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GYPSUM KARST OF THE WORLD

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5.3. Libya.

A remarkable gypsum karst is associated with the Upper Jurassic Bir al Ghanam Format which extends from the Ar Rabitat/Bir area some 100km south-east of Tripoli, to and beyond border with Tunisia. Detailed speleological studies have been carried out by Hungarian spele gists (Kosa, 1980, 1981a, 1981b) on the largest continuous outcrop, which is known as the B Gharam Gypsum. The formation, which is about 400m thick and lies almost horizontally, con of two gypsum members separated by a largely dolomitic member. Both the upper and lo gypsum members are karstified and they host numerous caves. Some 7km of passage has b surveyed, including the longest, Umm al Masabih Cave, with a length of 3,593m. The caves mainly of linear type, carrying ephemeral streams (active during rain generated floods for sev hours a year), and they display vadose morphology. Bedding planes and joints have both h role in passage development. Gypsum layers of various quality, as well as minor intercalation dolomite, clay and marl, influence the shape of passage cross-sections.

Locally, the upper gypsum member is removed by erosion, and the plateau surface compr rock of the more resistant dolomitic member. Underlying caves cause collapse features to d lop, and many of these contain cave entrances and swallets.