

Russell Cave National Monument

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Under contract with National Park Service
Harpers Ferry Center Interpretive Planning

2009–2018
Long-Range Interpretive Plan

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Introduction

Purpose and Context of the Plan

This Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP) for Russell Cave National Monument (RUCA) is a component of the park's comprehensive interpretive plan (CIP), as outlined in the National Park Service Interpretive Guidelines (NPS-6). Using the park's mission, purpose, and resource significance statements, plus the primary interpretive themes and visitor experience goals, this plan articulates a vision for the park's future interpretation program, and makes recommendations for the media and programs best suited for meeting visitor needs, achieving management goals, and telling the park stories.

The plan is not an end in itself, but rather it establishes the overall framework for the next phases of the process – program planning, and media planning, design, and production over the next five to ten years. Further, as defined in NPS-6, the park should develop Annual Implementation Plans and an Interpretive Database to complete the CIP.

Background

Russell Cave National Monument, near Bridgeport Alabama, was established in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy in Proclamation 3413 for its "outstanding archeological and ethnological evidence of human habitation in excess of 8,000 years." The monument

became possible when 310 acres of land surrounding the cave opening were donated to the National Park Service by the National Geographic Society.

The cave has a mapped length of 7.2 miles, only a fraction of which are buried under park lands. Its large main entrance was used as shelter for more than 10,000 years by prehistoric peoples. As summarized on its website, "Russell Cave provides clues to the daily lifeways of early North American inhabitants dating from 6500 B.C. to 1650 A.D. The cave shelter archaeological site contains the most complete record of prehistoric cultures in the Southeast."

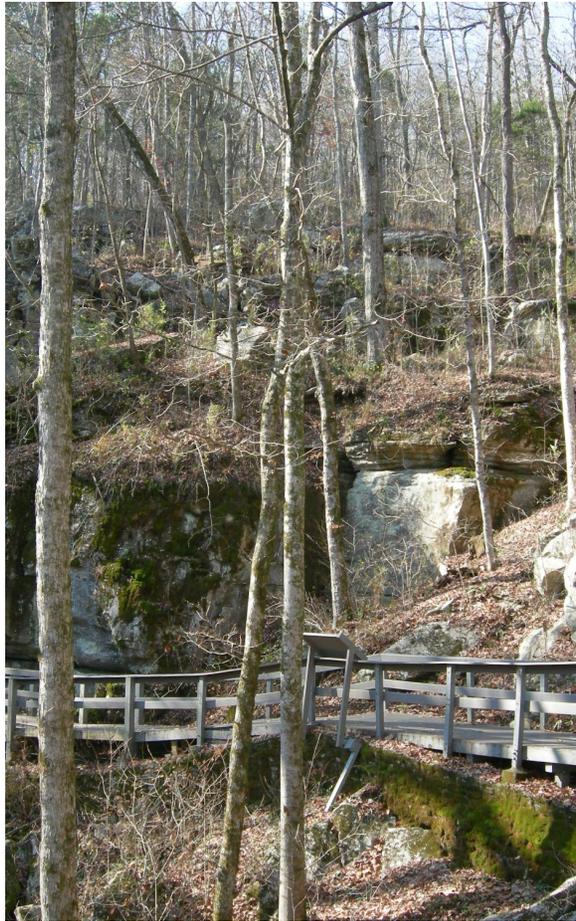
This Russell Cave site contains the cave, a stream, sinkholes, and sandstone outcrops. The woods near the cave entrance are comprised of blue ash, yellow buckeye, white basswood, and tulip poplar. The stream floodplain consists of boxelder and tulip poplar. Wooded slopes contain a diverse canopy that includes black cherry, white oak, yellow buckeye, American beech, black locust, and hickory species. A longer 1.2 mile loop trail winds up and across the hillside and through an Oak-Hickory forest.

A short walking trail leads the visitor along a wheelchair accessible raised boardwalk through the hardwood forest to the cave shelter. The trail extends a short distance into the large cave opening where visitors

can view interpretive reading rails about the cave and the successive peoples who utilized or inhabited the cave. Recently the park commissioned creation of a number of full-size human figures to help give visitors insight into life in the shelter. More are being created with the intent of eventually representing each major occupation period by an in-cave grouping of mannequins. Remote video cameras provide the park with surveillance of the shelter area.

In the past, further cave exploration, or spelunking, was allowed by caving clubs, but that is no longer allowed. There are several rare species within the cave but a full species inventory has not been done, and there is no cave management plan.

The visitor center includes exhibits about the prehistoric cultures that inhabited the site including artifacts and reproductions of tools and weapons. A large mowed meadow includes picnic tables and is a popular site for picnics and also hosts an annual Native American Festival each Spring. The festival features educational demonstrations of the lifeways of the Southeastern Native American Peoples.



Foundations

Foundational information is used to guide the development of the future interpretation & education program. It includes a wide range of subject matter: management goals for interpretation, a description of the significance ascribed to the place and its resources, primary interpretive themes (overarching stories), a description of those aspects of visitor experience affected by the program, an exploration of support for the interpretation & education program provided by other park functions, stakeholder suggestions for improving the program, and more. Through the course of the process, all of these elements are discussed and described, issues are raised, and solutions are voiced so that the development and implementation of the future interpretation & education program will be successful. Stakeholders play a vital role in shaping the future program by collaboratively establishing this foundation.

Foundations Workshop

A two-day Foundations Workshop was held in March 2008 including park staff and community stakeholders. The purpose of the workshop was to gather consensus foundational information on the significance of Russell Cave National Monument's resources. Workshop participants are listed in Appendix 1.

Park Purpose

National Monuments are created by the authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906 which authorizes the President of the United States "to declare by public proclamation historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States to be national monuments." In keeping with this 1906 Act, President John F. Kennedy declared Russell Cave a National Monument after the National Geographic Society donated the site to the National Park Service, specifically to preserve the evidence of nearly 10,000 years of human habitation of the cave site.

Park Significance

Because archeological understanding is constantly evolving and expanding, the significance statements below were refined, as part of the Foundations workshop process, from the park's previous significance statements to reflect the most current understanding of the habitation of Russell Cave.

- 1** Russell Cave National Monument preserves and interprets one of the longest and most complete archeological records of human occupation in the Southeastern United States; from early human presence through the time of European contact.
- 2** An exceptionally complete archeological sequence of Southeastern prehistoric cultures (Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian) was found within Russell Cave National Monument. This record provides a rare opportunity for insight into these earlier cultures.
- 3** The combination of geological features and natural resources found at Russell Cave has provided a haven for people for millennia. This landscape continues to resonate with people today.

Primary Interpretive Themes

Primary interpretive themes are those ideas and concepts about RUCA that the park hopes every visitor will have an opportunity to understand. The themes, which are based on the park's purpose and resource significance, provide the foundation for all interpretive media and programs in the park. The themes do not include everything that may be interpreted, but they do address those ideas that are critical to an understanding and appreciation of the park's importance. All interpretive efforts, through both media and personal services, should relate to one or more of the themes, and each theme should be addressed by some part of the overall interpretive program. Effective interpretation results when visitors are able to connect the concepts with the resources and derive something personally meaningful from the experience.

The following interpretive themes were developed as part of the Foundations workshop:

1 Within Russell Cave’s earthen layers are found the stories of countless lives, revealed through artifacts, pottery, weapons, weavings, and other remnants.

Interpretation of this theme will help visitors understand that artifacts and cultural remains deposited in the cave shelter over thousands of years provide the clues to understanding the people who lived here and their cultures.

