

# Leeds Castle Maze & Grotto Guide

The history of mazes and labyrinths stretches over many thousands of years, the first recorded evidence of a Labyrinth can be seen etched in the walls of prehistoric caves in Sardinia. One maze built in the 19th century BC was made up with thousands of rooms and had twelve maze like courtyards within it!

Mazes and labyrinths have been linked with rituals, legends and fairy tales due to their almost mystical properties, Labyrinth designs have also been used as a form of defence against invasion and evil spirits. At one time it was common practice for labyrinthine shapes to be drawn on doorsteps to keep witches at bay!

The best known maze story is that of the Minotaur. In Greek mythology, the Minotaur was a creature with the head of a bull on the body of a man. He was contained, by the Cretan King, Minos, in the centre of the Labyrinth, and fed seven Athenian youths and maidens every nine years.

The hedge maze is a recent development, having begun during Tudor times as low mazes of shrubs or herbs. The maze at Leeds Castle was created in 1987 using 2,400 yew trees. It is set in a square, and yet, when seen from the mound or the air, the pattern is circular, this is unique to Leeds Castle and adds to the difficulty in solving it. The pattern, although resembling in part the Cretan seven ring labyrinth, was designed using a computer programme, enabling the designers to incorporate both a crown and a chalice, two symbols which represent Leeds Castle.

The grotto and tunnel exit are the prize for solving the Leeds Castle maze, and is believed to be a unique combination in the world of mazes and labyrinths. Most grottos have a classical theme, and this one is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which is a series of tales dealing with mythological, legendary and historical figures, expressed by the instability of nature. Metamorphosis means dramatic change. This means you are going to see some unexpected and unusual things down below! Try to walk through slowly, paying attention to the floor, walls and not forgetting the ceiling!

Inside the entrance are some lines from a famous poem called 'The Ancient Mariner' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.....

*The fair breeze blew,  
The white foam flew  
The furrow followed free,  
We were the first  
That ever burst,  
Into that silent sea.*

One whole wall is taken up by the face of Typhoeus, who in Greek mythology was a giant with 100 heads, fearful eyes and a terrifying voice. Looking up, just below the skylight, one can see rectangular inset panels, revealing two of the Leeds Castle symbols – the black and white swans that live on the Castle moat.

There are many natural materials used to tell the stories in the grotto, including stones, shells, lava, agates, wood and bones. Just before you arrive at the exit, you will see birds on the floor; fish on the ceiling and fake tree roots on the walls, one with a snake wrapped around it.

At the end is the Hermit's cave, which was originally empty, as it referred to Ovid, who ended his life in exile. The cave is now occupied by the Green Man, an addition in the late nineties.



# Leeds Castle Maze & Grotto Quiz

Having read the guide, and visited the maze and grotto, how much do you remember?

1. In which country was the first recorded evidence of a Labyrinth found?

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2. Where were labyrinthine shapes drawn to keep witches away?

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3. The Minotaur had the body of a man, but the head of what?

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4. What was the name of the Cretan King?

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5. In what year was the Leeds Castle maze created?

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6. How many yew trees were used?

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7. From which poem are the lines in the grotto taken?

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8. What is the name of the Greek mythological monster carved in the rock?

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9. The grotto was created using many different materials. Which of them did you see?

Shells  Flints  Wood  Stones  Bones

10. The average time taken to complete the maze is 20 minutes. How long did it take you?

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We hope that you enjoyed your time in the maze & grotto. You can upload your photos and videos to our Facebook page or Tweet them to us @leedscastleuk.

