

52  
THE JOURNAL OF

# Spelean History

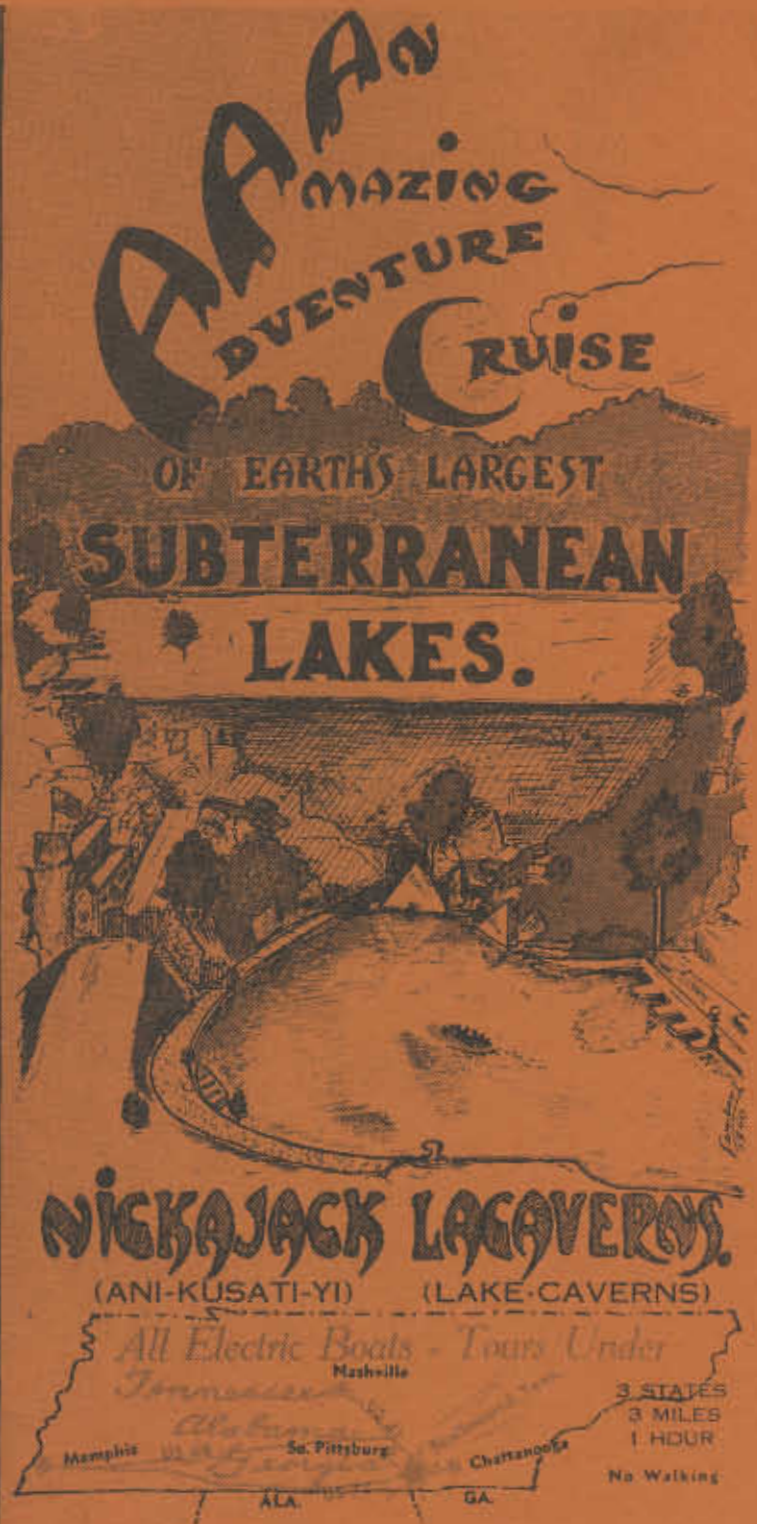
OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN SPELEAN HISTORY ASSOCIATION



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THE ASSOCIATION

The American Spelean History Association is chartered as a non-profit corporation for the study, dissemination, and interpretation of spelean history and related purposes. All persons who are interested in those goals are cordially invited to become members. Annual membership is \$5.00; family membership is \$6.00; and library subscriptions are \$4.00. ASHA is the official history section of the National Speleological Society.

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FRONT COVER:

Two rare, ex-commercial cave brochures from the collection of Gary K. Soule.

BACK COVER:

Hand bill from the Louise Chapman Holland Collection.

\* \* \* \*

Officers

President: Joel M. Sneed, 4300 Maner St., Smyrna, Georgia 30080

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THE JOURNAL

The Association publishes the Journal of Spelean History on a quarterly basis. Pertinent articles or reprints are welcomed. Manuscripts should be typed and double-spaced. Submission of rough drafts for preliminary editing is encouraged. Illustrations require special handling and arrangements should be made with the editor in advance. Photos and illustrations will be returned upon request.

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BACK ISSUES

All copies of back issues of the Journal are presently available. Early issues are photocopied. Send requests to Jack H. Speece (address given below, with officers). Indexes are also available for Volumes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. All issues of Volumes 1-7:2 are available on Microfiche from Kraus Reprint Company, Route 100, Millwood, New York 10546.

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Official Quarterly Publication of  
AMERICAN SPELEAN HISTORY ASSOCIATION  
History Section  
National Speleological Society

Journal Staff

Editor: Marion O. Smith, P. O. Box 8276, UT Station, Knoxville, Tennessee 37996.

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## ASHA 1981-1982

Due to a lack of membership attending the NSS Convention in Bend, Oregon, the annual ASHA meeting was canceled June 29, 1982. Mail ballots were sent out to elect trustees with the following results: Russell Gurnee (30), Jack Speece (32), Harold Meloy (30), Joel Sneed (29), and Paul Damon (25). One vote each was received for William Halliday, Larry O. Blair, Emily Mobley, and Marion O. Smith. At a special trustee's meeting held at the Old Timer's Reunion, Bowden, West Virginia, on September 4, 1982, the following officers were appointed:

President	Joel M. Sneed
1st Vice President	Larry O. Blair
2nd Vice President	Cato Holler
Secretary-Treasurer	Jack Speece

The officers will be responsible for obtaining a sufficient editorial staff to bring the Journal up to date, hopefully within the next year.

### FINANCIAL STATEMENT AUGUST 1, 1982

Balance August 1, 1982 . .	\$146.48	Expenses	
Income		Vol. 14, No. 3/4	100.00
Dues	230.88	Vol. 15, No. 2	85.00
Subscriptions	4.00	Vol. 15, No. 3/4	162.00
Back Issues	59.00	Bank Charge	5.00
Interest	9.37	Postage	16.85
Contributions	20.00		
	<u>\$323.25</u>		
	\$469.73		\$368.85
Balance August 1, 1982 . .	\$100.88		

### PETER M. HAUER AWARD

The fourth annual Peter M. Hauer Award for Spelean History was presented at the 1982 NSS Convention banquet at Bend, Oregon, to Joel M. Sneed. Joel has been quite active in ASHA since he joined in 1978. He has produced several special issues of The Journal of Spelean History. Currently he is researching deposits in Kingston Saltpetre Cave, Sequoyah Caverns, Big Bone Cave, and Ruby Falls. These projects will be described in future issues of the NSS NEWS. Joel has also shared in the responsibilities of many TAG events and in the NSS Office expansion program.

### 1982 HISTORY SESSION

The annual cave history session was held at the thirty-ninth NSS Convention June 29, 1982, in room A-7 at Mountain View High School, Bend, Oregon. A cave history field trip of the area was conducted the day before by Jim and Libby Nieland. Because of low ASHA attendance, the history session was combined with the social science session under the direction of George N. Huppert. The following paper, entitled "The Foundings of the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias," was presented by John M. Wilson:

After discussing several alternatives, the members of the Virginia Cave Commission founded the Conservancy on April 13, 1980, at a meeting in Richmond, Virginia. The Conservancy plans to make the cave ownership and control approach one of its top priorities. There is clearly a need to face the fact that many past attempts to save the caves were inadequate, both in the effort and resources

applied to the task. Most fund-raising efforts did not raise anywhere near enough money to significantly attack the problem of cave conservation. The Conservancy is an organized attempt to deal with these and many other problems. Some of the projects the Conservancy has undertaken to date are:

- 1) The establishment of a \$500 reward fund for information leading to the conviction of cave vandals under the Virginia Cave Protection Acts or equivalent laws in West Virginia and Maryland.
- 2) Establishment of plans with the Richmond Area Speleological society (RASS) for fund-raising through Bingo.
- 3) Support gating projects in cooperation with other groups such as that recently carried out for Unthanks Cave in Lee County, Virginia, and jointly manage that cave with the Cave Conservancy Institute (CCI).
- 4) Work with the West Virginia Chapter of the Nature Conservancy in managing General Davis Cave.
- 5) Establishment of a management plan for Madison and Fountain Caves.
- 6) The Conservancy was in the forefront of efforts to obtain conservation easement legislation in Virginia.
- 7) Advice to Town of Grottoes on the hazards of the construction of a water tower above Grand Caverns.
- 8) Work to obtain a stronger Cave Protection Act in Virginia.



#### MAMMOTH CAVE CLIPPINGS

A young lady having promised her grandma that she would never marry a certain fellow "on the face of the earth," repaired with him, after the old lady's death, to the Mammoth Cave, in Kentucky, and was married under ground.

Nashville Daily Press and Times, July 23, 1866.

**MAMMOTH CAVE--RATES AND REDUCTIONS.**--Single excursion tickets to the Mammoth Cave are now being sold by the Louisville and Nashville railroad at \$11.75. To parties of fifteen or over, tickets are issued at \$8.75 each, and a deduction of twenty-five per cent is made from the admittance fee to the cave and from regular rates charged transient visitors at the hotel. Parties of twenty-five or over can procure tickets at \$7.50 each, and a deduction of forty per cent is made from the admittance fee and twenty-five per cent from the hotel charges.