2 The story of Russell Cave National Monument progresses through thousands of years of development of pottery, weapons, medicines, clothing, and food procurement methods which ensured the success of myriad generations of people.

Interpretation of this theme helps visitors understand:

- that human cultures have changed and developed over time and this process can be seen in the cultural items found in Russell Cave.
- the connection between material culture and survival.
- the types of items found at Russell Cave, how they were used, and how they contributed to survival.

3 Russell Cave National Monument reveals the cultural evolution of Southeastern peoples (Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian) beginning with their earliest presence and extending through the period of European contact.

Interpretation of this theme further supports visitors’ understanding of evolving cultures and specifically those of the Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian cultures. It also provides opportunities for exploring intangible universals with visitors – concepts such as home, family, courage, fear, survival, and celebration.

4 An unusual combination of geological processes and physical characteristics created Russell Cave—a haven for thousands of years of continuous human use.

Interpretation of this theme helps visitors understand:

- the geological processes that created Russell Cave.
- how features of the cave contributed to its thousands of years of use for human shelter.

5 The rich and diverse plant and animal life of the Cumberland foothills surrounding Russell Cave has sustained human populations for millennia and continues to attract people to the area today.

Interpretation of this theme helps visitors understand:

- the ways in which successive human groups utilized the plant and animal life surrounding the cave for survival.
- the current park’s natural history, ecosystems, and plant and animal species.

6 The scientific discipline of archeology helps provide an understanding of the lifestyles and cultural practices of the successive communities of people who inhabited Russell Cave.

Interpretation of this theme helps visitors understand:

- some of the methods used by archeology.
- the role and importance of the discipline of archeology in understanding the past cultures of Russell Cave.

Management Goals: Interpretation and Education

The overall impact of the National Park Servicewide interpretation and education program is to help ensure that the public:

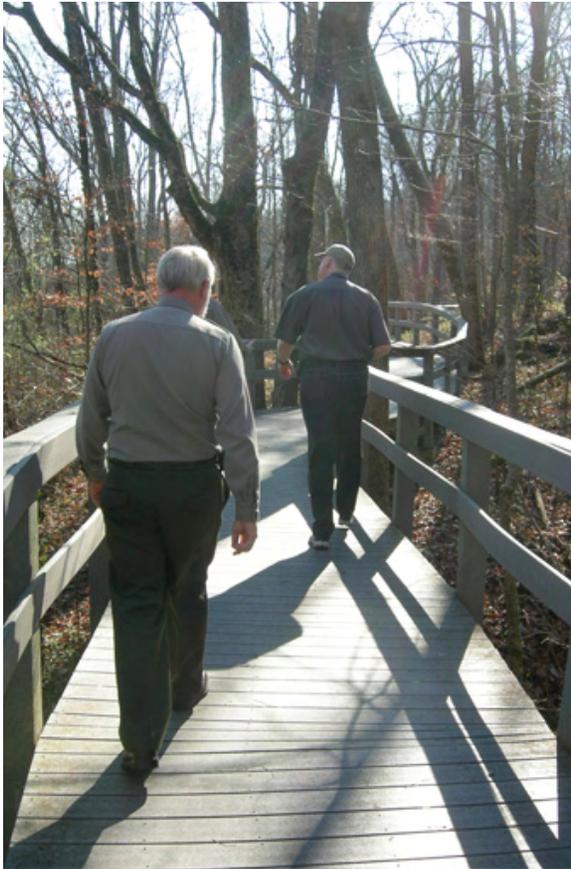
- *Finds personal meaning and shared heritage in the National Park System;*
- *Understands and participates in civil democratic society;*
- *Practices healthy lifestyles through recreation;*
- *Demonstrates a long-term commitment to stewardship of national park resources; and*
- *Enjoys motivating, lifelong learning opportunities.*

Ultimately, these things, along with the activities of other individuals and organizations, will lead to a National Park System that is preserved for future generations.

Interpretive services can help a park achieve management goals related to the park visitor. The following articulates specific management goals that the implementation of this long-range interpretive plan will help to address. These statements describe the goal but not the specific actions to address them.

Russell Cave National Monument should:

- Provide a setting in which visitors feel welcome, safe, and able to enjoy and benefit from park programs and resources.
- Help park audiences relate to Russell Cave National Monument, its resources, interpretive story and to the National Park System as a whole.
- Provide opportunities for visitors to interact with park personnel and have hands-on experiences relevant to the park stories.
- Provide educational opportunities for park audiences.
- Provide meaningful and memorable experiences for park audiences.
- Establish a sense of ownership and stewardship by visitors toward Russell Cave National Monument.



Visitor Experience Goals

Visitor experience goals describe desired visitor experiences that stakeholders think the managers of the program should pay special attention to as the park's interpretation and education program is planned and implemented. The following articulates the visitor experience goals that the implementation of this long-range interpretive plan will help to achieve. Some of the goals relate to the overall visitor interpretive experience, some relate directly to interpretive themes, and several relate to issues that are not directly addressed by the interpretive program but are important goals. The statements describe the goal but not specific actions to achieve them.

Goals Related to the Overall Interpretive Experience

- Visitors planning their visit will have an opportunity to find up-to-date introductory, enticing, and directional information on RUCA's website.
- Visitors of all backgrounds will feel comfortable and welcome.
- Non-English speaking visitors will have adequate access to park information.
- Pre-scheduled school groups will have an opportunity for a conducted experience applicable to their school curriculum.
- Visitors will be greeted by a Park Ranger and able to make their own choice of program and create their own customized experience.
- Visitors will have an opportunity to learn about the significance and themes of RUCA through a variety of effective interpretive services and media.
- Visitors will have an opportunity to experience hands-on activities that connect them to the past.

- Visitors will have an opportunity to learn more about RUCA's story through the educational material sold by the cooperating association.
- Visitors will experience park stories and meanings that connect them to their own heritage and background.
- Visitors will be encouraged to continue their learning about the larger story of which RUCA is a part by visiting other historic sites that expand the story or address other aspects of it.
- Visitors will feel a sense of ownership and stewardship toward Russell Cave National Monument.
- Visitors will learn that National Parks are important to our past and our future.
- Visitors will be inspired by their park experience and will leave wanting to return.
- Visitors will have a new experience no matter how often they come.

Goals Directly Related to Interpretive Themes

- Visitors will understand the progression of cultural technology.
- Visitors have a better understanding of the inextricable link between people and natural resources.
- Visitors will understand the richness of the natural diversity of the area and how people took advantage of that diversity.
- Visitors should leave with a sense of history and scope of time.
- Visitors will learn how the cave was formed.
- Visitors will have a better understanding of the value of preserving cultural and natural resources.

Goals Addressed by Other Park Management Approaches

- Visitors will experience an adequate way-finding system as they approach the monument.
- Visitors will have a positive first impression and be pleased with the overall appearance of the park.
- Visitors will experience park maintenance activities respectful of their presence.
- Visitors will have opportunities for solitude, peace, and tranquility particularly on the nature and hiking trails.
- Visitors will have the opportunity to commune with nature and be more reflective about life itself.
- Visitors will have an opportunity to see and respect wildlife in a natural setting.
- Visitors will not be unreasonably inhibited by accessibility issues.
- Visitors will experience a landscape in the area of the cave that is reflective of that experienced by the early peoples.



