

## Three Sources of Light Episode #2: Carlsbad Cavern Underground National Register Nomination

[Introduction Music]

ANTHONY MAZZUCCO: Hello, and welcome to another episode of Three Sources of Light, presented by Carlsbad Caverns National Park. Park Guide Anthony Mazzucco in studio with you today. Any in-person visit to a National Park Service site is typically supplemented by an interaction with a Park Ranger, whether that be through a guided tour, registering for a campsite, or just gathering information at the visitor center. However, many different divisions do exist among the National Park Service's workforce. A lot of really important projects are completed beyond the eyes of the visiting public.

This work often extends past the official boundaries of our parks, scenic vistas, and historic sites. The National Park Service also oversees the National Register of Historic Places, an official list of United States' historic places deemed worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect historic and archaeological resources. Chances are, out of the 95,000 properties listed in the National Register, one of them exists within your own local community.

In September of 2020, I was able to sit down with Carlsbad Caverns National Park intern Ellery Stritzinger to chat more about opportunities for internships with the National Park Service and her work towards completing a National Register nomination form for the Carlsbad Cavern underground.

Enjoy!

[Transition Music]

AM: So, this conversation is going to be an opportunity to highlight a really amazing project that has been going on here, in the summer of 2020, at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. At this point I am proud to introduce my colleague Ellery Stritzinger.

ELLERY STRITZINGER: Hello!

AM: Ellery, how are you today?

ES: I'm great. I am working hard. I am wrapping up the task that we will be talking about.

AM: If you do not mind giving our listeners a little insight as to what your title is, maybe how long you have been here at Carlsbad Caverns National Park, and then some of your previous park service experience.

ES: My name is Ellery and I'm the Cultural Resource Intern here and I've been in that position for nine and a bit weeks. I'll be wrapping it up at ten weeks. It is a short-term internship. I've been living and working here in the park. My most recent park that I was working at was in Sitka, Alaska. I was working at Sitka National Historical Park. I was working there as a Museum Collections Intern, also in Cultural Resources. Here it is a bit more of a broader job, a broader

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role. I have been hired specifically to work on the National Register of Historic Places registration form for the Carlsbad Cavern Underground.

AM: If you do not mind telling the folks here exactly what the National Register nomination means?

ES: It is a form that is made by the park service and you don't have to be within the park service to fill it out. It is open to the public and accessible online. Usually as a task that is done through your State Historic Preservation Office, SHPO. It can have a variety of uses for people, but a lot of private property owners are interested in validating the historic integrity of where they live, or a place that they work, or a place that is important to them.

There are hundreds of sites, districts, buildings, objects that are submitted to a National Register nomination each year. It is not a competitive process, but it is a research-intensive process. As a newcomer to this park and as a general newcomer to the park service it is a really great way to get to know a place or a site and it does require some investigation into primary sources. The point is to make an argument for the integrity and historical significance whether that be national, statewide, or local and make that case to your state historic preservation office.

AM: Yeah, I am really excited to see this type of work being done here at the park. As a trained historian myself, sometimes I do feel out of place talking about a giant hole in the ground, some rocks underground, I am by no means a geologist. That historic significance, those cultural stories, certainly do exist and that is something we are going to dive into a little bit in just a moment. I do want to point out to everyone, in doing a little bit of research in preparation for this conversation, just about 90,000 different sites exist within the National Register. And so, you have buildings, caves, infrastructure inside of caves, historic landmarks that exist within these iconic national parks, but sites probably exist within your own hometown. Some buildings, districts, local communities.

ES: Oh sure. Yeah, if you can make a case for it, you've got the time, and the inclination towards information then this could be a good way for you to spend your time.

AM: Yeah, a great way to connect these stories that are told in national parks and extend it all the way to your own local community. But I do want to ask before we dive into some of the specifics here at Carlsbad Caverns National Park, what is the benefit of having something registered?