Nashville Union and American, July 21, 1867.

The Mammoth Cave of Kentucky is for sale at \$500,000.

Gallatin [Tenn.] Examiner, January 13, 1872.

LOUISVILLE, Oct. 27.--A special to the Courier Journal from Cave City, Ky., states that a difficulty occurred to-day between D. L. Graves, the proprietor of the Mammoth Cave Hotel, and E. Wilcoxon, an agent for the cave, in which pistols were used and several shots fired by both parties. Graves received a wound in the bowels which it is thought will prove fatal, Wilcoxon is unhurt. The cave guides and others witnessed the shooting, but were unable to prevent it.

Nashville Union and American, October 28, 1873.

A PORTION of the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky is hereafter to be used for the purpose of raising mushrooms, an enterprising Frenchman having suggested the idea to the manager of the property.

Kingston [Tenn.] Weekly Cyclone, October 8, 1881.

## PRESERVATION PROPOSAL: UNITED STATES EX-COMMERCIAL CAVE BROCHURES

Gary K. Soule

On Wednesday, June 29, 1983, during the noon luncheon at Davis and Elkins College, the regular meeting of the American Spelean History Association was called to order. It was part of the activities of the 1983 NSS Convention held at Elkins, West Virginia. Among the various things discussed was my desire to see some type of systematic cataloging of ex-commercial show cave brochures with a goal of eventually collating the various collections and producing some sort of publication available to all. As a result, I was asked to write the following article for this journal, expressing my ideas and thoughts on the subject and at the same time list what I have available in my own extensive collection of ex-commercial show cave brochures.

Just today, as I write this article, I received the July, 1983, NSS NEWS. Once again, I read where another NSS member has LOST EVERYTHING due to a disastrous fire. On page 202 it reports that Roy Powers of Duffield, Virginia, lost 3,500 caving slides alone in the April 2 fire! These slides were taken over a thirty year period! Also lost was an extensive collection of caving memorabilia and equipment.

It is well known among cave historians and others that both Bob Liebman and Russ Gurnee previously had major fires as well, that resulted in the loss of a significant amount of printed cave material, some of it being quite historical in nature. With this latest fire, it becomes even more imperative that an organized effort be made to minimize the potential future losses due to fire, floods, death of the collector, etc., by trying to disseminate the existing material in the form of a widely distributed book, available to all cavers.

One widely discussed subject was that of ex-commercial cave brochures. Ideally it would be nice to reproduce brochures, even if just in a cheaper black and white booklet format, on ALL show caves, but the sheer numbers would be staggering, and the cost prohibitive. In terms of the caves represented, not to mention the numerous different types on each cave, I personally have a total of 258 U.S. caves represented, and on a world wide basis, the number would climb to 405 different caves! So much for that.

So if the project were scaled down to the rare ex-commercial brochures on U. S. caves, it might be more manageable, and from a historical viewpoint, prove to be extremely interesting. What would be nice is:

1. If every person who has any brochures on ex-commercial caves would carefully review the following list and then note if:
  - A. they have an actual brochure, or even a photocopy, of a natural U.S. ex-commercial cave not listed; or
  - B. have an actual brochure and not a photocopy if only a photocopy is noted for a certain cave on my list.
2. This information could then be sent or called into some central location or clearing house. (I would be willing to serve in this capacity, or others could send the information to the Journal of Spelean History so all members could see in print what progress, if any, is being made.)

3. Finally, a single person, or ideally, a small group of cave historians could communicate and determine just what ex-commercial caves should be represented and if any variations in types should also be printed. Then a master list of where all the originals exist should be made up, and the appropriate people contacted. This should be done by the main printer so all interested parties could take whatever rare brochures they have to local printing firms and carefully have each side of the brochure photographed. This would avoid any damage or possible loss in the mails, or possible misplacement at the central printing location. All that would be sent would be the negatives of the brochures, and the printing bills would be passed on to ASHA. The final product should be priced high enough to cover all production costs, yet hopefully low enough to make it available to as many cavers was possible.

Maybe the cost would be prohibitive, I do not know. The proposal contained within this article is merely for open discussion at this time.

As an added incentive to instill in cavers, or even non-cavers, the desire to come forward with, or else look for these long lost brochures, each brochure or booklet page should state the source of the original, or at least the photocopy, if no original can be found. Obviously, originals reproduce better than photocopies, so this is why the strong emphasis exists towards originals. I am not ruling out photocopies as a last resort at this point, however.

If some people prefer to send the brochure directly to the main printer instead of carefully doing it in their own respective areas, the brochures should be between cardboard and sent by registered mail to insure proper delivery.

It amazes me how I am always finding more ex-commercial caves I do not have brochures on, and if we do not attempt to do something like this now, eventually we will find that these brochures will all disappear forever. This publication could then be sold as a special issue of The Journal of Spelean History, or as a regular publication through Speleobooks or the NSS Office, or both.

Following is a listing of some fifty-three different ex-commercial caves I have brochures on, which should serve as a major focal point to start with. So as not to have anyone misconstrue this list, a few of these brochures resemble "ads," while a few others are in a larger type format or resemble fact sheets. I have more than one type of brochure on a number of these ex-commercial caves. The vast majority are true, vertical format brochures, and if I have only a photocopy, it is noted as well. (Better a photocopy than nothing, and this goes for any ex-commercial caves you might have that are not listed here, too!) A few of these caves operated up to very recently, but now appear to have closed for good. Historic Great Onyx Cave in Kentucky is once again open for a limited number of tours courtesy of the National Park Service, but still should be included in any such proposed book.

Please report any changes to this author, as even the status of these

caves change from time to time. I might point out that the May, 1976, NSS NEWS contained an extensive listing, unfortunately now out of date, of both current and ex-commercial caves that might be of considerable help in seeking out from your collection or those of friends, what may, or may not, exist. Former show cave owners, managers, close neighbors to the cave, tourist bureaus, and libraries are all good starting sources to trace old brochures so they can at least be copied and preserved.

UNITED STATES EX-COMMERCIAL CAVE BROCHURES  
(held by Gary K. Soule)

1. Alexander Caverns, Reedsville, Pennsylvania
2. Arrow Point Cave, Brumley, Missouri
3. Baker Caverns, Williamson, Pennsylvania
4. Battlefield Crystal Caverns, Stausburg, Virginia
5. Boone Cave, Rocheport, Missouri
6. Cardareva Cave, Ellington, Missouri
7. Cherokee Cave & Museum, St. Louis, Missouri (photocopy)
8. Civil War Cave & Memorial Park, Ozark, Missouri
9. Cobb Cavern, Florence, Texas
10. Crystal Caverns, Clay, Alabama
11. Daniel Boone Cave, Camp Nelson, Kentucky
12. Decorah Ice Cave, Decorah, Iowa (photocopy)
13. Devil's Well, Gladden, Missouri (you did not tour inside this cave, but rather viewed a large, partially water filled cave chamber from high above.)
14. Dunbar Cave, Clarksville, Tennessee
15. Emerald Lake Cave, Greenfield, Missouri
16. Fairy Cavern, Boerne, Texas (photocopy)
17. Fairy Caves, Glenwood Springs, Colorado (photocopy)
18. Floyd Collins Crystal Cave, Mammoth Cave, Kentucky
19. Gardner Cave (Crawford State Park), Metaline Falls, Washington
20. George Washington Caverns, Charles Town, West Virginia (photocopy)
21. Great Onyx Cave, Mammoth Cave, Kentucky
22. Great Salts Cave, Mammoth Cave, Kentucky (photocopy)
23. Guntersville Caverns, Guntersville, Alabama
24. Harpers Ferry Caverns, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia
25. Hiawatha Caverns, Witoka, Minnesota
26. Hidden River Cave, Horse Cave, Kentucky
27. Honey Branch Cave, Elkhead, Missouri
28. Inca Cave, Waynesville, Missouri
29. Indian Cave, Charlestown, Indiana (photocopy)
30. Knox Caverns, Knox (near Altamont), New York
31. Lakeland Caverns, Charles Town, West Virginia (photocopy)
32. Lost River Cave, Bowling Green, Kentucky
33. Lost River Cave, Blue Mounds, Wisconsin (also Bluemounds Cave on some brochures)
34. Mammoth Cave - New Entrance (a separate operation), Mammoth Cave, Kentucky (photocopy)
35. Mammoth Cave of Illinois, Burksville (near Waterloo), Illinois
36. Manitou Grand Caverns (the formerly developed back

- portion of Cave of the Winds), Manitou Springs, Colorado (photocopy)
37. Melrose Caverns, Lacey Springs (near Harrisonburg), Virginia
  38. Nickajack LaCaverns (Nickajack Lake Caverns), South Pittsburg, Tennessee
  39. Ocala Caverns and Subterranean Springs, Ocala, Florida
  40. Old Spanish Cave, Reeds Spring, Missouri
  41. Old Spanish Treasure Cave, Sulphur Springs, Arkansas
  42. River Cave (Ha Ha Tonka Park), Camdenton, Missouri
  43. Rolater Park Cave, Cave Spring, Georgia (photocopy)
  44. Rowland Cave, Fifty Six, Arkansas
  45. Savage Cave, Adairsville, Kentucky
  46. Seawra Cave, Lewistown, Pennsylvania (photocopy)
  47. Se-qui-o-ta Cave and Park, Springfield, Missouri (photocopy)
  48. Shawee Cave, Yellville, Arkansas
  49. Shelta Caverns, Huntsville, Alabama (photocopy. Really an ad)
  50. Spirit Mountain Caverns, Cody, Wyoming
  51. The Underground Theatre, Kimberling City, Missouri (photocopy)
  52. Wompi Cave, Monona, Iowa
  53. Wonderland Cave, Bella Vista, Arkansas (once an active part of the Bella Vista Resort complex)



#### THE HAINTEED SINKHOLE

Cato and Susan Holler

The first of these two tales was transcribed directly from a taped interview with Mr. Joe Holtsclaw. The second is taken from notes made while visiting Mr. Garvill English. We would like to thank these men for sharing their time and tales with us.

