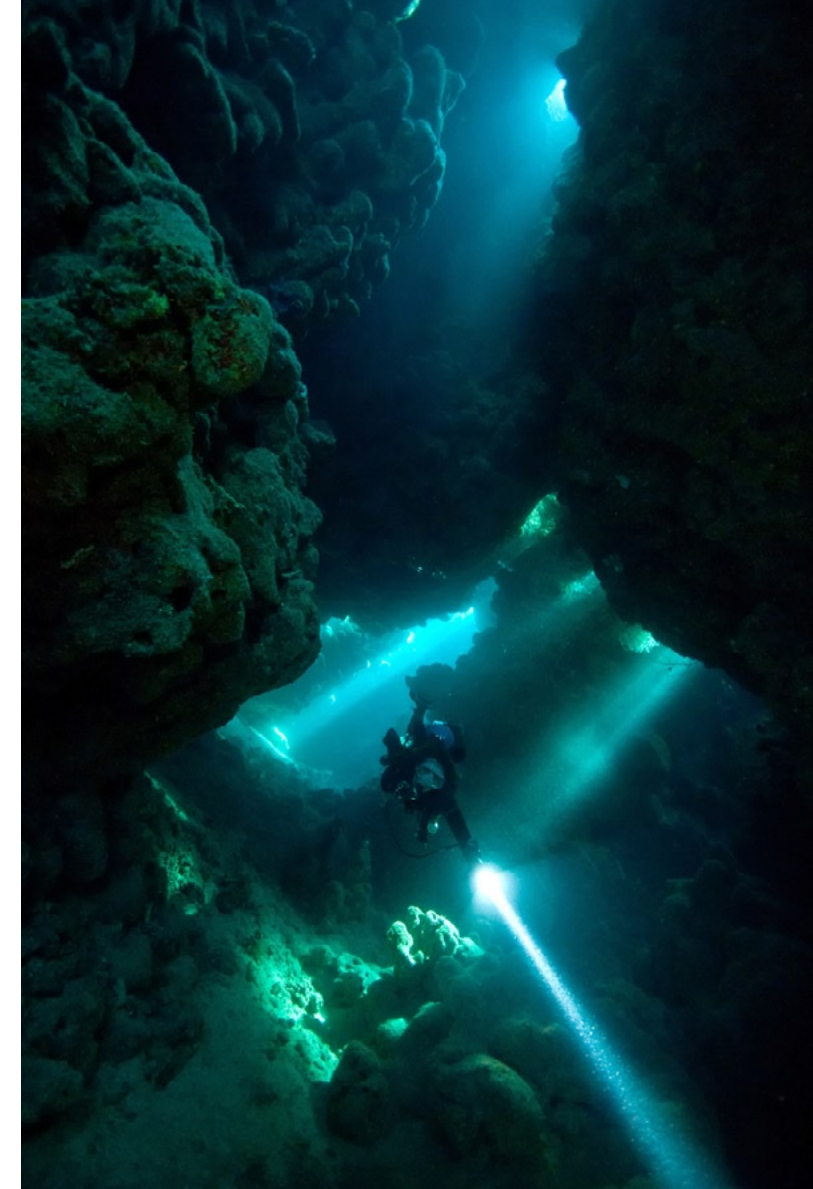
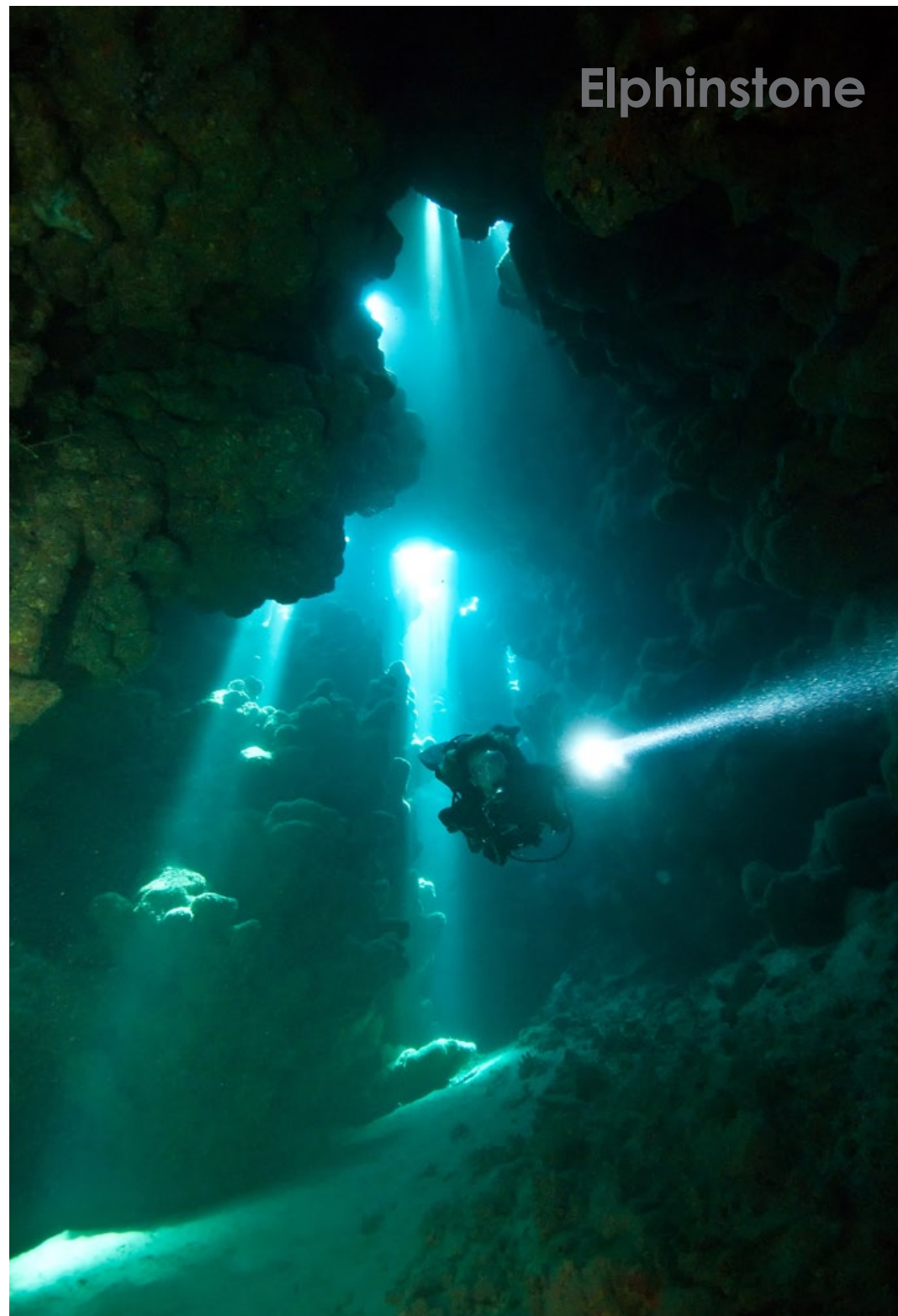