ES: What is important to know is getting a National Register nomination, well certainly does not get you any money. It doesn't get you a plaque. That is something you have to purchase separately. It is interesting because I was actually, yeah, I was on the site yesterday and I and I was looking at a brochure that they made for it and they had testimony of people sort of in the way that you would with any kind of service of people saying that their historic nomination helped them sell their house, or helped them feel more connected to their family, or to their family's history, or to the place that they live. There's a dignity to having your site recognized by the National Park Service. That is cool.

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AM: Our reach as employees of the National Park Service, as owners of these national sites, extend far beyond park boundaries. I think this register nomination is a great way to highlight some of that work that happens outside of the boundaries of the national parks.

ES: And for this park itself, so obviously we are not a private entity. This wasn't my idea to do this form. I was hired to do it. I think that the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office requested it of the park. We're also in the process of doing a Cultural Landscape Inventory for the park. So, two forms do kind of go in conjunction with each other.

AM: It is awesome that as an intern and as a temporary employee of the park, you mentioned you have only been here for nine-ish or so weeks, that you have this power and influence to help construct this document and really leave a lasting impact.

ES: I could in a sense personalize this document in a way that would make sense to me, and I was using a lot of documents from other caves or national parks that had done nominations, as well as using the Cultural Landscape Inventory for this park as models and guides. I've been reaching out to other staff and kind of taking a more, a direction that seemed more suited towards the significance that was relevant to what I was observing being a resident here in the park and interacting with other staff. It has become a lot more fun recently, and I have been a lot more, I guess I would say, just empowered to kind of put some personality into this, because, of course what I am writing about is people and the decisions they've made and the intentions behind those decisions. It has made a lot of sense to have this be a more social, and specifically collaborative, project with other staff.

AM: Yeah, in essence you are telling the story of this park. Something that I myself as an interpreter, the coworkers that you have been getting some feedback from on this project, we are interpreters. We work with the public and give these formal programs. Something that stands out to me as you walk through your answer right there, but as an intern you are able to live at the park, live inside of these historic structures, so in a lot of ways are better positioned to tell the story of the historic landscape.

ES: And that is part of what I have really enjoyed about working with the park service. That was the same with the last park I was working at. I was living in park housing. It is just immersive and all-consuming in a way that I've been interested in living where I work. I've been liking that a lot. Yeah, the housing is cool. I see the escarpment. Oh, there was a ringtail on my balcony last night. I also saw two little deer in my yard. Yeah, living in a national park is awesome.

AM: To paint a little bit of a picture for the visitors here, the buildings that interns and other staff do live or work in at the national park here at Carlsbad Caverns, they are situated a little bit up on top of a hill. So, they do have a nice overlook of the Guadalupe Mountain range, right in the middle of the Chihuahuan Desert just above the natural entrance of the cave, so you do get to experience the sunsets, the dark sky, but also the wildlife. We can't talk about the wildlife here at Carlsbad Caverns without mentioning the bats. The area that you live is a perfect spot to witness the evening bat flight that has made Carlsbad Caverns a little famous.

ES: I am tremendously close, distance wise, to the bats and that knowledge is also nice.

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AM: Yeah, it is these little things that make these jobs so unique. But we'll get back to talking more about the National Register Nomination here at Carlsbad Caverns. If I understand it correctly from our previous conversations, this form that you are writing is separated into two distinct parts?

ES: I think maybe there are nine numbers but the first three are pretty, you know, straight forward. Name, location, whether it is national, statewide, or local. There's a narrative statement, which is an introduction to the property and an introduction to the site. The way that this works, is that you have a period of significance that you have to define. As in, the time that you are arguing that your site has the most integrity. As a general rule of thumb, across any kind of history realm, that is likely going to be before 50 years ago. So, at some point before 50 years ago, you are making the argument that something important happened that had resonance within the region. To do that, you have to say what aspects of that property or that site are, and the term that is used is contributing to that significance, and so these are called contributing features. You will walk the reader through those features of the park that are contributing to the significance of the site. Most important is to do the contributing features, but then it is also encouraged and expected that you are also going to be talking about features within the site that are non-contributing and justifying why you made that decision.