Issues and Influences

No program operates in a vacuum. A number of factors including long-range Service-wide initiatives, critical resource issues, staffing and funding, employee development, new technologies, dynamics of neighboring communities, and concerns of stakeholders not voiced previously should all be taken into account when planning and implementing the park's overall interpretive program. Articulated below are several issues of relevance to Russell Cave National Monument.

1 Interpreting the Resource

The primary resource, the cave shelter, by itself is not very dramatic or impressive. The archeological dig has been filled, replaced by a flat, barren area of dirt. For visitors to appreciate the site, though, they have to understand the long occupation of the shelter by successive groups of native peoples. How to impress that history upon the visitor remains one of the primary interpretive challenges for the park. There is some discussion of developing a second interpretive route that would take visitors to the stream level of the cave providing a very different vantage point and understanding than the shelter portion.

2 NPS Interpretation and Education Renaissance

The National Park Service National Education Council recently began a nationwide movement to enhance and equip its interpretation and education programs to meet the needs of 21st century audiences. The Renaissance has five areas of focus, all of which are relevant to the Interpretation and Education of Russell Cave National Monument. The five areas of focus include:

- a. Establishment of National Standards for Interpretation and Education. These are currently under development. When they are complete, it will be important

for RUCA to evaluate its program and make adjustments to meet the national standards.

b. Engaging new and diverse audiences. The demographics of the American population are changing drastically. It is important that national park audiences reflect the face of a richly diverse nation. Everyone must feel welcome at national parks, and everyone should have opportunities to see aspects of their own background and experience reflected in the universal meanings and stories interpreted at national parks. RUCA must continue to work to engage traditionally underserved audiences such as African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians, new immigrants, and low-income urban and rural audiences.

c. New Technology. Changing technology is profoundly impacting the way people communicate, learn, find community, express themselves, and find and process information. To fully embrace 21st Century audiences, national parks must use new media and current technologies to interpret park resources without abandoning traditional methods and techniques. RUCA must insure that its menu of interpretive media includes new and currently used technologies.

d. Embrace Partners. It is clear that with ever-growing audiences, and ever-dwindling budgets and personnel, the only way to meet the demand and need for fully serving park audiences is to work closely with partners. To meet the needs of park audiences both onsite and at a distance, RUCA should build upon opportunities to engage with and facilitate interpretive and educational activity by and through partners.

e. Evaluation. Traditionally in the NPS, the interpretation and education program has not made decisions on what program to offer, how to allocate funding, personnel and other critical resources based on solid research and evaluative data. In this time of scarce resources, it is critical to make decisions based on what approaches are effective, and what audiences respond to. To accomplish this, parks must start to conduct evaluations themselves and learn from evaluative and research data produced throughout the system and the interpretive field in general. RUCA should consider the outcomes of their program and create a plan for collecting and using evaluation information on a regular basis for making decisions about programming and for ongoing program improvement.

3 Park Fifty Year Anniversary

In 2011, the park will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. This affords opportunities for special programs, activities, and events that increase the public's awareness of the park.

4 NPS Centennial

In 2016, the NPS will celebrate its 100 anniversary. The current administration (Director Mary Bomar) has established a Centennial Initiative focusing on stewardship, environmental leadership, recreational experience, education, and professional excellence. The present plan should take these major themes into consideration when making recommendations for future programs and media. RUCA should take advantage of opportunities that arise for new partnerships and programs.

5 Civil War Sesquicentennial

The 150th anniversary of the Civil War will occur during the period of the present plan's implementation. Russell Cave National Monument, though not a Civil War site may have opportunities to partner with nearby NPS Civil War sites.

6 Engaging the Local Community and Ethnically Diverse Community Members

Russell Cave National Monument currently enjoys a good relationship with its neighboring communities and partners. The present plan must capitalize on these relationships and continue to enhance them becoming an even more integrated part of the local community. It is especially important for the park to engage ethnically and racially diverse community members, because they have traditionally not benefited from the park, and their stories are an important part of American history. Relationships with gateway communities to national parks are critical to park preservation, tourism, and enhanced visitor experiences. National parks should be a source of local pride for everyone, and it is hoped that park neighbors will become inspired to help steward park resources.

7 Staff/Funding Shortage

All NPS parks have experienced severe budget cuts over the past ten years. Currently the interpretive staff at Russell Cave is extremely limited with only three permanent positions. Creative use of volunteers, seasonal staff, interns, and partners must be considered in fulfilling the goals and objectives of this plan.

8 Remote/Rural Location

Russell Cave is a remote park in a rural area of farms and forests. Attracting destination visitors is a challenge. The present plan must consider tourism initiatives and partnerships with local communities. The plan should also consider opportunities for virtual visits to the park and the use of distance learning technology to reach audiences that may never visit the park or the region.

9 Recreational Uses of the Park

Some park visitors enjoy the peaceful setting and open space of the park for recreational walks, bird-watching and other activities not related to the cave and its resources. Others enjoy the open mowed field and picnic tables for birthday parties, picnics, and other group and family events. The present plan should address ways to help these visitors connect with the significances and meanings of the park.

10 North Alabama Birding Trail

Russell Cave is stop #44 on this extensive “birding trail.” NABT maintains an informative website (<http://www.northalabamabirdingtrail.com/>) that describes the sites, birds likely to be seen, and other information. The birding trail designation has the potential to bring more wildlife-oriented visitors to the park.

11 Year of Alabama History

2009 has been designated the “Year of Alabama History.” Several publications are being produced for this event and should include information about Russell Cave.

12 Trail of Tears Annual Motorcycle Ride

Each year the Trail of Tears Motorcycle ride brings more than 100,000 riders through the area. There is the potential to attract more of these riders to Russell Cave.

13 Improved Highway Signage

Improved highway access and improved signage to the park from I-24 has the potential to increase park visitation.

14 Home Schooling

There is a significant population of children being home schooled in the region. The park is a potential field trip site for home schooled children.

15 Generational Marketing

The “Baby Boom” will begin to reach retirement age in the next decade. This will create a large demographic shift. Many retirees are more likely to travel during the shoulder seasons – Fall and Spring. Marketing directly to this large group of retirees may help boost off-season park visitation. Related to this is the potential for increased numbers of bus tours and tours with connections to Steamboat tours.

16 Tri-State School Draw

Russell Cave, located in Alabama, is near the borders of Tennessee and Georgia and attracts school groups from all three states. Efforts toward meshing park offerings with curricula standards for all three states should be continued.

17 National American Indian Education

Because of the long history of Native Americans represented at Russell Cave, there is a potential for interest in the site by a number of American Indian education programs.

18 Inter-park Cooperation

Russell Cave is within a day’s drive of a variety of National Park sites. Cooperation between sites can help increase visitation.