We would like to also encourage other members of ASHA and the caving community to visit with some of the senior citizens in their caving areas to record as much oral history and folklore as possible while these folks are still around to share such tales with us.

No sector of civilized man would neglect the dark and unknown in folklore. Tales of witches, ghosties, haints, and ghoulish things abound.

The more isolated areas of mountainous western North Carolina are no exception. Up and down the winding dirt roads, through the hollers, from house to house, the stories of a passerby or neighbor's fate is told and retold, year after year.

Old timers Joe Holtsclaw and Garvill English still tell the tales of what



is now the North Cove Community of McDowell County.

JOE'S TALE: "The road used to come up from down there past Bufford's old house. It went between the sinkhole and the creek. There was a level, sandy place there, white sand along.

Old man Gabe said one night he was coming along . . . I guess the old devil was drunk, stayed drunk 'bout all the time . . . he hauled stuff from Marion for the merchants of Linville Falls . . . had him a team of mules. He was coming along there one night or one morning, said the moon was shining just as bright as could be. He looked up the road and there was a big cow coming down the road. Said when she got to the mules, the mules never paid no attention to her. Said she got up and got on the tongue of the wagon, walked all round and walked over him. Said he never felt her at all but she went off on the other end."

(Laughing), "Course now that was a pretty big 'booger'."

GARVILL'S TALE: During heavy rains a lot of water would mysteriously disappear down the sinkhole by the road. Slaves of the area didn't like that dark swallowing void, especially Ol' Sal after her experience.

Ol' Sal was sorta crippled, cause she lost most of her toes to frostbite. One evening she was coming down the road by the sinkhole, when out of nowhere this mule was coming after her with a headless rider on its back. A loose shoe on the mule made a frightening, loud, clopping sound as it chased her along the darkening road. Her crippled feet ran as fast as possible toward the safety of her cabin in the woods. The mule and rider disappeared as quickly as they had come. After poor Sal's horrible scare, the other slaves gave that sinkhole a wide going around.

The story has been passed down from generation to generation. Could this be one reason why no black families choose to live within several miles of the sinkhole even today?

Note: U.S. Highway 221 now winds its way through North Cove, further removed from the isolated, overgrown, little-visited sinkhole. A mile up the road, tourists flock to Linville Caverns. The road comes closer to Joe's house, within twenty feet of the front porch, but it doesn't twist back like it used to, close to Garvill's. Time, floods, and man have made many changes over the years, but the folklore from a bygone day of "haints," "boogers," and negro slave superstition remain as a real and unchanging part of the community.



#### PITTS CAVE, MISSISSIPPI: A BRIEF HISTORY

John P. Sevenair and Steven D. Carey

Pitts Cave, at 1,340 feet in length, is Mississippi's longest cave.<sup>1</sup> Two large entrances, about 150 feet apart, open on opposite ends of a large wooded sink complex. The entrance passages soon reach narrow and lower stream passages; the streams unite, and the combined flow sumps about 400 feet downstream. The two entrances are connected by a medium-sized, moder-

ately muddy upper level; by a crawl route involving the stream junction, and by a mud passage that intersects the stream just above the sump.<sup>2</sup> The resurgence is about 3,000 feet east of the entrances, not far west of the Chickasawhay River.<sup>3</sup> The cave is in Wayne County on the Alabama state line, east of Laurel in the southern part of the state.

The Choctaw Indian town of Hiwannee was located within a few miles of the cave, and there can be no doubt that these peaceful hunters and farmers knew of the cave. The area was taken out of Choctaw hands by the treaty of Mount Dexter in 1805, and an influx of settlers began to arrive. Wayne County was formed in 1809.<sup>4</sup> The cave was named after Dr. J. R. S. Pitts, who settled near the cave in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

Though several caves are mentioned in early Mississippi Geological Survey publications, Pitts apparently is not, probably because Wayne County is rather remote from the main population centers of the state. Discovery of the cave by workers for the Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration in the 1930's changed all that. The WPA writers interviewed local residents, and in the guise of historical material and a guidebook collected and published some tall tales.<sup>6</sup>

For example, an Indian and his dog were said to have entered the cave. Either they both came out on the east side of the Chickasawhay River, or the Indian was never seen again and the dog "came out at another entrance with its body stripped clean of hair by the limestone gases." Another tale says that a Confederate detachment took refuge in the cave from pursuing Union forces, despite the fact that no battles were fought in Wayne County during the Civil War. Captain L. S. Pitts, father of the depression-era owner, was said to have explored the cave "using twine and candles in a Tom Sawyer manner. After four candles had been burned, Pitts was at the end of his twine and gave up the search for the end of the cave. He had traveled, he estimated, three miles." The other reference, after briefly but accurately describing the upper level connecting passage, states that the other passage was "supposedly eight or nine miles long."<sup>7</sup>

The scientific exploration of Pitts Cave began with some biological studies in the 50's and has continued until recently.<sup>8</sup> The cave is presently closed.<sup>9</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>D. R. Williamson, "Mississippi Caves," Mississippi Underground Dispatch, VIII(1982), 37-39.

<sup>2</sup>J. P. Sevenair, "The Pitts Cave Survey," SMG Bulletin, I(1974), 47-48 (map, p. 54).

<sup>3</sup>J. P. Sevenair, "The Surface Connection: Pitts Cave," Mississippi Underground Dispatch, VIII(1982), 18-19.

<sup>4</sup>Works Progress Administration, Mississippi - a Guide to the Magnolia State (New York: Viking Press, 1938).

<sup>5</sup>E. L. Knight, B. N. Irby, and S. D. Carey, Caves of Mississippi (Hattiesburg, Miss.: Southern Mississippi Grotto, 1974), p. 74. The original source seems to be an April, 1933, Memphis Commercial Appeal article.

<sup>6</sup>Works Progress Administration, Source Material for Mississippi History, Preliminary Manuscript, Wayne County, LXXVII, Ch. 2, pp. 6-7; Mississippi - a Guide to the Magnolia State, 448.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>This area is beyond the scope of this paper. Abundant source material may be found in J. Nanninga, J. Sevenair, D. and P. Williamson, "Bibliography," Mississippi Underground Dispatch, VIII(1982), 40-46, and in J. Sevenair, "The Surface Connection: Pitts Cave," ibid., 18-19.

<sup>9</sup>M. Bograd, "Trespassers Beware," Mississippi Underground Dispatch, IX (1982), 7.



#### BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ALABAMA CAVES, 1797-1900

William W. Torode, NSS Librarian

The following list, in approximate chronological order, may be considered preliminary. The sources include various published works, newspapers, court house records, and manuscript collections which mention, no matter how briefly, Alabama caves. The modern name of a mentioned cave, if known, has been placed in brackets at the end of each citation. Undoubtedly, additional early references exist. If anyone knows of a source not herein given, please send its citation or, even better, a copy, to me at the National Speleological Society Headquarters, Cave Avenue, Huntsville, Alabama 35810.

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Tuomey, Michael (1805-1857). Second Biennial Report on the Geology of Alabama. Montgomery: N. B. Cloud, State Printer, 1858, pp. 14, 15, 25, and 246.

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"Underground Cave Lake." Pulaski, Tennessee, Independent Citizen, June 22, 1860, p. 2, c. 2. Reprint. Birmingham Grotto Newsletter (March, 1982), p. 7. [Belgreen Underground Lake.]

Nashville. Tennessee State Library and Archives. Samuel Dold Morgan Papers. Burwell Lanier, Nelson Robinson, Sam Tate, John D. Taylor, and James R. Harris to Morgan, May 1, 10, 11, June 28, 1861. [Sauta and various other caves in Jackson, Marshall, and Colbert counties.]

"Gunpowder for the South." New Orleans Daily Picayune (quoting May 9 Chattanooga Advertiser), May 17, 1861, p. 2, c. 1. [Sauta Cave.]

"A Mine of Nitre." Charleston Daily Courier (quoting Richmond Dispatch), May 11, 1861, p. 1, c. 8. [Sauta Cave.]

"Saltpetre Caves in Franklin County." Rome, Georgia, Tri-Weekly Courier, May 11, 1861, p. 1, c. 6.

"Saltpetre Caves." Jacksonville Republican, May 16, 1861, p. 2, c. 2-3. [Mentions a Calhoun County saltpetre cave.]

"Saltpeter Manufacture." Huntsville Democrat, May 22, 1861, p. 3, c. 6. [Sauta Cave.]

"Vitreous Saltpetre." Huntsville Democrat, May 29, 1861, p. 4, c. 3.

"Saltpetre Caves." Lynchburg Daily Virginian (quoting Huntsville Democrat), May 31, 1861, p. 3, c. 2. [Sauta and Crossing Caves.]

"More on Saltpetre Caves." Huntsville Democrat, June 5, 1861, p. 3, c. 1. Also printed in Nashville Daily Patriot, June 8, 1861, p. 2, c. 3, and Nashville Christian Advocate, June 20, 1861, p. 3, c. 4. [Mentions Newsome Sinks caves.]

"Saltpeter." Florence Gazette, June 5, 1861, p. 3, c. 5. [Watkins Saltpetre Cave.]

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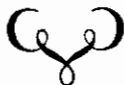
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## THE CUMBERLAND GAP CAVE SYSTEM: A HISTORY EMPHASIZING EARLY VISITATIONS

Marion O. Smith

At the extreme western tip of Virginia, on July 30, 1983, six Tennessee cavers connected Cumberland Gap Saltpetre Cave to commercially shown Cudjo's Caverns, proving it to be a single system of some five miles in length and 420 feet in depth. Although each major segment has been known a long time, not until now has it been necessary to consider the histories of these once "separated" caves as one.