AM: In doing some previous research on the park itself, preparing for programs, I understand it correctly that a similar nomination was completed just a few years ago for the structures on the surface. Does that also include the amphitheater, the bat flight amphitheater?

ES: You know that is a great question because the amphitheater is right on the edge of the Carlsbad Historic District, which is this above ground area you are mentioning, all these buildings. The Carlsbad Underground, which is what I am working on, and where those two... The fine line that has been decided by the historic district is that its border is four switchbacks in the natural entrance. Which is kind of the argument that is made, after you go four switchbacks in you go underground. The bat flight amphitheater is not in my nomination. It is in the other nomination form and four switchbacks down from that is where I start. It does ask this, there are two overlapping features that are in both nominations. Do you have any guess what those would be?

AM: I'm drawing a blank right now.

ES: Trivia.

AM: Yeah you tricked me. Classic game of stump the ranger.

ES: That is what I have come here to do. It is the natural entrance itself, because of those four switchbacks I am also talking about it. And then about four switchbacks in, it's arguably the borderline, is that pictograph that is right in that upper right-hand corner when you look up. I know you know what I am talking about.

AM: Absolutely.

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ES: That pictograph is also on the historic site nomination. Also, there is a boundary justification happening within the site and so when you are doing any kind of nomination, or historic preservation, or specifically dealing with archaeology, it's necessary to be strict about what the boundary is that you are working with. That is a feature of the nomination form. So, the boundary starts four switchbacks, four out of thirteen in, so more in the underground in and then continues down the Main Corridor to the Big Room so it follows the whole main route of the cavern. Then also includes the lunchroom.

The trails have changed quite a bit. And there is a lot of record of that when you go through the cave and a lot of visitors will notice that there are several trails that are closed off. Some of them will resemble the modern trail that we are walking on, some of them will look a lot older. Yeah, trails have been made in the cave as early as exploration has been happening in the cave. There's been worn areas just from accidental trails, but then intentional trails and public guided trails have really started. For the most part, since the fifties the main trail has not changed all that much. Part of the understanding of the cave's history is knowing that people tried a lot of different stuff to get around these features and to do it safely and efficiently, and to try and get a ton of people in there. There are elevators in there. There's been a parking lot, I don't know if you know this, proposed in the cave. A lot of imagining and a lot of what I would say hard decisions to be made about what's the best way to get people into the cave and do it safely. The evidence of that is all over the cave. There are few named, or known, or well-worn features that are included as their own contributing features. And then I also have a collective catch all for inactive trails that are either not named, are not used, are not talked about or known about. It's frankly just not worth the effort to do them one-by-one because they are not individual trails, they are all overlapping each other. I do reference a place where, if you'd like more detailed information you can refer to the Cultural Landscape Inventory and the man who did that made a great map.

AM: It is important to distinguish here that National Register nominations are meant to be accessed by the general public. There are other reports, projects that have been done, that are more curtailed to some of these finer tuned details. Oftentimes when I am talking to visitors and I am trying to explain the layering of this cave I use the analogy cave lasagna.

ES: Oh cool.

AM: So, I think it would be appropriate, in terms of talking about the trails, to reference it, in this case maybe as cave spaghetti. It seems like a lot of your focus, in talking about the trail work, curtails a little bit to the visitor experience inside of the cave.

ES: The reason that humans are having strange, or positive, or challenging experiences cannot be separated from the way the cave was formed and why that makes the cave different from other caves. It is really so much just related to the rocks that are here. I would say I've had a growing appreciation for geology just by doing this. And I think that, just in the relevance of it, the way that I am moving this nomination is that the conservation efforts and the visitor experience, what I would genuinely describe as a sense of awe, is intrinsically related to any kind of conservation

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of the cave. So, because people feel something special in the cave, there's greater conservation efforts happening for this cave and caves all over the world.