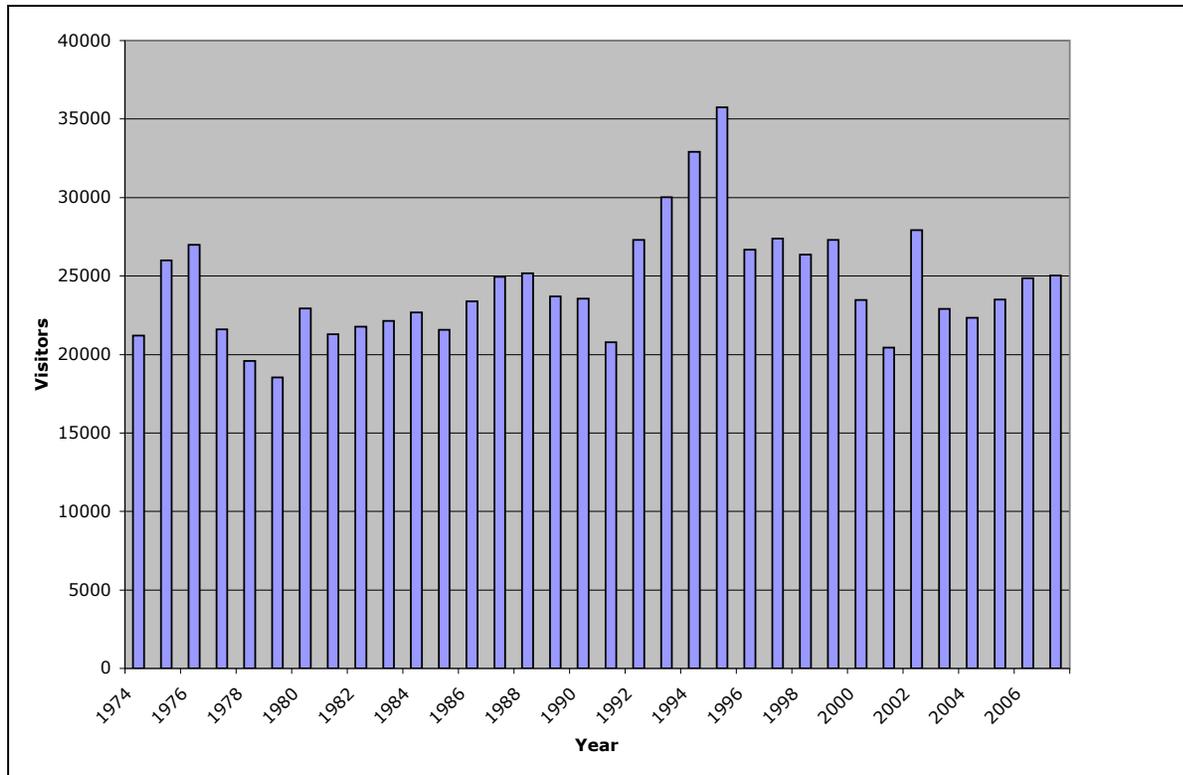
19 Archeological Advancements

As archeology is a constantly changing and advancing field, new discoveries or understandings may impact how Russell Cave is interpreted.

Existing Visitor Experience

Visitor Use Data

The chart at left summarizes park attendance figures for the park for the past 33 years. Other than three years, 1993 to 1995, when attendance was above thirty thousand and two years, 1979 and 1980, when attendance fell slightly below twenty thousand, park attendance has remained in the annual range of 20-30,000 visitors annually. Park data does not provide any further breakdown of attendance or audience.



Total Park visitation, 1974 - 2007

	EXHIBITS	FESTIVALS	PARK MOVIE	JUNIOR RANGER	DEMOS	NIGHT/DAY PROGRAMS	PARK TOURS	OFF-SITE	WEBSITE
School Groups	X		X		X		X	X	
Home School	X	X	X	X	X		X		
Public	X		X				X	X	
Retirees	X		X				X		
Families on Vacation	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
Scouting groups	X	X	X	X	X		X		
Locals		X				X			
Archeological grps.	X		X						
Outdoor groups					X	X	X		
Spelunkers			X						
Business grps.			X						
History buffs		X	X		X				
Drop-ins	X		X		X	X			
Day-trippers						X			
International	X		X		X				
Gen X, Y			X						
Hikers, bikers									
Geo/earth cachers									
Rvers			X						
Jackson Cnty Ldrshp					X				
Spring break									
Birders									
Group tours			X		X				
Mentally challenged					X		X		
Other Park service									
Native Americans		X							
Social events					X				
Antique car groups									
Motorcyclists					X				

Summary of Park Audiences

Understanding current and potential audiences can help visitors plan interpretive programs that most effectively enhance the experiences of its visitors. When comprehensively planning an interpretation & education program, the basis for categorizing audiences lies in whether or not a particular audience requires communication in a way distinct from that of the general park audience. A balance must be struck between communicating effectively with a greater number of specific audiences, and the limited resources available to the park's program.

The current audiences shown at left were described by participants along with ideas about which existing programs are most applicable to the group.

Specific Audience Segments for Special Attention

A list of new or potential target audiences was articulated along with ideas on how to address these audiences.

Other Audiences: potential

Audience approaches	Possible program
Locals	special emphasis programs
Teenagers	GPS, podcasts, etc, interactivity
Bus Tours	consistent program, new programs, podcast
20-somethings	Internet/virtual current programs on calendar, good navigation, enhanced page-link
Interstate travelers	signage, mileage, welcome centers (TN, GA, AB), coordination w/partners
Diverse audiences	translations, community outreach activities

The 2007 Visitor Survey Card Data Report found that 98% of park visitors were "satisfied overall with appropriate facilities, services, and recreational opportunities."

Existing Conditions: Interpretive and Educational Programs and Media

When looking to the future, it is useful to obtain a snapshot of the park's current interpretive operation, programs and media to gain a sense of what might be improved to make the interpretation & education program more efficient and effective over the next five to ten years. Below is a summary of existing programs and media at Russell Cave.

Personal Services

1 Visitor Center

The visitor center at Russell Cave, constructed in 1967, is small but appropriate for the size of the park and visitation. The center is designed to lead visitors into the building and past the visitor information desk and interpretive exhibits before they exit by a back door to the boardwalk leading to the cave. This is an effective architectural management scheme and affords the park the ability to fulfill its goal of offering all visitors an opportunity to be greeted by a park ranger.

100% of 2008 Visitor Survey Card respondents rated the visitor center as "good" or "very good."



2 Exhibits

Exhibits are about eleven years old. Photos and a timeline tell the story of the people that lived at Russell Cave long ago, as well as the history of the archeological excavations there. Artifacts and reproductions of items found in the cave shelter are on display. Park staff describes the exhibits as adequate from the visitor point of view but problematic from the staff point of view: Access to the display cases for periodic inventory and cleaning is very difficult. In addition, by current accessibility standards, the exhibits are not very interactive and are not accessible to people with visual or hearing impairments.

98% of 2008 Visitor Survey Card respondents rated the exhibits as "good" or "very good."

3 Park Film

The park film was produced in 2004. The Park Staff is in the process of establishing a new Park video.

4 Bookstore

The bookstore operated by Eastern National has a good variety of books and products related to the park's interpretive story.

5 Prehistoric Tools and Weapons Demonstrations

Rangers provide hands-on demonstrations of the types of tools and weapons early inhabitants used. Demonstrations include using an atlatl to throw a spear, flintknapping methods to make a spear point, and how to make a fire using natural materials and a bow drill. The demonstrations and hands-on programs are well-received.

99% of 2008 Visitor Survey Card respondents rated park ranger programs as "good" or "very good."

6 Cave Shelter Interpretation

A wheel-chair accessible raised boardwalk leads visitors to the cave shelter where a series of waysides provide interpretation of the cave shelter and the successive groups that occupied it. In addition, mannequins representing the different groups of people who have occupied it have been commissioned. The intent is to have a grouping for each main period (Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian). The park also offers guided tours to the sinkhole which is part of the cave system.

7 Other Trails and Waysides

A short nature trail includes several waysides on the park's natural history. A 1.2 mile hillside trail, constructed in 1962 has a narrow asphalt walking surface, but has steps and is steep in places, hence it is not handicap accessible.