While en route to Kentucky in 1750, Dr. Thomas Walker made the earliest notes regarding Cumberland Gap and its cave. On April 13 he recorded, "On the North side of the Gap is a large Spring, which falls very fast, and just above the Spring is a small Entrance to a large Cave, which the Spring runs through, and there is a constant Stream of Cool air issuing out."<sup>1</sup> Walker referred to the opening in the mountain ridge as Cave Gap, but the name survived only a few years.

Undoubtably, after Daniel Boone's party blazed the Wilderness Road through the Gap twenty-five years later, a good many travelers must have ventured at least a short distance into the cave when they paused to refresh themselves with water. But, so far as known, no one wrote about the cave until April, 1834. Then, Charles F. Hoffman, a New York writer on an extended tour of Kentucky, East Tennessee, and Virginia, accompanied by four guides, "each of whom carried torches," entered the cave:

It is a ragged aperature, about six feet in diameter, sloping downward . . . about fifteen feet . . . and after lighting them [the torches] at the entrance . . . we entered the mouth of the cave. A few steps in the shallow water at the bottom led to a sudden turn, where the daylight was at once excluded; and . . . we discovered a deep pool about breast-high, which lay clear as crystal before us. In the middle of this pool a detached crag hung from above . . . near the water's edge . . . ; and before entering the water I sent one of the party ahead to ascertain whether there there was any dry footing beyond. He shrunk at first from the icy water; but . . . soon disappeared behind the curtain; and listening to his splashes . . . we were glad . . . to hear his call to "come on."

Our path . . . did not seem to improve much . . . for, after advancing a few paces over a floor of rock and sand, another pool, still broader, and almost of equal depth, lay yet before us . . . and so we went ahead, while our route through this damp and narrow gallery soon terminated in a lofty and dry chamber some fifteen feet in diameter. This was called "The Fireroom," and here we proceeded to kindle some fuel brought with us. . . . On the upper side of this chamber, whose floor was a rough inclined plane of about forty-five degrees, there was a narrow hole called "The Blast," barely large enough for . . . a man's body. Through this . . . the wind rushed with . . . force. . . . The passage it afforded ran in an upward direction, and was about five yards in length. Having supplied himself with a brand from the fire, our principal guide led the way through the crevice, and we . . . followed . . . on our hands and knees.

This . . . was rather disagreeable; but when the torches were

again lit . . . I felt myself amply repaid. The apartment, which from its smooth, dome-like roof is called "The Oven," would cover an area . . . of at least forty feet diameter. . . . Rock formed a rough knoll in the centre; and clambering with some difficulty to the top, we pursued our way along a rocky ridge. . . .

At length . . . we descended into a long narrow apartment, called "The Saloon," It had a high square ceiling and a firm floor of clay. . . . This, I learned from my guides, was the favourite room of the place; but . . . I did not think it compared with the apartment into which I was soon after ushered. "The Gallery of Pillars" . . . was so irregular that it was nearly impossible to . . . estimate . . . its dimensions. The The innumerable stalactites, sometimes pendent from the roof, and sometimes raising themselves in single columns from the floor, were so clustered together and intermingled, that the actual walls of the subterranean chamber were excluded from view. . . .

But the most striking object in this fairy cell . . . was a formation of spar resembling a frozen waterfall, that reared itself to the height of fifteen or twenty feet, and ran completely across one end of the chamber. The ceiling . . . was about ten feet higher, but the petrifying water, which was now dripping from the hanging stalactites above, had united them here and there with the top of this marble cascade. . . .

There was yet another chamber to be explored; and being now about half a mile from the mouth of the cave, it behooved us, if we wished to derive any benefit from our lights in returning, to expedite our movements. Passing, then, from the grotto, the uneven floor of which was partly strewn with broken pillars that some barbarous hands had wrenched from their places, we crawled over huge rocks, where the roof . . . descended to within three or four feet of the broken floor, and came to a rugged declivity, seamed by deep and dark chasms, which rendered the descent difficult. . . . When we had gained the bottom . . . and looked up, the top of the cavern was scarcely discernible by the light of our torches. A limpid brook, about a foot in depth, had here channelled its way in the smooth limestone: following it up for a few yards, a sudden turn brought us to a long semi-circular gallery, about five feet in height, and hardly more in breadth. This, from the singular echoes it produced, was called "The Music-room. . . ." This room was nearly in the form of a crescent, and its smooth ceiling sloped gradually at the farther end till it touched the surface of the winding rivulet. At that point the stream became both broader and deeper; and the cavern not having been yet explored beyond this chamber, I proposed diving into the brook. . . .

The principal guide, however, declared that he had already tried . . . and had nearly been suffocated. . . . We prepared, therefore, to retrace our steps. . . .<sup>2</sup>

A generation later, during the Civil War, Cumberland Gap was an important strategic point, and it was alternately occupied by forces from both belligerents. Until early September, 1863, except for three months during the summer of 1862, the Southerners were in control, after which time the Unionists firmly held sway. During their occupation soldiers from both armies explored another cave at the Gap "about 150 feet above the Va. road,"<sup>3</sup> which was higher

in elevation than the well-known cave near the spring.

An unnamed Confederate artilleryman, writing back home in Georgia during early April, 1862, concluded his description of the features at and near the Gap by mentioning "a cave in the mountain, recently discovered by Corporal Blasingame." There they could "profitably spend a couple of hours, amidst the most gorgeous and weird scenery imaginable," but admitted that to describe "the magnificance" of many of the cave's "halls and galleries, would require a more graphic pen" than his. "We," the soldier continued, "have already named several of its chambers, as 'Big Red's Room,' 'Yeiser's Parlor,' 'Connor's Alcove,' 'Brown's Study,' etc.; it has been explored several hundred yards; Gen. E. Kirby Smith honored it with a visit the other day."<sup>4</sup>

A few days earlier, James E. Rains, colonel, Eleventh Tennessee Infantry, and commander of the Southern forces at the Gap, had written his wife, Ida:

We are having great excitement . . . over a cave . . . recently discovered. The entrance to it is just above our house. Hundreds visit it daily. . . . I have been in it today. It is indeed grand, & beautiful. The stalactite formations surpass anything of the kind I ever saw. All conceivable shapes of men & animals & vegetables, are distinctly to be seen. There are towers & statues, pools of clear water, beautiful arches, & splendid chambers. . . . It is perhaps the most beautiful cave in the world.<sup>5</sup>

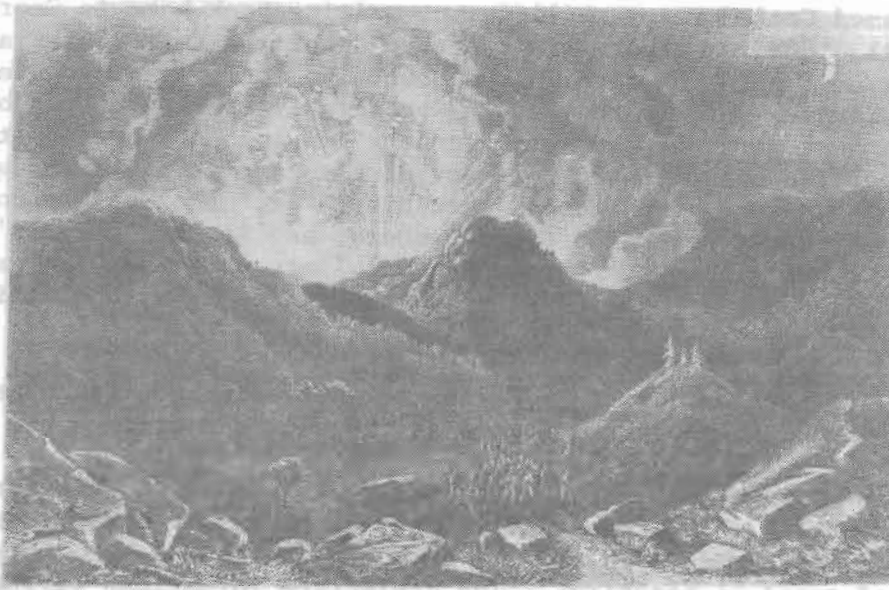
Northern soldiers were equally impressed with this cave's beauty. Writing during late June, 1862, Sergeant Stephen K. Fletcher, Thirty-third Indiana Infantry, gave his impressions:

I have been in the Mammoth cave Ky. and several smaller ones, but never have I found one so beautiful as this, nor half so fine. High guttered, fluted columns, the color of rich honey comb Columns of stalagmites most magnificent. . . . One column about 30 or 40 feet high & about 12 or 15 feet in diameter at the base we called "the tower of Bable." The ceiling glittered with thousands of pure white steactights each with a drop of water on its point. One room was full of pure white knotty formations, another, chamber adjoining it, full of pure white smooth formations. One big chamber covered about an acre & a half of space. We could not throw across it, nor throw or see to the top.<sup>6</sup>

Understandably, this grotto became known as Soldiers Cave, while the cave first noticed by Dr. Walker acquired the name King Solomon's Cave. By the 1890's developers were conducting tours through the caves. In 1934 Soldiers Cave was electrically lighted, and within a few years a tunnel was blasted downward to King Solomon's Cave. The "combined" cave was re-named Cudjo's after John T. Trowbridge's 1864 novel, which described the wonders of a fictitious cave "among the rugged ranges of the Cumberland Mountains, in the heart of Tennessee."<sup>7</sup>

Even higher on the mountain, there was a third significant cave some two miles northeast of the Gap. It was known simply as Saltpetre Cave, to which name twentieth century explorers added the prefix Cumberland Gap, to distinguish it from numerous other saltpetre caves in Lee and adjacent coun-

is elevation than the well-known cave near the spring.



Union Evacuation of Cumberland Gap, 1862

The new Novel, by the author of "Neighbor Jack-wood,"



Ready at all principal bookstores. Published by  
J. E. TILTON & CO., Boston.