AM: That's a really great point and I think a good transition period in our conversation here. Tracking the historic infrastructure that exists underground through nominations such as this allows park service folks to better understand the cave within the entity of itself, but also in context to other caves that exist, whether or not that is in the realm of National Park Service management or even those that are privately owned.

ES: Yeah, and I think that has probably been my biggest shift in focus from the Cultural Landscape Inventory. Something that has just become apparent living and working here is that Carlsbad Cavern, and the Carlsbad Cavern Underground, its significance cannot be accurately stated.

AM: It is completely subjective.

ES: Well you can't talk about it without talking about other caves is the thing.

AM: Sure.

ES: That's kind of the point of it. You cannot talk about Carlsbad Caverns without talking about other caves and its effect on it and their relationships with each other, and exchange of staff, and exchange of information. And also, specific comparisons to other caves. It has been happening since the early tours of Carlsbad, people have been thinking that it looks a little better than Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. People are thinking that it is shorter than Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. And other caves across the country have been justifying their existence or being dethroned from their status as national monument or national park because they are not as cool as Carlsbad Caverns.

It is so important with the way that it fits into the national park story and its status as... and that was in the early days too, when this was just discovered by European-Americans, that's what people were saying. It is as cool as Grand Canyon. It was a source of context for the cave and a way to encourage people to come. All caves are unique, but maybe Carlsbad Caverns is the most beautiful, most unique. And so, I was talking to another ranger today who has worked at Oregon Caves and who has worked at a cave in Alaska, he was working at El Capitan Cave in Alaska, and he was saying I got so tired of hearing about Carlsbad Caverns. I think that has got to be across the board with any cave park. It comes up every day, people are asking how it compares to it because, yeah Carlsbad Cavern is an insane cave, and if you've seen it and that is your expectation of caves... That is the argument. Carlsbad Caverns' significance is its influence on caves within the park, on research for caves, on cave recreation.

AM: I think something that is interesting, that you touched on just a moment ago, is that idea of recreational caving. We can definitely talk about that in comparison to show caves. Carlsbad Cavern, with the self-guided routes within the cave that a visitor can access, all these trails and tour routes that you are tracking, it certainly has an impact on how Carlsbad is perceived and how the caving community perceives this place.

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ES: The conclusion of what I talk about is that recreational caving is an integral part of the conservation of Carlsbad Caverns, and actually that, even though recreational caving is known, and kind of rightfully known, its exclusive, private, and there is a lot of interest in exploring places that have never been seen by man, as one staff put it. The question I had, why would recreational cavers care about one of the most stomped around places in the country? Why does it still have that appeal? The answers I've gotten to that question have been it allows for the exposure of these caves and the awareness and education to the public allows for appreciation of other caves. It does take a caver's enthusiasm to instill in a person that caves are precious and are important and learning about them is important. That sort of feeling that cavers are going after is something that anyone can experience, even just doing a guided tour on a trail in a lit cave that has a bathroom, and that has lunch, and has an elevator that will take you up. There is still possibility for that appreciation. The second part of that, which is the point being made, is because of Carlsbad Cavern's size and because of where it is located and how it was formed, there is also cave to be explored. And so, it is described as pushing the cave and pushing the boundary of it. That is still happening at Carlsbad Caverns. Regular requests for studies and surveys of the cave, and that is not the case at a lot of other show caves or big national parks just because of the structures of them and a variety of reasons. There still is that spirit of exploration here that keeps cavers really interested and wanting to be involved, potentially wanting to work here, or volunteer here, or you know, survey here.