8 Native American Festival

The Russell Cave Native American Festival is an annual event held every Spring and draws several thousand participants and visitors. The festival features educational demonstrations of the authentic lifeways of the Southeastern Native American Peoples. The festival also draws diverse communities to the park.

9 Park Publications

The park folder is well done and current. It interprets the main stories of the site well and provides basic orientation materials. The park has a popular Junior Ranger publication and program. An inexpensive booklet entitled Life at Russell Cave that summarizes the story of human habitation of the cave is available in the bookstore.

98% of 2007 Visitor Survey Card respondents rated park publications as "good" or "very good."

10 Curriculum-based Education Programs

Russell Cave has a limited curriculum-based interpretive program which needs to be revised.

11 Website

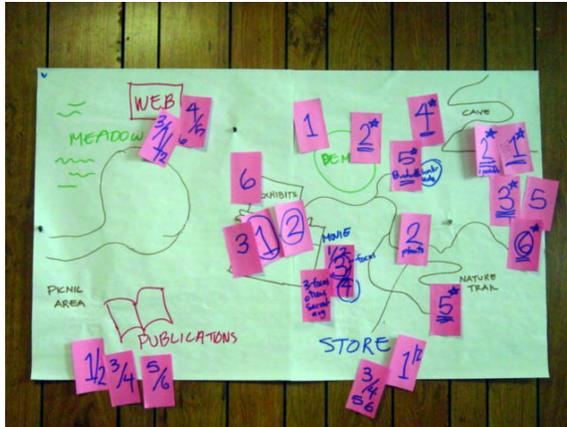
Russell Cave's website provides clear, basic information on the park and its interpretive offerings.

12 Interpretive Technology

The site does not have an audio tour, cell phone tours, hand-held technology, or other state of the art interpretive media.

Recommendations: Interpretive and Educational Programs, Media, and Facilities 2009-2018

The following goals and recommendations are based on the foundational information detailed in this document, and the ideas generated at the second stakeholder workshop. Together, they outline a vision for Russell Cave National Monument's future Interpretation and Education Program, and the steps necessary to achieve that vision.



Theme Mapping

As part of the planning process, the planning team “mapped” venues within the park where each of the six interpretive themes are currently being interpreted, where they could best be interpreted in the future and in which site or venue each is best presented or highlighted. The table at right summarizes the findings.

Interpretive Themes Referenced in Table

- 1 Within Russell Cave’s earthen layers are found the stories of countless lives, revealed through artifacts, pottery, weapons, weavings, and other remnants.
- 2 The story of Russell Cave National Monument progresses through thousands of years of development of pottery, weapons, medicines, clothing, and food procurement methods which ensured the success of myriad generations of people.
- 3 Russell Cave National Monument reveals the cultural evolution of Southeastern peoples (Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian) beginning with their earliest presence and extending through the period of European contact.
- 4 An unusual combination of geological processes and physical characteristics created Russell Cave – a haven for thousands of years of continuous human use.
- 5 The rich and diverse plant and animal life of the Cumberland foothills surrounding Russell Cave has sustained human populations for millennia and continues to attract people to the area today.
- 6 The scientific discipline of archeology helps provide an understanding of the lifestyles and cultural practices of the successive communities of people who inhabited Russell Cave.

Interpretive Venue	Themes to be presented
(bold/underlined indicates best place to interpret theme)	
Internet	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Publications	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Personal Services	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Exhibits	1 , 2, 3, 6
Movie	1, 2, 3 , 4
Bookstore	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Demonstration Area	1, 2
Nature Trail	2, 5*
Boardwalk (incl. Sinkhole)	4, 5
Cave	1, 2, 3, 4, 6
Lower Cave Trail	4 , 5

* not wheelchair accessible

Summary goals

- **To increase overall park visitation.**

Russell Cave’s visitation has remained relatively stable for the past three decades. Several of the following goals, if achieved, would contribute to this overall goal. Though the park does get some visitors from afar, the park offers a scale and amenities especially appropriate for local and regional visitors.

- **To increase park visitation by diverse audiences.**

Like many National Parks, Russell Cave’s visitation is not representative of a cross-section of the nation or of it’s local community. Outreach efforts should be made to bring awareness of the park to a broader cross-section of the local and regional population.

- **To expand the park’s curriculum-based education programs.**

Located near the border of three states and multiple school districts, Russell Cave has considerable potential for expanding its school programs increasing understanding and awareness of the park in the area.

- **To focus interpretation on primary interpretive themes.**

In a time of very tight resources it is important to focus efforts on and reinforce the primary interpretive themes.

- **To enliven the visitor’s cave interpretation experience.**

Interpreting the cave and bringing its story alive is an ongoing challenge addressed in this plan.

- **To expand park interpretive opportunities.**

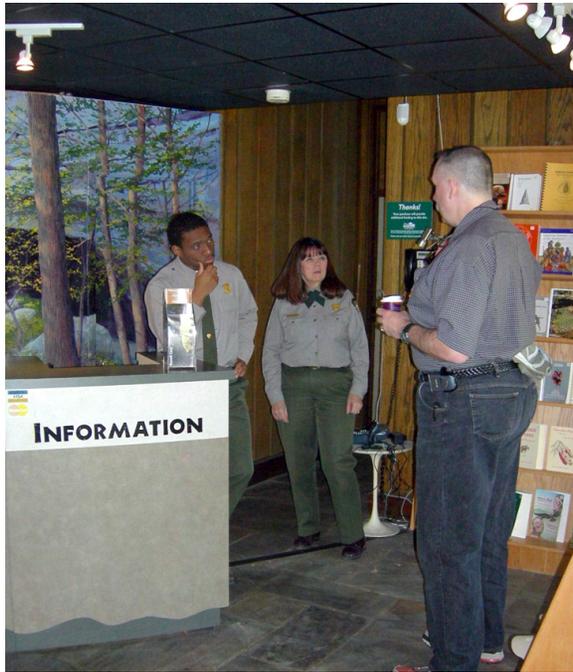
Though a small park, there is the potential to expand interpretive opportunities in ways that help make the Russell Cave story engaging and personal to visitors.

- **To increase park partnerships.**

With little new funding on the horizon for parks across the country, partnerships with community organizations and businesses become increasingly important for parks to take on new projects and achieve goals.

- **To expand the park’s volunteer program and opportunities.**

Volunteerism provides opportunities for individuals to contribute to the National Park Service and learn about Russell Cave while also providing important effort to the park.



Narrative Introduction

Russell Cave National Monument is a small, out-of-the-way park, special in its understated attributes. It is located in a tranquilly scenic pastoral valley. It's modest but appealing Mission 66 buildings are set among large mowed meadows and mature shade trees in the lee of a hillside of maturing eastern deciduous forest. The meadow and picnic areas are frequently used for picnics and family events. Clear parking and walkways lead visitors directly to the visitor center. The design assures that nearly every first time visitor passes through the center en route to the cave, the park's primary resource. The park has capitalized on this and makes personal and direct contact – some might say “Southern hospitality” -- a strong feature of the visitor experience. Nearly every visitor is greeted personally and provided with a verbal overview of the resource and opportunities for the visitor. Interpretive staff at Russell Cave offer interpretive tours of the cave on an as-needed basis as long as there is someone available to staff the front desk.