THIS PAGE: Diver entering the secret cave chambers and exploring its "canyons"

We started talking about technical diving and cave diving, and I showed him some of my photographs on the display of my dripping underwater housing. "So, you like caves, eh?" he asked, obviously unaware about my regular sub-terra activities. I decided to keep a low profile and just tell him that I did. He started looking around, moved a little closer while lowering his tone and whispered, "Are you interested in a very special dive?" I almost felt like I was being



It was 6:30 in the morning, and my dive buddy and I were hauling our gear back from the big zodiac speedboat after a thrilling midnight dive on the famous Elphinstone reef in the Red Sea near Marsa Alam, Egypt. While rinsing my gear, Ahmed—the local dive guide—started talking to me because I was diving a back plate, wing and long hose just like him, and he probably felt some kind of connection.



regularly when he was working for another dive center. He told us that he had been keeping it kind of private because it was an easy place to damage and stir up. On rare

of light streaming through, but we decided that this secret site would probably be another silty and sandy cavern area somewhere in the middle of nowhere.

At 8:30 the next morning, we were at the jetty. We got our briefing. The reef was six miles away and two miles out from the coast. It consisted of several connected pool areas. The connections between those pools were sort of like canyons, which could differ in size from really small to ballroom dimensions. Ahmed told us that the tour through the canyons would last at least 45 minutes. My buddy and I looked at each other, imagining what swimming for almost an hour

offered an indecent proposal, but I responded that as an editor for several dive magazines I was always interested in very special dives.