Ad in Harper's Weekly, February 13, 1864

Even higher on the mountain, there was a third significant cave some two miles northeast of the Gap. It was known simply as Saltpetre Cave, so which name twentieth century explorers added the prefix Cumberland Gap, to distinguish it from numerous other saltpetre caves in the and adjacent coun-

ties. Unlike the other two Gap caves, it was dry, practically devoid of formations, and more difficult to explore. Consequently, after the mining of saltpetre ceased, there were few recorded efforts at exploration until the early 1960's.<sup>8</sup>

Cumberland Gap Saltpetre Cave has two entrances, both requiring ropes or ladders. One opening, the Wellhole, is a seventy-five foot pit which leads through a narrow canyon to a second pit of thirty feet, beyond which is a room where several saltpetre leaching vats had once been in operation. The horizontal entrance is about fifty feet lower in elevation and about 200 feet west of the Wellhole. About 300 feet inside, narrow forty and sixty foot pits are encountered, followed by a twelve foot climb directly into the Saltpetre Room, beyond which horizontal passages radiate in several directions.

Since the August 18, 1961, "re-discovery" of this cave by Will Provine of Harrogate, Tennessee, and April, 1962, visits by Cumberland Gap Historical Park Historian Andrew Loveless and three members of the National Speleological Society, including saltpetre researcher Burton Faust, it has been assumed that this cave was mined solely during the Civil War. This was surmised from the dates scratched on the cave walls which began in 1854 and were "concentrated in the early 1860's."<sup>9</sup>

During the late 1960's, with permission of the park, Knoxville, Tennessee, caver David Irving began the survey and systematic exploration of the saltpetre cave. Long stretches of virgin passages were eventually found and charted, and in the process David and his helpers passed a couple of names and dates on the walls nearly 2,000 feet from the Saltpetre Room, but did not take much note of them. Finally, in 1982 and 1983 other cavers from Oak Ridge and Knoxville, Tennessee, did record these names, "B Denin(?) 1812" and "James W. Hill 13<sup>th</sup> Decr 1812," in addition to a charcoal scratched name in the Saltpetre Room which looked something like "L D Hewkinky" (or perhaps L. D. Hawkins of Ky.) and a very legible scratched "John Johnson 1816 July 15" in the main passage several hundred feet away.

James W. Hill has been tentatively identified. Born in Virginia about 1787, and usually listed as a farmer, he lived in Lee County as late as 1824. By 1830 he moved to Limestone County, Alabama, and six years later to Mississippi. He and a brother, Elijah, married sisters, Margaret M. and Eliza, daughters of Richard Beaty, who in 1846 "conveyed to them by deed" his Lee County "powder mill plantation." This 378 acre property, "on Shavers Creek," was in turn sold by them three years later.<sup>10</sup> It is not known when the powder mill on this property was in operation, nor where it obtained the required raw ingredients.

The discovery of the 1812 dates led to speculation about what men were doing that far back in the cave at so early a day. The answer seems to be that they were either saltpetre miners scouting the potential of the cave or simply hardy adventurers. The former notion is deemed most likely since the United States was then at war with England and a great number of caves in Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee were being mined to supply much needed nitre or saltpetre, the main ingredient of black powder.

Supportive data for the possibility that James W. Hill and friend were saltpetre miners comes again from Charles F. Hoffman when he visited the Gap and vicinity in 1834:

I had heard of a remarkable saltpetre cave, within a few miles of the inn . . . at Cumberland Gap, and was anxious to explore it. There was an individual in the neighborhood who was said to have worked in the cavern, in manufacturing saltpetre . . . during the last war. This man I attempted to procure as a guide; but . . . nothing could persuade him to take me. . . . He at length . . . assigned his reasons; which will better appear after I have given you the features of the place, as they were described to me. The opening of the cavern is in West Virginia, on the side of the Cumberland Mountains; but one of its branches has been traced far into . . . Kentucky. . . . The most direct of its branches has, in former years, been measured with a chain, to the extent of seven miles. The form of the cavern is as remarkable as its size: as, just far enough within the entrance to shroud it in darkness there is a precipice of more than two hundred feet (two hundred and sixty-two feet is said to be the measured depth); and the only mode of advancing farther . . . is by descending here. . . . The sides of the precipice are marked here and there by ledges of rock, and the persons employed in manufacturing saltpetre had . . . adjusted a chain of ladders from one ledge to another. . . .

At the close of the war, twenty years ago, the cave became deserted. The population then was not dense around, and . . . the place was seldom mentioned, and never resorted to. It chanced one day, about six years since, that the man whom I wished now to guide me thither passed the mouth of the cavern, with a companion, in hunting. Sitting down near it . . . they began to recall . . . those who had worked in the cave in bygone years; and . . . they thought it worth while to look whether none of their implements, then used, were yet to be found in the pit. . . .

Entering the cavern, they . . . carefully examined the wooden ladders. . . . They had been made of cedar, and still appeared sound. The cautious hunters . . . both descended . . . and, as expected, they found several neglected tools still remaining there; and selecting a pickaxe and a spade, they commenced their ascent. . . . The first flight was soon accomplished; but their steps became slower as they got farther from the bottom . . . as . . . they . . . [were] compelled to move more and more carefully. Patience and steadiness . . . brought them near the summit . . . when the foremost man taking hold of one [rung] more decayed than the rest, it broke . . . and he fell backward . . . upon the chest of his companion . . . [who] kept his one-hand hold upon the ladder. The iron tools went clanging to the bottom. There was a moment of intense anxiety. . . . But the falling man clutched the ladder instantly, and laying a frantic grip, with both hands . . . they gained the top, at last, together. "Stranger," concluded the man, while his voiced faltered at the end of the tale, "we knelt to God at the mouth of that cave, and swore never to enter it more."<sup>11</sup>

Saltpetre mining from caves in nearby Claiborne and Campbell counties, Tennessee, is known to have occurred before 1812. In fact, William King and another man signed the walls of King's Saltpetre Cave near Tazewell in June, 1797. The cave described to Hoffman very much sounds like Cumberland Gap Saltpetre, and if so, is evidence that that cave was not mined just during the Civil War, but had actually seen such activity fifty years earlier.

If this is correct, the idea put forth by Faust and Loveless that all miners and materials entered the cave via the Wellhole entrance, is inaccurate.<sup>12</sup>

Each of the three major components of the main cave at Cumberland Gap has a distinctive history. It is interesting to note that 233 years lapsed before all were proven to connect to each other, which may be a record for slowness of exploration of an United States cave under ten miles in length. The investigation began with Dr. Walker and subsequent unidentified pioneers, and continued through two nineteenth century war periods to the latter part of the twentieth century, the last primarily under the leadership of David Irving.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert L. Kincaid, The Wilderness Road (Indianapolis, 1947), 47-48.

<sup>2</sup>A Winter in the West (2 vols., New York, 1835), II, 177-82. Charles Fenno Hoffman (1806-1884) was founder of the Knickerbocker Magazine (1834) and editor of several other magazines. He wrote several collections of poetry, two novels, and Wild Scenes in Forest and Prairie (1837) before falling victim to a mental disorder, spending nearly thirty-five years in an asylum. National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, VIII, 379-80.

<sup>3</sup>Perry McCandless, ed., "The Civil War Journal of Stephens Keyes Fletcher," Indiana Magazine of History, LIV(June, 1958), 175.

<sup>4</sup>Rome Tri-Weekly Courier, April 24, 1862.

<sup>5</sup>James E. To Ida Rains, March 26, 1862, Letters of James E. Rains, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville. Rains (1833-1862), a Nashville attorney, rose to brigadier general before he was killed at the battle of Murfreesboro. Ezra J. Warner, Generals in Gray (Baton Rouge, 1959), 250-51.

<sup>6</sup>"Journal of Stephen Keyes Fletcher," 175. Fletcher (1840-1897) was a son of Calvin Fletcher, a prominent pioneer of Indianapolis. Ibid., 141.

<sup>7</sup>Andrew M. Loveless, "A Natural History Report-Caves of Cumberland Gap," December 1, 1962, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, p. 6; John T. Trowbridge, Cudjo's Cave (Boston, 1864), 145. King Solomon's Cave was owned by the East Kentucky Land Company, and in 1890 was opened to the public by the company's manager, G. B. Cockrell, and his son. During the first season "several registers" were filled with visitors' names, although "just how many" was "not known." Improvements were then being built, including a "new house . . . over the entrance," and there were plans to build a restaurant and "an electric plant" at the spring to power "about four hundred incandescent lights in the cave." Data is lacking on the outcome of these plans, but the cave continued to be frequented by tourists, as indicated in a local newspaper that six young couples had had a "Cave Party" at the Gap one evening during July, 1903.

During June, 1864, Trowbridge's book was adapted to the stage by John F. Pool, and thousands saw it at Canterbury Hall Theatre on Washington, D. C.'s Louisiana Avenue. "King Solomon's Cave," in J. C. Tipton, The Cumberland Coal Field and Its Creators (Middlesboro, Ky., 1905); Middlesboro Democrat, January 21, 1891; Middlesboro News, July 25, 1903; Washington Evening Star, June 15, 1864.

<sup>8</sup>Loveless, "Report," p. 9; Middlesboro News, April 24, 1962.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. All the major caves discussed in this article are within the boundaries of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. In-cave graffiti suggests that the saltpetre cave was never really "lost." A 1983 search of the horizontal entrance passage above the pits yielded only three legible dates, 1861, 1887, and 1890, with a number of old looking names or initials. "W H" [which may stand for Private William Hall] or "W E P" is associated with "22<sup>nd</sup> Ohio" [Independent Battery, Light Artillery] illustrating the Union soldiers knew the cave's location. At the top of the thirty foot pit in the Wellhole entrance is Dan(?) (1949) and William and Maurice Tribell (both January 1, 1957). In the main passage leading from the Saltpetre Room are several first names written with a carbide lamp with the date "'43," and a scratched "B. Kruly LMU [Lincoln Memorial University] '29." Further along, just before the low Sand Crawl, are several 1904 names, Charlie Smith, J. H. Quillin, Fred G. Chamberlin, and Lelon R. Eager, and two 1943 names, Ralph York and Robert W. Hamm. Maurice Tribell repeated his name here also. In the Sand Crawl itself are some carbide initials, "NRK(?)y 1943," "K. G.," and "DMT."