The visitor center public areas, including a small exhibit area, bookstore area, information desk, and multi-purpose room/theater, and restrooms, are all on one level and fully accessible. An elevated walkway, protected by handrails, leads visitors the short distance to and into the cave. This

combination means that the primary interpretive experience is appropriately accessible to a wide diversity of visitors of varying physical capabilities. Unlike many modern parks that today are challenged to make an aging infrastructure accessible to modern standards, this is not an issue for Russell Cave.

The park's annual visitation has fluctuated between twenty and thirty thousand visitors for all but five of the last 35 years. It's significance and story are compelling but not earth shattering. Because of its small size and modest number of visitors the park can offer personal contact unattainable in larger parks.

For many visitors, especially those who have visited Mammoth Cave, Jewel Cave, or Wind Cave in the National Park system, and a number of private caves that dot the Appalachian mountains, the word “cave” conjures up visions of descending deep into the earth, surrounded by darkness and fanciful rock formations. For these visitors, Russell Cave might be a disappointment. Though there is a miles-long portion of the cave that winds its way through the ancient hills, this part of the cave is out of sight and, beyond the first several hundred feet, lies outside of park boundaries. The accessible portion, an alcove to the main cave consisting of a large outcrop of rock sheltering a relatively flat expanse of exposed dirt offers

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little initial visitor reward. The significance of this relatively humble grotto lies in the stories told beneath the earth – in artifacts and remains representing thousands of years of habitation of the cave.

The park has made efforts to bring this story to life. Demonstrations of native tools and weapons – a bow drill, fire starter, and atlatl – are very interactive and well received. Several years ago the park completed new waysides in the cave. One briefly describes the archeological dig that took place there. Others describe the native peoples who inhabited the cave – the Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian. Paired with these waysides are groupings of human figure mannequins representative of each of the groups. Security for the mannequins consists of a guard rail along the boardwalk that communicates to people a separation but many visitors could easily hop over the rail if they were so inclined and approach the mannequins. A video monitor further helps protect from vandalism and the park has had more problems from rodents than from human visitors.

Beyond the primary resource, the park provides other opportunities. A short pathway leads to a sinkhole, part of the same geological system that produced Russell Cave. A narrow asphalt trail, a portion equipped with interpretive signage on natural history

themes, winds its way up, across, and back down the hillside above the visitor center through the maturing deciduous forest. This walk provides opportunities to enjoy a relatively intact ecosystem with diverse tree and plant species that harbor a wide variety of resident and seasonal migrant bird species.

The park has a limited curriculum-based education program and a number of school children visit the park, especially in late spring. One of the most successful efforts the park has made in expanding its interpretive outreach is an annual Native American Festival which occurs the first weekend in May. In 2008 it drew over 2,000 visitors to a weekend dedicated to the authentic lifeways of the Southeastern Native American Peoples. The festival includes dancing, skills demonstrations, art exhibits, and food vendors.

It is anticipated that, as a very small park, there are probably few sources of funds for large capital projects. For these reasons this report focuses primarily on modest-sized projects and a variety of approaches across the board for expanding outreach and exposure to the park aimed at increasing overall visitation particularly by diverse audiences. That said, due to the park's 50 year anniversary coming up in 2011 there is the opportunity to capitalize on that event



to attract funds for one or two larger efforts. The National Park centennial in 2016 also provides some opportunities.

The overall interpretive program for this modest park is strong and provides a solid foundation for consideration of directions interpretation may take in the next ten years covered by this Long-Range Interpretive Plan. Many of the recommendations interconnect.

Specific Recommendations

Recommendations 1 through 7 build upon current programs and efforts.

1 Expand the park website to provide visitors with a menu of offerings to enhance understanding of the park.

Some visitors call or write to obtain information for trip planning. The park has a standard package of info that is mailed in response. Many more visitors today rely on websites for their initial understanding of a park and to aid in trip planning. RUCA's website is thorough in its planning role but includes little in-depth information about the park's significance, interpretive themes, or resources. With the help of new technologies a variety of information in multiple formats should be provided on the website – virtual

tours, audio and video podcasts, theme-related flash movies, curriculum materials, and current research documents. Digital technologies are rapidly changing and offer ever greater possibilities. An important effort for RUCA in the next ten years covered by this plan will be to train staff to be technically up-to-date paving the way for in-house production of digital media and maintenance of on-line efforts.

Implementation Strategies

- Provide staff with training in new media and purchase equipment for in-house production of programs.
- Provide training for an in-park staff website manager.
- Incorporate counter into website to track numbers of web visitors.

Benefits

- There are signs that park visitation may decline across the country as a younger generation raised on digital media come of age. Increasing RUCA's online presence and accessibility to a digital-savvy generation can help maintain interest, visitation, and understanding of RUCA.

2 Work with tri-state agencies to assure adequate wayfinding to and welcome

center exposure for Russel Cave National Monument.

The park is located near two interstates – I-24 and I-65. The park should evaluate the effectiveness of current highway signage in directing visitors to the park and where found deficient should work with the states of Alabama and Tennessee to correct. In addition state welcome centers provide the opportunity for the park to advertise itself through rack cards. Russell Cave should continue to produce rack cards and work with organizations such as the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourism Association and State of Alabama Travel Council to distribute these materials. Rack cards are currently paid for directly out of park budget, but potentially could be funded by Eastern National.

Implementation Strategies

- Work with state highway agencies to assure adequate and clear directional signage to Russell Cave.
- Produce RUCA rack cards and work with distributing agencies for display at interstate welcome centers.

Benefits

- Increased ability to easily find RUCA.
- Increased exposure of RUCA to travelers.

3 Maintain strong personal services approach.

Russell Cave's personal approach to visitors previously described is well received and should be continued. Personal welcome and orientation at the front desk, ranger led walks, roving rangers, all provide meaningful experiences to park visitors. The park should review current ranger-led walks to make sure that all six primary interpretive themes are represented. Current walks focus on the cave story. Additional walks should cover natural history topics and cave geology, while always tying the story to the human habitation of the cave. These new programs should stress theme-related universal concepts to help create personal meaning and connections to the RUCA story.

The personal services offered at RUCA are time intensive, however. An expanded volunteer program (see recommendation 10) could help the park maintain this personal approach while freeing up it's professional staff for some of the new initiatives below that will help increase park visitation especially by diverse populations who have not utilized the park in the past.

Implementation Strategies

- Develop additional theme-based interpretive walks stressing theme-related universal concepts.

- Train volunteers to lead some walks and programs.

Benefits

- Expanded program offerings, increased relevance to an increasingly diverse population.
- Expanded meaningful volunteerism opportunities while freeing time for park staff for other efforts.

4 Add to Park Publications

The park folder is well done and current. It interprets the main stories of the site well and provides basic orientation materials. The park has a popular Junior Ranger publication and program. An inexpensive booklet entitled *Life at Russell Cave* summarizes the story of human habitation of the cave and is available in the bookstore. Site bulletins on specific themes should be developed and both printed for hand-out and posted to the website for downloading. The Junior Ranger Program could also be expanded to include an online feature – children could begin the program online and then visit the park to complete it. Follow-up activities and volunteer opportunities could be offered to Junior Rangers through the park email list. Finally, *Life at Russell Cave* should be republished with an updated appearance and any new information.

Implementation Strategies

- Identify volunteers or college students to develop site bulletins, expanded Junior Ranger Programs.
- Identify college faculty to provide professional input into updating *Life at Russell Cave*.

Benefits

- Keeping print materials up-to-date so that visitors are afforded a consistent high-quality and current interpretive experience.