AM: Our park here at Carlsbad Caverns is really the best of both worlds where you can come with your family and comfortably enjoy a few hours underground and come back to the surface in time to have lunch or go for a hike at Guadalupe Mountains National Park down the road. A day in the life of a ranger at Carlsbad, three hours ago I was 750 feet (228 meters) underground chatting with a visitor in front of a stalagmite that was 60 feet tall (18 meters), and now here I am in our park library chatting with you, but I was talking with this visitor about the fact that we have this developed tour route and they are able to comfortably walk around with electric lighting, but just beyond that wall, or just below our feet, there could be a brand new cave that has yet to be discovered. I think a great way to highlight that contrast is that you have world renowned Carlsbad Cavern, a developed show cave, within the park boundaries we have Lechuguilla Cave. Which is also world renowned but for very different reasons. Just this year, surveyors eclipsed 150 miles (241 kilometers) of explored passageway, making it, as of September 2020, the eighth longest cave in the world. The nomination that you are working on right now is currently focused entirely on Carlsbad Cavern. Is there any plan in the future that you know of to extend that to the other 119 plus caves that exist within our park boundaries?

ES: Well no, because something that the nomination is really focusing on is that human infrastructure which is so prominent and longstanding here at Carlsbad which you don't have intentionally in these other caves at the park. I don't foresee, well no one foresees, mark my words, no one will ever put a trail or a bathroom into Lechuguilla Cave and because of that there will not be a historic register nomination for it. Because really what I am talking about, and what I am focusing on, are these intentional man-made spaces in a natural environment.

AM: That is a really good summary for the entirety of your work here at the park and it also reflects the mission statement of the National Park Service, to both protect and preserve these

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places unimpaired, which is what is going on inside of Lechuguilla Cave, but also to make them available to the public land owners of the United States, which is what we have inside the Big Room of Carlsbad Cavern.

ES: Doing this here does lead to greater conservation in other places and that matters.

AM: So, Ellery, in conclusion here, I do have two questions to pose to you. The first, being that you have only been here for nine or so weeks, I am curious as to what your first impressions and or most memorable experience here at Carlsbad Caverns has been? And the second question, you are a temporary employee of the park, so I am wondering what is next for yourself in this National Park Service journey?

ES: What has been memorable, and what has really helped me with this is that I've been going into caves. I've been doing it semi-frequently, like every few weeks, I do go into a cave and I do like it a lot. I enjoy it and it is fun and that's been awesome. Yeah, I got to go into a few of the backcountry caves here and then this past week I got to do a couple of the tours within the cave with some of the staff. It is such a great way to move around within a place and I really like the compact rock and the crawling and the real physicality of it is really fun. So that's been awesome.

AM: The closer you get to the Earth, the slower you have to move through it. You definitely feel way more connected to your surroundings.

ES: Three parts on the wall, on something at all times. That's the rule.

AM: Sure is. As is three sources of light, the namesake of this podcast.

ES: Oh, is that what it is called?

AM: It sure is, yup!

ES: Aw that is sweet. Oh, and what is next for me? I don't know. I mean I do like working for the park service. I mean I am really interested in having a job that is outdoors and really kind of movement oriented. I am interested in working in historic preservation somewhat and doing masonry or carpentry and do like a short term or a season with that in the park service because the park service has good opportunities to get experience in those things.

AM: Well I can certainly appreciate that. Ellery, it has been an absolute pleasure to have you on Three Sources of Light today.

ES: Thank you for inviting me. I feel really appreciated.

AM: Thank you for your time, I know you have a lot to work on this week finishing up the nomination. But from Sitka, Alaska to Carlsbad, New Mexico to wherever it is that your future journey takes you, I hope the listeners here can hear in your voice your passion and enthusiasm for this nomination and help putting Carlsbad Caverns maybe a little bit more on the map.



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ES: Alright, well thanks!

[Conclusion Music]

GABE MONTEMAYOR: Hello listeners. Thank you for listening to Three Sources of Light. This podcast is produced by the Interpretation and Education Division at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. Episodes are researched, developed, and hosted by Park Guides Anthony Mazzucco and James Gunn. Today you also heard the voice of Ellery Stritzinger. All audio engineering, music, and sound effects are made in house by Park Guide Gabe Montemayor. This episode was recorded in September of 2020. For more information about Carlsbad Caverns National Park please visit our National Park Service website at [www.nps.gov/cave](http://www.nps.gov/cave). Thanks for listening.