In May, 1962, after the Loveless explorations had been publicized, a Mrs. L. L. Pumphrey wrote the editor of a local paper that "in the late 1890's" her brother, A. M. Victor, and "an elderly man" made "several exploring trips into the cave." She indicated they had used the horizontal entrance and descended "with ropes" next to "the remains of a crude ladder. . . ." Middlesboro News, May 3, 1962.

<sup>10</sup>Anne W. Laningham, comp., Early Settlers of Lee County, Virginia and Adjacent Counties (2 vols., Greensboro, N. C., 1977), I, 58, 169; 1850 Census, Miss., Marshall, Northern Div., 551. John Johnson remains unidentified, although a John Johnson or Johnston of Washington Township, Franklin County, Pennsylvania, bought 16,100 acres in Lee County, Virginia, in 1796. Another(?) John Johnson was on an 1810 Lee County tax list. Ada G. Catron, comp., Early Records of Lee County, Virginia (2 vols., Pennington Gap, Va., 1972), II, 33; Netti Schreiner-Yantis, A Supplement to the 1810 Census of Virginia (Springfield, Va., 1971), p. T-6.

<sup>11</sup>Winter in the West, II, 213-16.

<sup>12</sup>Loveless, "Report," p. 12; Middlesboro News, April 24, 1962.



#### THE TAG HOUSE: A SPELEAN GATHERING PLACE REMEMBERED

Larry O. Blair

In many geographical sections of the United States caver fieldhouses have been established to facilitate camping and logistics in areas in close relation to a major karst zone. The TAG House near Garth, Alabama was one such structure. The house, now abandoned as a caver meeting place, still holds many fond memories for Southeastern cavers, especially for those of Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia; hence "TAG."

Perhaps the best known of today's fieldhouses is the Austin/Collins House and Collins Crystal Cave ticket office complex located within the Mammoth Cave



National Park in Kentucky. This logistic vantage point played an important role in the connections of the caves within the Park boundary and continues to be a place of prominence in the continued studies of the area by the CRF (Cave Research Foundation).

Two other Southern fieldhouses, which provoke memories of cave exploration in the true sense of the word, are the Rockeater House, located near Rising Fawn, Georgia, at the head of Deer Head Cove (in DeKalb County, Alabama), and the Big Coon House, which was located in Big Coon Valley just west of Stevenson, Alabama.

The Rockeater House was used heavily by members of the now defunct Rockeater and West Georgia Grottos. The Big Coon House was jointly used by cavers from many grottos and by local hunters, until it mysteriously burned in late 1977. Both hundred year old structures were extremely picturesque.

The TAG House, while not as historical or perhaps as long lived as a gathering place, still played an important role in the exploration of major caving areas in Alabama, particularly the nearby Engle Double Pit System. The building, owned by Mr. Floyd Clemons, was established as a caver fieldhouse by the West Georgia Grotto (W.G.G.), a student grotto of West Georgia College, Carrollton, Georgia. This took place officially around the first quarter of 1968, although the house had been used by cavers during the preceding year.<sup>1</sup>

W.G.G. paid Mr. Clemons ten dollars a month for the use of the house.<sup>2</sup> The building had electrical service arranged through the North Alabama Electric Cooperative of Stevenson. The bill for this luxury generally ran one dollar twenty-five cents per month, however, at times the bill rose to a whopping one dollar forty-three cents, usually during cooler weather months.<sup>3</sup>

Word of this convenient meeting spot began to grow. Trips and parties were planned. For example the Dogwood City Grotto (D.C.G.) trip of March, 1968, was to "meet at the TAG House and excursions were planned for Engle Double Pit Cave and MacFarland's Spring Cave."<sup>4</sup> On November 4, 1969, Richard Newell of W.G.G. presented the program to the monthly meeting of the D.C.G. in Atlanta. "Richard also made an announcement that the TAG House was open to visitors as long as they were accompanied by at least one member of the West Georgia Grotto."<sup>5</sup> This openness led to a strong bond of friendship between the two grottos. Individuals in many cases belonged to both clubs.

This trust was exhibited by the fact that the W.G.G. proposed that the D.C.G. share the TAG House with them for accepting half of the costs of running the house. "This motion was carried by the membership" at the November 3, 1970, D.C.G. meeting.<sup>6</sup>

Problems soon arose by the increased volume of visitors from across the country as the fame of the TAG House spread. Controls had to be exerted. It was decided "that only members and novices accompanying them are to use the TAG House." The building then was locked.<sup>7</sup> Cavers coming into the area may not have known of this new policy. Their free spirit attitude and the sheer numbers of all visitors soon spelled the closing of this now famous gathering spot for good. "The TAG House, or Engle House to some old timers has been closed."<sup>8</sup>

Hearts were saddened at this closing. In remembrance, TAG House tee shirts were made and proudly worn, but began to fade with age. Several attempts were made by the Dogwood City Grotto to find a new location, even the building of a

structure was suggested. None has yet been found and one will never be found that will match this old place that was so dear to so many Southeastern cavers.

The TAG House became more than just a club house and camping/meeting place-- it had become a landmark in giving directions and played a prominent place in the exploration of the rugged wilderness behind and around the shelter.

Evidence of this may be seen in Marion O. Smith's work TAG PITS, in which several cave directions were given with reference to this landmark. For example-- Polack Pit, "Over 4 miles behind old TAG House"; Donna's Pit, "about 3 or so miles behind TAG House, before Tony Sinks"; Engle Double Pit System, "About 2 miles behind TAG House."<sup>9</sup>

This building won its place in the spelean history of the Southeast. Its concept and memory will remain in the hearts and minds of many as they become older and retire from active caving.

The accompanying ink drawing of the TAG House was sketched by the author from a black and white snap shot made by Dennis M. Holt, former member and officer of the W.G.G., circa early 1970's.



#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>NSS NEWS, XXXVII (April, 1979), p. 84. Also ownership established by general knowledge and West Georgia Grotto payment ledger.

<sup>2</sup>W.G.G. Ledger, Volume I, 1968-1973; payments for "cabin rental" p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 33, "North Alabama Electric Cooperative."

<sup>4</sup>Minutes of the Meeting of the Dogwood City Grotto, March 13, 1968. Typed from notes taken by Allan Vanderford.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., November 4, 1969, author anonymous.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., November 3, 1970, Bill Liggett, Recording Secretary.

<sup>7</sup>Georgia Underground, VIII (January-February, 1971), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., (May-June, 1971), p. 76.

<sup>9</sup>Marion O. Smith, TAG PITS (Atlanta, 1973), 71, 72, 73.

As a matter of record, the remaining files of the West Georgia Grotto are housed in the library of the Dogwood City Grotto of Atlanta, Georgia.

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## INDIAN CAVE PARK: ITS HISTORY, LEGEND, AND LORE

Jim Whidby

When I first visited Indian Cave I immediately became overwhelmed by the beauty of its massive bluff entrance. The large wrought-iron gate fitted within a man-made stone arch was impressive. Walking into the large entrance room and hearing the echo created by the Indian River flowing through the cave, just added more mystique to my first visit. As I talked to the cave's manager, Dan Osborne, I decided on that first visit that I must find out more of the history of Indian Cave Park. When I arrived back home I looked for the cave in Larry E. Matthews' Bibliography of Tennessee Speleology. Finding only four references listed, I felt sure that more information must exist. Thus began my research into what I consider to be one of the most historical show caves in the Southeast. The following information is still far from complete. I believe that further research will yield more of the fascinating history of this grand old cavern.

### Cave Description

Indian Cave is located in Grainger County, Tennessee, about twenty-five miles northeast of Knoxville. It is reached by U.S. 11W to Blaine, then east seven miles by paved road. The cave is by far the largest in the county, and possibly the largest found anywhere in the Copper Ridge Dolomite. The entrance is located on the west side of the Holston River at an elevation of 950 feet.<sup>1</sup> As of November, 1983, the cave is known to contain 2.57 miles of avenues. The current survey is still unfinished. The passage consists primarily of a 5,150 foot long "borehole," with many smaller side passages. The average dimensions are fifty-four feet in width and thirty-four feet in height. The temperature is 57° to 58°F year round, with relative humidity above eighty percent.<sup>2</sup> The cave is well decorated with dripstone, forming many beautiful speleothems. The Indian River flows the entire length of the main passage. The cavern has three entrances, known by local residents as Indian Cave, Blowing Cave, and Potato Cave.