5 Continue and Expand Prehistoric Tools and Weapons Demonstrations

Rangers provide hands-on demonstrations of the types of tools and weapons early inhabitants used. Demonstrations include using an atlatl to throw a spear, flintknapping methods to make a spear point, and how to make a fire using natural materials and a bow drill. The demonstrations and hands-on programs are well-received by audiences of all ages. This program helps bring the Russell Cave story to life. The program should be continued and expanded (see Cave Interpretation and Boardwalk Extension) to include more activities and reach more people.

6 Expand the Russell Cave Native American Festival by adding a “school Friday” before the weekend event. In addition create an annual theme on which some of the events, in addition to general activities, will focus each year.

The Russell Cave Native American Festival is an annual event held every Spring and draws several thousand participants and visitors. The festival features educational demonstrations of the authentic lifeways of the Southeastern Native American Peoples. The festival draws a population that otherwise might not visit the park. Starting the festival on Friday – “school Friday” – would provide an opportunity for area school classes to take advantage of this educational and fun event. Creating an annual theme on which some of the activities and exhibits would focus, could encourage repeat visitation by adding variety from year to year to the program.

Implementation Strategy

- Gauge interest among local school districts for a “School Friday”, and among program providers.
- Given sufficient support, expand and advertise program through school channels.
- Establish an annually changing theme.

Benefits

- This approach capitalizes on a successful program to reach new audiences with relatively little effort.

7 Develop an expanded curriculum-based education program.

An expanded curriculum-based education program should be modeled on “trunk programs” at other parks. The program should be developed to tie in with state curriculum standards for Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia and should be aimed at grade levels with the most direct relevance to state standards. The program should offer a complete package to teachers including pre-visit materials, in-class “trunk” activities, follow-up park visit, and post-visit materials. The park should also develop and offer on-site teachers’ workshops through nearby districts to provide opportunities to learn about the park and its educational offerings. Many of the curriculum materials could be developed by education students from regional colleges as part of internships or as credit-generating class projects. Alternatively or additionally, materials could be developed by retired classroom teachers through an expanded park volunteer program. The fully developed program should include the following elements:

- Traveling “trunk” of props, reproductions, and classroom activities related to Russell Cave interpretive themes.
- On-line downloadable pre-visit curriculum materials.
- On-site ranger-led park visit including park movie, interactive demonstration activities, and cave tour.
- On-line downloadable post-visit follow-up activities.

Implementation Strategies

- Identify and apply for education grants available for development of curriculum materials.
- Work with area colleges to identify partnership opportunities for internships or special credit-generating projects developing curricular materials.
- Create project team of park interpreter, college interns, and volunteer teachers to develop curriculum materials.
- Advertise new program through teacher newsletters and education networks.
- Work with nearby districts to develop and offer on-site in-service teacher workshops.

Benefits

- An expanded curriculum program helps fulfill the park mission of informing the public about Russell Cave and its resources.
- School programs can contribute to increased park visitation by increasing local awareness of the park and its resources. Children may encourage their families to visit.
- School programs provide an opportunity to reach a broader cross-section of local populations.

Recommendations 8 through 11 expand RUCA's efforts to reach diverse audiences in a rapidly changing world.

8 Expand internet, and electronic media options

There is a lot of excitement about new electronic media and their possible application to National Park interpretation. Cell phone tours, podcasts, and video pod tours all have potential and limitations. The technology is changing rapidly and new opportunities and approaches will become available on a regular basis. There have been a number of suggestions about the possibility of enlivening cave interpretation through the use of video pod casts available to visitors

to play on their portable media player (PMP) that could depict through animation what life in the cave might have been like during different time periods. Such technologies have been tested at some historical battlefield sites in England with mixed reactions from visitors – some applauding the new approach and others finding it a rude intrusion into what they view as an opportunity for quiet and reflection. The cost for animation is currently prohibitive for a park the size of Russell Cave.

Perhaps the most promising initial venture for RUCA into this realm would be in the creation of short video podcasts of its lifeways demonstration program. Short programs could be made using hand-held digital video cameras on flint knapping and on the use of an atlatl, pump drill, bow drill, blowgun, and nutting stone. These programs could be available for downloading at the visitor center or from the park website. Another simple entrée would be creation of an audio podcast walking tour of the cave. Again this podcast could be downloaded from the visitor center onto visitors' PMPs or ahead of time from a park website. PMPs could be available for checkout for visitors without their own. Probably the most important recommendation in this regard, rather

than specific suggestions that will soon be outdated, is for the park to provide staff training so that the park can stay current and active in expanding its interpretive offerings through new media to a rapidly changing population.

Implementation Strategies

- Provide opportunities for staff to obtain training on new technologies and to stay current.
- Provide training in technologies to facilitate in-house production of short programs.
- Identify volunteers from the community with related expertise to share.
- Develop partnerships for the production of theme related, up-to-date materials for distribution through a variety of media: on line, podcasts.
- Acquire additional hardware and software to develop programs, create download station at front desk.

Benefits

- Entering and staying current with the new digital age will allow the park to make connections with and attract a new generation of park users. It will create opportunities for increased understanding of the park and its resources.



9 Expand outreach programs to increase visitation especially by diverse communities.

Many parks share concern about visitation: the majority of park visitors are middle class Caucasians and visitation does not fully represent the makeup of local communities. This is true at Russell Cave. Efforts should be made to bring awareness and understanding of Russell Cave and its resources to a wider public.

- Interpretive offerings at the park should provide opportunities for personal connection by diverse populations through the use of universal themes.
- The park should make Spanish translations of its materials available at the visitor information desk. A sign in Spanish at the desk should advertise the availability of this material.
- Develop a compact, easily transported traveling exhibit about Russell Cave National Monument for participation in regional festivals. The traveling exhibit should include discussion of the park’s significance and visitor opportunities and should highlight the park’s active demonstration program, natural setting, and opportunities for hiking, bird-watching, picnicking and other outdoor leisure activities. In addition to festivals, the exhibit should be displayed at scout jamborees, local libraries, and other public

facilities where it could bring the park’s opportunities to a larger and more diverse local audience.

- Special programs – flute concert in the cave, snake program and others – have been offered in the past. This program should be expanded to offer monthly “First Saturday” programs and events that relate the themes of Russell Cave to broader community interests. Programs could include special theme guided ranger tours, public speaking events by authorities on subjects related to Russell Cave, art shows by a variety of local artists, book readings and signings by local or regional authors, etc. One program could be modeled on a successful Halloween program at Arkansas Post National Monument called Ghosts of the Past. In this program, many members of the park staff participate, each re-creating a character from one of the Posts previous historic eras. Visitors follow a candlelit pathway through the park where they encounter each of these characters who tell about their life and culture. This approach would work for Russell Cave with individuals stationed at points along the boardwalk and at the demonstration area. Each of the four Native American cultures as well as an early pioneer and archeologist could be portrayed.

Implementation Strategies

- Identify and obtain funding to create traveling exhibit.

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- Identify diverse local festivals (Cornbread Festival, Civil War Reenactments, Scouting jamborees, etc.) where a traveling exhibit could be displayed. An expanded volunteer program (discussed below) could provide staffing for these events at limited cost to the park.
- Establish special program schedule and advertise through local newspapers, public service announcements, community bulletin boards, and the park website.
- Ask attendees at festivals or park events to provide name and email address for inclusion on a park email list for notification of upcoming events.

Benefit

- The primary benefit of these efforts is broadening awareness of the park and its resources to a larger local and regional audience with the goal of increasing visitation especially by previously underrepresented populations.