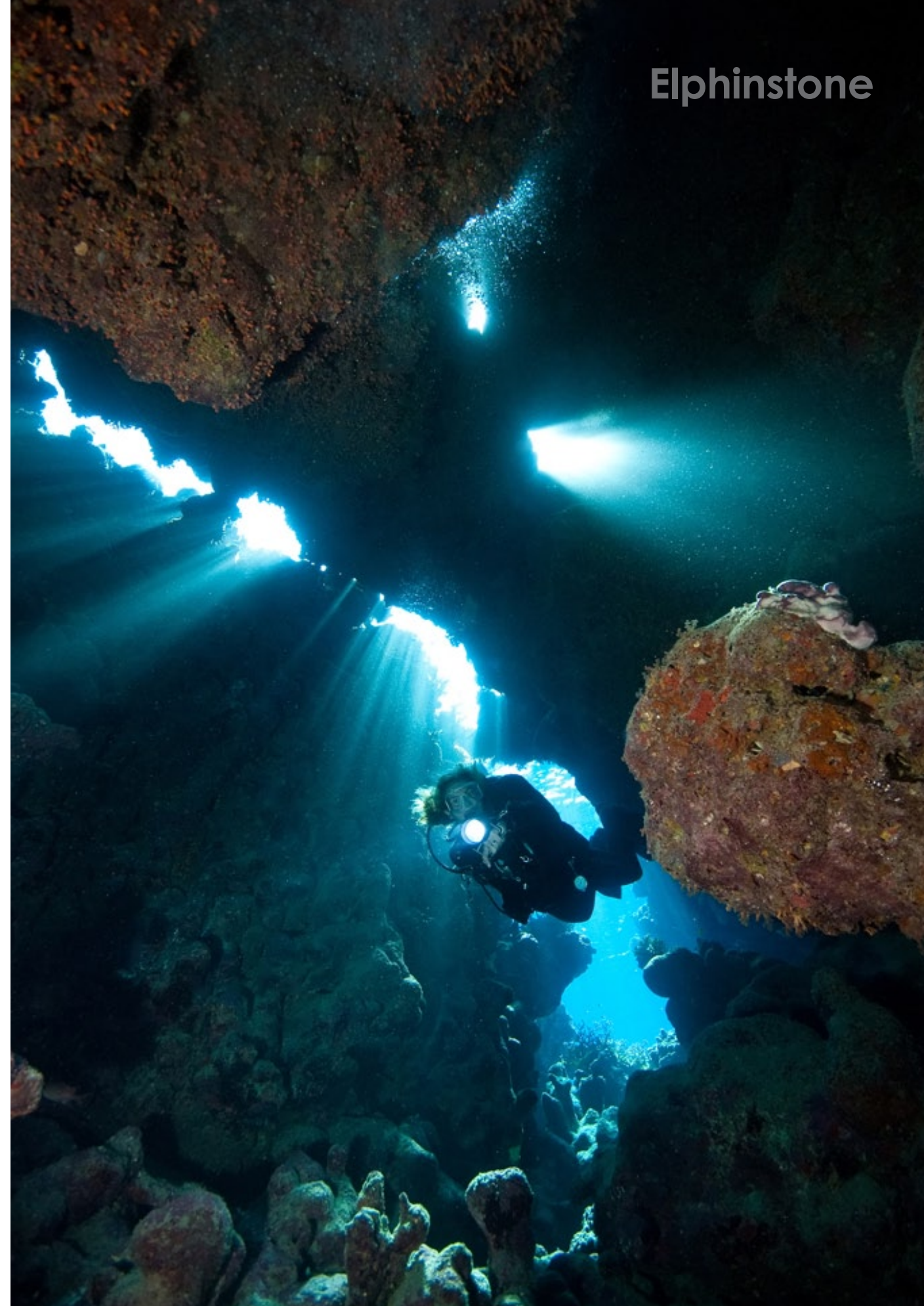
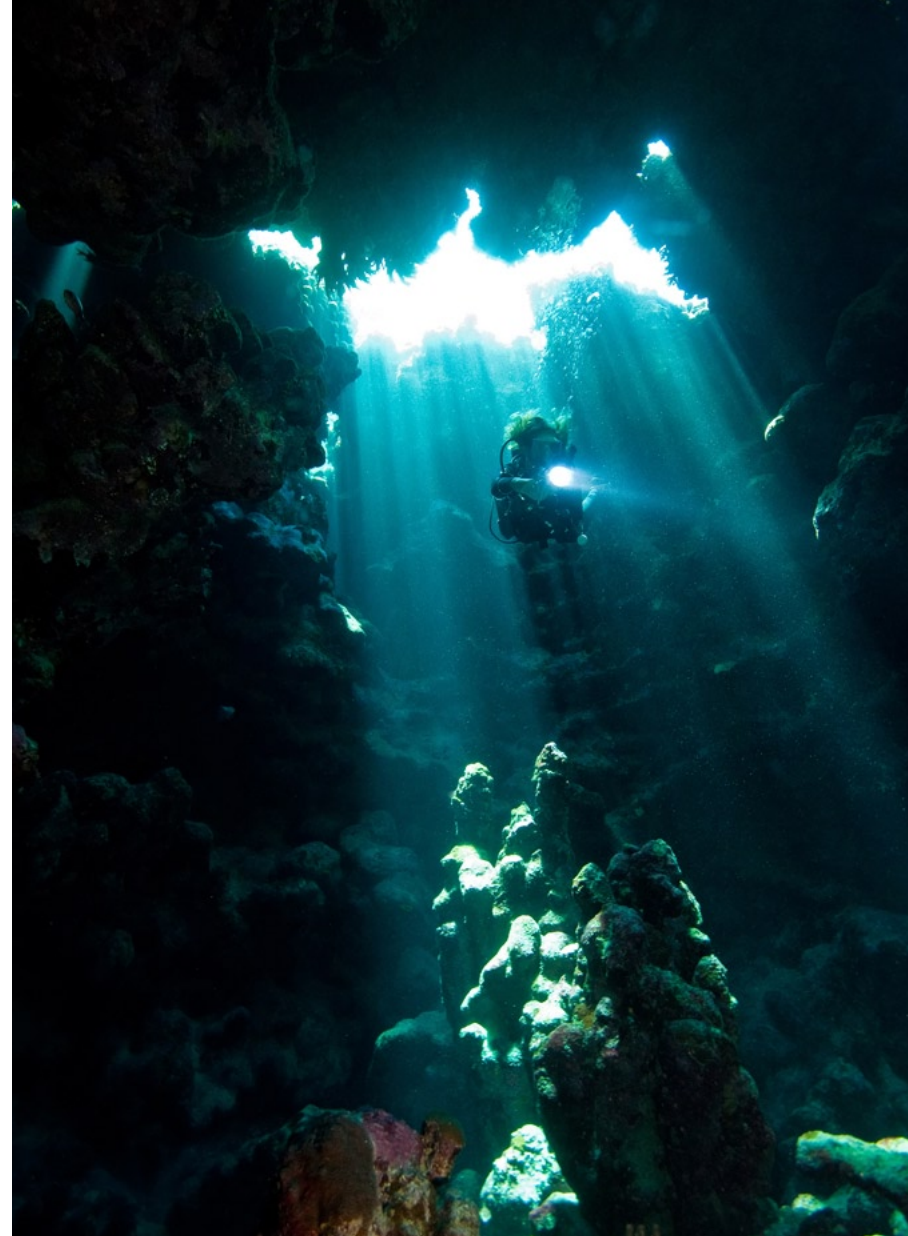
"I will talk to the management and see what I can arrange," whispered Ahmed and walked away in the direction of the dive