### Legend and Lore

It is well known that Indian Cave was used by early Indians. It certainly afforded a convenient and perfect shelter as well as an ideal water source, since the cave's stream flows out of the cave and into the Holston River. A Cherokee village is said to have existed just west of the main entrance. Locals tell of

a Frenchman who used the cave entrance when in the area trading with the Indians. Other legends allude to a massacre of white men which reportedly occurred on the river in front of the cave in the 1700's. This story further states that some of the people killed had smallpox, resulting in an epidemic among the Indian tribe.<sup>3</sup>

Folklore speculates that James Donelson and his party may have visited the cave about 1779 while en route down the Holston on their way to Middle Tennessee where they settled Nashville. In the 1800's a grist mill stood outside the cave entrance and was powered by water from the cave. "Uncle" Jimmy Reynolds operated the mill. The old mill slough is all that remains today.<sup>4</sup>

### History

Ownership of the cave can be traced back to W. B. Mitchell, who transferred a hundred acres to ex-Confederate General Robert F. Hoke of North Carolina on July 21, 1869. On October 29, 1913, the property was transferred to Van Wyck Hoke from Lydia A. Hoke. During the ownership by the Hoke family, General Hoke shipped large amounts of bat guano to Atlanta, Georgia, for fertilizer.<sup>5</sup>

On January 4, 1916, the Indian Cave Park Association was formed, and a hundred shares of stock were offered for sale at \$50.00 each. The officers of the corporation consisted of five directors, which included a president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. The incorporators were R. M. McConnell, Charles H. Brown, R. F. Colgan, Charles M. Seymour, and Howard Cornick.<sup>6</sup>

The incorporators' first meeting was held twelve days later at the law offices of Cornick, Franz, McConnell, and Seymour in the East Tennessee National Bank Building in Knoxville. McConnell chaired the meeting and Howard Cornick acted as secretary. The first order of business was the presentation of the charter incorporating the cave park. At this meeting all directors except Cornick stepped down to allow the following new directors to be accepted unanimously: M. M. and W. O. Whittle, E. E. Wooten, and H. M. Johnson. Stock was sold to each in the amount of \$250.00 for five shares and in addition, Wooten purchased another \$3,000, making him the majority stockholder. At this time the property's value had been estimated at \$5,000, but as a pleasure resort it was felt it could be worth \$50,000. As farm land, however, it was considered to be worth only \$2,000. Wooten became president and treasurer, Cornick vice-president, and M. M. Whittle secretary. Commercialization work began, but the cave did not officially open until May 30, 1924. Carriage rides from New Market were given, and the Indian Cave Ferry transported these visitors across the Holston River to the cave property. In a 1926 article it was claimed that the cave had the "longest stalagmite" in the world. In 1928 a brochure of the Smoky Mountains area described the cave with twenty-seven photos of cave formations and the property. It further stated that Indian Cave was one of the most interesting spots adjacent to the mountains, and that roads leading to the cave were graded and more suitable to travel by automobiles.<sup>7</sup>

Major commercialization of the cavern did not begin until 1930. On August 2 that year all directors of the corporation submitted their resignation, and the following directors were elected: Hunter B. Chapman, Dr. Douglas G. Chapman, Hugh A. Kneisley, E. E. Wooten, and W. O. Whittle. This action succeeded the stockholders meeting of the previous March 13 when it was announced that Wooten had incurred \$6,330 in unpaid debts on behalf of the corporation. Four thousand of this was evidenced by a note to the Union National Bank and secured by a trust deed on the Indian Cave Park property. Also at this meeting the capital

stock was increased from \$5,000 to \$150,000. Hunter B. Chapman thus became the new president of the corporation.<sup>8</sup>

Chapman was the owner of Shenandoah Caverns in Virginia, which had opened commercially less than ten years before. Shenandoah had already proven to be a great success with more than 87,000 visitors per year.<sup>9</sup> Chapman had learned of Indian Cave from a railroad official while on a trip to Washington, D. C. After learning of the cave's beauty, he became convinced that Indian Cave could become another Shenandoah. He in part seemed to be attracted due to some similarities in the two caves, such as both being near the same highway 11 and towns named New Market. He also was attracted by the legends of the Indians' use of the cave and grounds.

According to Hunter Chapman's daughter-in-law Louise, he spent about \$32,000 to become the majority stockholder, and then over \$79,000 on internal improvements in the cave, including better trails, with numerous concrete bridges. Also, he had installed more than ten miles of lead shielded electric cable, and built a dam at the end of the cave creating a lake for boat rides. The remains of a flat bottomed boat can still be seen today on a mud bank moored to its post.

By 1931 Indian Cave was advertised as the largest electrically illuminated cave in the world, and two years later 100,000 folders about the cave were distributed over the nation. More than 1,800 electric bulbs, ranging from 200 to 500 watts, actually lit the cave's "borehole" passage. Twenty-four hundred volts of electricity was carried through the cave by a number of transformers. The early power source was a Ford tractor engine installed outside of the cave on the hillside.<sup>11</sup>

1930 and 1931 saw the greatest improvements and commercialization of the cave. Hunter Chapman's son Paul became manager, and Paul's wife Louise became secretary. Part of the year they lived in a screened, mostly chestnut wood cottage near the cave entrance, where they also ran a small general store. Water for themselves and guests was lifted from the stream exiting the cave by a ram pump to a reservoir on the hillside. They also maintained eight cabins, of which only three are still standing, and built a camping area on the hillside above the cave. These cabins in 1939 rented from seven to twenty dollars a week. The cave park was only operated in the summer months. During the winter the Chapmans moved their residence back to Shenandoah Caverns.<sup>12</sup>

Due to Hunter Chapman's influence, Hugh A. Kneisley of Woodstock, Virginia, became a director and treasurer of the corporation. Kneisley was considered an "expert caverns engineer" and had been in charge of the exploration and development of Shenandoah Caverns. William Snyder of Staunton, Virginia, who had been in charge of the lighting of Shenandoah, likewise came to Tennessee. He and Paul Chapman, who also had electrical experience, took charge of the ten plus miles of wiring which was planned for Indian Cave.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the visitors to the park came by way of New Market, which was located about five miles away on the opposite side of the river. The Indian Cave Ferry was very important as an access to the cave. Roy Vineyard was the ferry operator for many years. Roy was operating the ferry when the Chapmans arrived in 1930 and he was still running the ferry when they left in 1942. He apparently operated the ferry up into the 1950's. He lived in the second cabin facing the river on the right as you enter the park today. The ferry was constructed mostly of wood and was carried from one side of the river to the other by the current. A large wheel was used to apply tension to a cable which was attached to the main

cable that spanned the river. Applying tension to the cable would cause the ferry to move sideways in order to take advantage of the current. The ferry could accommodate up to four automobiles at a fee of twenty-five cents each.<sup>14</sup>

Indian Cave boomed throughout the 1930's. Louise Chapman collected more than seventy newspaper articles related to the cave which she placed in a scrapbook. Civic and youth groups came from all around to hold picnics and outings at the park. Lunches and banquets were held in the cave entrance room as well as on the park grounds. Louise recalls on one occasion she decorated the trees around the cave with hundreds of balloons. Local people were hired to help with barbeques.

Admission to the cave during the 1930's was a dollar per per person, which was fifty cents less than at Shenandoah. The annual 4th of July celebrations were held jointly by Grainger and Jefferson counties at the cave. The celebrations were first begun in 1926 and by 1938 they reached an estimated attendance of over 5,000 persons. Newspaper accounts in 1938 stated that visitors from eight states were on hand for speeches by U. S. Senator George L. Berry. Present at the 1939 celebration was Arizona Governor R. T. Jones, who was born in Grainger County. The 4th of July celebrations were all organized by D. Swann Haworth, a prominent man of Jefferson County and Knoxville. These events were continued by him through the 1940's.<sup>15</sup>

Other well-known and prominent figures came each year as the celebrations grew. In 1941 Congressman John Jennings, Jr., Attorney General Joe W. Wolkenbarger of Rutledge, Professor C. C. Justice of Knoxville, Honorable Charles Stephens of Morristown, Dr. Reuel B. Pritchett of White Pine, and D. Riley Haworth of Jonesboro all gave addresses. Two years earlier the speakers were W. I. Daniel, Grainger County clerk, James Iddins, city attorney of Jefferson City, Dr. W. E. Gallion, mayor of Oakdale, Burgin E. Dossett, manager of the social security board in Knoxville, and Judge S. H. Justice.<sup>16</sup>

Along with the honored guests each year, up to thirty Indians in costume were hired to hold ceremonies in the cave. Baseball games were held during the daylight hours. Lunches, cold drinks, and ice cream were sold on the grounds. A public address system was installed by Taylor Electric Company "so all could hear." In 1939 the first telephone service was acquired, and reservations and information could be obtained by calling 8011, Jefferson City.<sup>17</sup>

Tom Roach, current historian for Jefferson and Grainger counties, was born in 1936. He recalls the large number of people who attended the celebrations and the Indians in costumes who would walk through the crowds. Tom became a cave guide in the 1940's and earned his school lunch money by acting as head tour guide. He recalls the traffic was so heavy that he would lead one tour after another. He recalls a goblet which had long been placed on a ledge in the cave to catch dripping water, and which had a calcite crust formed over it. Tom also recalls guitarist Chet Atkins' family coming to the park for many years, using one of the cabins. In the 1950's Tom had been away at school and upon returning had gone to the cave and ended up leading a tour. About 4,000 feet inside he heard a loud, strange sound that frightened him. He then discovered that while he was away a well pipe had been sunk on top of the ridge and had come through the cave to the stream. The sound, of course, was the pump activating! The well pipe is still in use today. Local residents still come to the cave to get their water as they and their ancestors have done for many years.

In 1941 Hunter Chapman began efforts to have a bridge built across the river near the cave. Some material from a disassembled bridge at Cherokee Dam was

hailed to the east side of the river. But the bridge was never built. In 1942 Chapman died of a heart attack, and his son, Dr. Douglas G. Chapman, vice-president of the corporation, took over. About that time Paul Chapman went into the army, and he and Louise separated. Louise moved first to Mt. Jackson, Virginia, and then to Richmond, where she lived for twenty-five years. During this time she married James "Dixie" Holland. They are now retired and have lived in Woodstock, Virginia, for the past ten years. Louise was born in 1905 and does not have any children. Paul Chapman died in the early 1970's, and Dr. Douglas Chapman is also gone.

The cave park remained under the control of the Chapman family until 1947. At that time the property was purchased by Gene Monday, a Knoxville realtor, who passed through one weekend and became charmed by the park and cave.<sup>19</sup> Monday acquired 132 acres with the cave, which was claimed to be the third largest commercial cave in the country. Soon he began construction of a lake which he planned to use for swimming, boating, and fishing. Water from the cave was fed into the lake by underground pipes from one side of the park to the other. The lake is to the right as you enter the grounds today.

Gene Monday hired Charlie and George Norton to operate the cave. Their admission fee was a dollar and ten cents per person, and half price for groups and tour buses. About 1960 admission was increased to a dollar and a half. George helped operate the cave until his untimely death, caused by an auto accident in 1976. In the late 1950's Larry Widner began setting up glass display cases which were outside, between the main and Blowing entrances. In these cases he erected scenes of the life of Christ. About this time Monday had a stone altar built, and a large stone was carved with the ten commandments. Widner, whose age was about fifty, was suffering from leukemia, and finished his project just before his death, about 1960. Near this same time, the cave became an official fallout shelter, with a capacity of 9,060, as proclaimed by the sign still found at the entrance.<sup>20</sup>

Also in the early 60's Enoch M. Hurt, a Knoxville contractor, began the removal of the Chapman's old cottage. In its place he erected a two story building which was to be a motel. During the completion of the last room an electrical fire destroyed the structure.<sup>21</sup> The walls of the upper level were knocked down by a crane and the lower level was rebuilt. This is the main building in the park today. It serves as living quarters for the manager, restaurant, and guest room, complete with a large fireplace.

Hurt also was responsible for constructing a dam in the entrance room of the cave to form a small lake, and for building the religious altar outside the cave entrance, mentioned earlier. In addition, he hired Hugh Waldrup, a master electrician, who in four months' time, with the aid of two workers, rewired the cave. During this period an electrical fire at the entrance, involving dry leaves, almost caused serious injury to one of the helpers.<sup>22</sup>

The decline of the cave seems to have occurred in the late 1950's or early 60's. This was caused in part by the demise of the old Indian Cave Ferry. It is said that before Roy Vinyard's death, the old ferry had ceased operations and Roy was carrying people across the river in a small boat. Without a means to cross the river the cave could not experience the popularity it had seen in earlier years.

About mid-1960 the cave experienced an enormous flood. Water was a foot and half deep at the entrance. Fred Nicley, who still lives in Blaine, along with

Alvin "Goat" Patterson, spent three days cleaning mud from the bridges and trails and doing trail repairs. This is the only time that the cave has been known to flood.<sup>23</sup>

Virginia Johnson of the New Beverly Baptist Church of Knoxville escorted groups of about twenty girls to the cave between 1965 and 1970. This group was the church's girls auxiliary. They would tour the cave for sixty cents each and have a picnic on the grounds. About 1979 Gene Monday allowed the church to operate the cave park. Jim Myers was the first to set up and have gospel singing groups at the park. Donations were solicited to cover expenses. They did not charge an admission to the singings or tours of the cave. Following Myers, David Staley, also with New Beverly Church, took up operations about 1980. Staley brought in many well known gospel groups from surrounding states. He too tried to operate on donations, but had to give up after a year. Attendance was too low and there were not enough donations to cover gasoline expenses for the buses transporting the singers.<sup>24</sup>

In April, 1982, Daniel Osborne, Jr., came to Knoxville from Kentucky. Dan hoped to find employment in the area due to the World's Fair. After becoming disappointed he noticed a newspaper ad placed by Gene Monday, advertising the cave for lease. Although Dan knew nothing about the operation of a commercial cave, he had an interview with Monday, which resulted in a lease agreement.

Dan immediately began a massive clean up of the grounds and the cave, and again opened the cave. Visitation is light due to the reputation of being closed, and the direction which traffic must take. A bridge over the Holston River would allow more direct travel to the cave from the interstate. This along with vigorous advertising will be the key to success. Indian Cave now features riding tours in electric "cave buggys," the longest tour ride in a United States cave.

In October, 1982, Dan held a "haunted cave" event for local children. About this time Jeff Bowers of the Smoky Mountain Grotto first visited the cave and became interested in doing a survey. His first impression was that the survey could be completed in only a few months. It soon became apparent that the cave had never really been explored by cavers, since Jeff began to discover more and more virgin passage. In May, 1983, Jeff contacted me for help from the East Tennessee Grotto. Survey work continued along with cave diving by Gary Daugherty in the sump at the end of the "borehole" passage. In three diving trips Gary penetrated 250 feet, with more possible. On July 4, during a survey trip, Jeff and Mike Whidby explored a low, wet crawl passage about 3,000 feet inside the cave. Some 300 feet off the main passage Jeff noticed some bones in a mud bank. A tooth was removed and taken to the University of Tennessee Anthropology Department, where it was examined by Drs. Pat Willey and Charles Faulkner and identified as being human. On July 7, Jeff, along with Brian Ball, Mike Green, and myself, went to the site equipped with ammo cans, packing material, digging tools, and camera. We extracted all the bones we could find, along with a bi-face flint knife. The following day the discovery was given to the U.T. Anthropology Department. Later Dr. Willey gave his opinion that the remains were those of a robust male Indian, approximately twenty to twenty-five years of age at time of death, which occurred possibly between 2,500 and 5,000 years ago.<sup>25</sup>

So, the history and discoveries of this majestic old show cave continue. I am amazed at the rich history that has almost been buried with time. Sometimes when I visit the cave I wonder what secrets it still holds within its chambers. Perhaps those who follow us will continue to unravel and discover more of its treasures, cultural as well as physical.



#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Morristown Gazette, November 16, 1881 (reprinted in Lea's Spring Resort, c1883, p. 4); Thomas C. Barr, Jr., Caves of Tennessee (Nashville, 1961), p. 213.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Biology Report, Carson and Newman College, Jefferson City, Tennessee, May 29, 1926.

<sup>3</sup>Barr, Caves of Tennessee, 213; Lea's Spring Resort, p. 2; Stories told to Daniel Osborne, Jr., by local Grainger County residents; Indian Cave Park Association Charter, January 4, 1916, Louise Chapman Holland Collection. Much of this collection is in possession of the author.

<sup>4</sup>Louise Chapman Holland, History of Grainger County, Tennessee, a paper read over radio station WROL June 1, 1939; Interview with Tom Roach and his mother, Gracie Beatrice Jarnigan, both of Rutledge, Tennessee.

<sup>5</sup>Holland, WROL paper, June 1, 1939.

<sup>6</sup>Indian Cave Park Association Charter, January 4, 1916.

<sup>7</sup>Indian Cave Park Association By-laws, January, 1916, Holland Collection; Southern Opportunity Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1926; 1928 travel brochure, Smoky Mountains Park Library, Sugarlands Visitor Center.

<sup>8</sup>Indian Cave Park Stockholders Meeting Minutes, March 13, August 2, 1930, Holland Collection.

<sup>9</sup>Knoxville News-Sentinel, October 26, 1930.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Louise Chapman Holland; Jefferson City Standard, June 29, 1933.

<sup>11</sup>Appalachian Journal, May, 1931; Knoxville News-Sentinel, May 21, 1931; Detroit Sunday Times, August 16, 1931; Asheville Citizen-Times, May 24, 1931; Knoxville Journal, June 20, 1937.

<sup>12</sup>Interview with Louise Chapman Holland; Unnamed Jefferson City newspaper, March 30, 1939.

<sup>13</sup>Knoxville Journal, August 17, 1930; Shenandoah Herald, August 15, 1930; Appalachian Journal, August, 1930; Interview with Louise Chapman Holland; Knoxville News-Sentinel, October 26, 1930.

<sup>14</sup>Interviews with Louise Chapman Holland and Charlie Norton; Indian Cave Ferry Photographs, c1930, Holland Collection.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with Louise Chapman Holland; Knoxville News-Sentinel, July 5, 1938; Jefferson City Standard, June 30, July 4, 1938; Knoxville Journal, June 24, July 5, 1938; 1939 and 1941 hand bills, Holland Collection; Unnamed Jefferson City newspaper, June 29, 1939.

<sup>16</sup>Unnamed Jefferson City newspaper, June 29, 1939, June 26, 1941; 1939 and 1941 hand bills, Holland Collection; Knoxville Journal, July 5, 1939.

<sup>17</sup>Unnamed Jefferson City newspaper, March 30, 1939.

18 Ibid., November 27, 1941; Unidentified newspaper, c1935, Holland Collection; Interview with Louise Chapman Holland.

19 Knoxville News-Sentinel, October 26, 1947.

20 Interviews with Charlie Norton and Tom Roach.

21 Interview with Enoch M. Hurt, Knoxville, Tennessee.

22 Ibid.

23 Interviews with Fred Nicley and Charlie Norton, Blaine, Tennessee.

24 Interview with Virginia Johnson, Knoxville, Tennessee.

25 Knoxville News-Sentinel, July 30, 1983.



Entrance to Indian Cave, c1931



Post Card views of Indian Cave,  
late 1920's or early 1930's

1925



1939

## 14th Annual Home Coming JULY 4th CELEBRATION

Home Coming and Reunion of Families and Friends of  
Grainger, Jefferson and Other Counties at

# INDIAN CAVE

Greetings to the thousands who have been attending each year—**GIVING YOU A BETTER PROGRAM** than ever before. Bring the friends with your lunches (or get sandwiches and drinks on the grounds).

### PROGRAM

OPENS PROMPTLY AT 10:00 A. M.

Music directed by Hon. W. I. Daniel, Clerk of the County Court, Rutledge

Welcome Address—City Atty. James Iddins, Jefferson City

Response—Dr. W. E. Gallon, Mayor, Oakdale

10:45 Literary Gems—County Historian C. C. Justus, Knoxville

11:05 to

11:45 Address—Hon. Burgin E. Dossett, Manager Social Security Board, Knoxville

12:00 to

1:30 Noon Intermission

1:30 to

2:10 Patriotic Address—Hon. Hamilton S. Burnette, Judge of Knox County Circuit Court

2:10 Address—Notable Contacts and Values in the Tennessee Senate and House—Judge S. H. Justice

### INDIAN TRIBE HERE

About 30 Indians, costumed, with ceremonies in Cave. Two baseball games will be held during the day, the first game starting at 9 a. m., in the Jefferson and Grainger County League.

D. SWAN HAWORTH,  
Chairman for the Day