manager's office leaving me and my buddy behind with about a 100 questions unanswered.

Later that evening, Ahmed sneaked up to us during our dinner and told us to be at the jetty at 8:30AM the next morning with all our gear assembled. He would take us to an unknown reef he used to dive

occasions, he said he took some very skilled divers out there to amaze and impress them with his secret location, and we were the lucky ones.

As we retired to our lodgings that night, my partner and I talked and fantasized about the dive to come. I already had images of big underwater canyons with radiating beams



through coral canyons would be like.

The very bumpy, high-speed zodiac ride lasted for about 30 minutes when we reached a shallow reef in the middle of the sea. The water was crystal clear, and the submerged reef sparkled with an array of colors. After our checks, we rolled backwards into the warm water of the Red Sea and followed Ahmed through a small entrance into the reef.

The beginning of our little journey was quite restricted, and we took our time working through the small tunnels trying not to touch any part of the environment. Occasionally, Ahmed stopped us and pointed to a corridor, or room, which was of exceptional beauty. I looked for a good position and directed my partner to where I wanted her to position herself as a

model in the next shot.

The light, entering from all sides, was spectacular and a real challenge for me to capture on the CCD (image sensor) of my digital SLR camera. A huge room led into another one, and the light effects were starting to have an almost hallucinating affect upon us. I had flashbacks from my cave dives in Mexico where some of the cenotes offered a similar sensation.

After about an hour of playing hide and seek in the hidden labyrinth, we exited the canyons and swam with our eyes half closed to protect them from the sudden sunlight. We were drifting over a very healthy and pristine coral reef covered with huge shoals of tropical fish. It was the icing on the cake of a magical dive.

Back on board the zodiac, we

thanked Ahmed from the bottom of our hearts for this amazing experience and promised him that we would keep this location a secret.

On one hand, it's a shame that I can't share this location with others. On the other hand, imagine the excitement you will feel if one day you are approached by a dive guide who starts whispering in your ear about a special secret dive. ■

Read the whole story of JP Bresser's trip to southern Egypt in an upcoming edition of X-RAY MAG. Bresser is a Dutch cave diver and member of EKPP—a European cave exploration team. He is also a Technical Course Director for NAUI Netherlands and active as an Instructor for GUE. Find more photographs at: www.jpbbresser.tv

THIS PAGE: Scenes from the secret cave chambers and canyons