10 Increase advocacy for and volunteerism at Russell Cave National Monument.

Over the next several years, RUCA should facilitate the development of a Friends group that could provide advocacy, input, funding

and grant writing assistance, and other support to the park. The park should continue its efforts to obtain funding for an RV pad so as to create a “park host” program, an onsite volunteer who could provide a variety of assistance to the park’s interpretive efforts. In addition the park should create a formal volunteer program to provide opportunities for community involvement for local citizens of all ages and backgrounds and to provide assistance to the park for specific interpretive tasks and projects. Special effort should be made to attract volunteers with teaching experience (retired teachers), writing skills, and development of electronic media. Due to the rural nature and dispersed population of the area, development of a volunteer program will be challenging. Outreach efforts should be made to local service organizations, scouting groups, 4H clubs, and other civic groups as sources of possible volunteers especially for one-day service events for clean-up, invasive plant removal, and other specific tasks. Volunteers could contribute to a wide range of park efforts including:

- Staffing the front desk freeing up interpreters to lead interpretive walks for other tasks and interpretive development efforts.

- Staffing a traveling exhibit at local festivals as described in #9 above.
- Providing assistance in developing curriculum materials.
- Providing grant writing assistance.
- Assist in the development of podcasts, videos and other new media efforts.

Implementation Strategies

- Create, expand, and maintain an email database of community individuals who have been involved in park programs.
- Contact other parks with Friends organizations for advice on process of establishing an effective group.
- Identify and contact individuals in the community who have an interest and past involvement in RUCA to establish an initial Friends organization planning group.
- Provide programs to Rotary, garden clubs, scouting groups, and other service organizations to promote volunteer and service opportunities.

Benefits

- Effective Friends organizations play a variety of roles advocating for, raising funds, writing grants for, and promoting parks.

- A Friends organization could help increase exposure to, and support for Russell Cave among local businesses and community service organizations.
- One-day service events raise community awareness of the park to a wide variety of community groups.

11 Expand park partnerships.

In an era of shrinking resources parks must pursue creative partnerships with community groups and businesses to help further their goals.

- Russell Cave should expand its efforts to create ties with regional colleges and universities (NE Alabama Community College, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, University of Alabama, University of the South). These institutions can be a good source of research information and assistance with project development by students through credit-generating special projects and internships.
- Expanded outreach to scouting and other youth groups and service organizations may lead to long-term relationships and assistance with special projects.
- Russell Cave is site #44 on the Alabama Birding Trail and is part of the Native American Heritage Trail. These and other partnerships should be advertised and built upon.

- Contact should be made with regional organizations and agencies such as the Appalachian Regional Council and the Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments which are possible sources of networking support and even funds for efforts such as formation of a park Friends group.

Recommendations 12 and 13 are specific proposals that might qualify for funding as part of the National Park Service's Centennial project.

12 Create partnerships with other National Park sites commemorating Native American cultures.

Nearly 30 smaller National Park sites commemorate ancient and ancestral Native American cultures as a primary mission. Interpretive partnerships with some of these sites could broaden the public's understanding of the diversity and vitality of Native American cultures spanning the American continent prior to European settlement and could increase visitors' awareness of Russell Caves place in the National Park Service. These partnerships should take the following directions:

- Provide links to websites of related parks.
- Share bookstore sales items to provide visitors with a broader context for understanding Native American cultures.

- In honor of the National Park centennial, form a partnership between 5-6 sites and create a traveling exhibit for the sites. The traveling exhibit should highlight each individual park and its significance and expand upon common themes that link diverse ancestral Native American cultures.

Implementation Strategies

- Determine shared interest by contacting related parks. The list below provides a starting place.
- Research grant opportunities related to the park centennial.
- Obtain grant funding to develop partnership activities listed above.
- Work with interpretive staff of partner parks and with exhibit design firm to create traveling exhibit for use by 2016.

Benefits

- Partnerships would increase exposure of public to Russell Cave, its story, and resources.
- Partnerships would increase awareness by the general public of the diversity, richness, and vitality of pre-contact Native American cultures.
- Traveling exhibit would tie into a proposed changing exhibit program.
- Traveling elsewhere, the exhibit would increase exposure of Russell Cave to a broader audience.

Park sites whose primary significance is related to ancient and ancestral Native American cultures:

Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail, Hawaii
Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument, Texas
Aztec Ruins National Monument, New Mexico
Bandelier National Monument, New Mexico
Canyon De Chelly National Monument, Arizona
Casa Grand Ruins National Monument, Arizona
Chaco Culture National Historical Park, New Mexico
Effigy Mounds National Monument, Iowa
Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, New Mexico
Hohokam Pima National Monument, New Mexico
Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, Ohio
Hovenweep National Monument, Colorado, Utah
Inupiat Heritage Center, Alaska
Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site,
North Dakota
Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado
Navajo National Monument, Arizona
Nez Perce National Historical Park, Idaho, Montana,
Oregon, Washington
Ocmulgee National Monument, Georgia
Pecos National Historical Park, New Mexico
Pipestone National Monument, Minnesota
Poverty Point National Monument, Louisiana
Pu 'uhonua O Honaunau National Historical Park, Hawaii
Pu 'ukohola Heiau National Historic Site, Hawaii
Tonto National Monument, Arizona
Tuzigoot National Monument, Arizona
Walnut Canyon National Monument, Arizona
Wupatki National Monument, Arizona
Yucca House National Monument, Colorado

13 Create a changing exhibit program. Reconfigure park multi-purpose room and install track lighting to create a changing exhibit area along wall to the right of the entry.

A changing exhibit program is important for repeat visitors. This area will be utilized for art exhibits of local artists, traveling exhibits such as the partnership exhibit described below, and for displaying current information or new research about Russell Cave. Several free standing storable, changeable modules should be obtained. Changeable wall-mounted display space should be provided. Track lighting will provide flexible illumination of changing exhibit elements. Changing exhibits should include a tie-in with “First Saturday” special programs described above.

Implementation Strategies

- Make changes to multi-purpose room to accommodate changing exhibits.
- Work with community groups, artists, other parks to create simple theme-related exhibits.
- Advertise changing exhibits through email lists, postings, park website, and newspaper, including “First Friday” opening or other thematic tie-in.

Benefits

- Changing exhibits keep local populations coming back to and involved in the park.
- Diverse exhibit topics have the potential to bring new first-time visitors to the park.

Recommendations 14 through 16 are actions that upgrade the overall park interpretation and could be bundled together as a funding request from the region in conjunction with the park’s fiftieth anniversary.

14 Create expanded, park-theme related wayside program.

The 1.2 mile hillside trail above the park takes visitors through a good example of a maturing Eastern Woodland forest rich with tree and plants species, migrating and local bird populations and offers an enjoyable venue for recreational hikers. The forest represented is in many ways similar to what it might have been like during Russell Cave’s habitation by Woodland and Mississippian peoples. The existing waysides on these trails are small and outdated. New waysides should combine plant and animal identification and natural history information with Native American themes – traditional uses, cultural meanings, etc. They should also utilize universal themes such as environmental change and adaptation.



In addition, an additional nature trail could loop from the start of the boardwalk along the forest/meadow edge before returning through the meadow past the picnic area to the visitor center to complete a full loop. This expanded trail will have the advantage of including different habitats and a transition area between forest and meadow, a rich area for wildlife viewing. Waysides should be included along this expanded trail.

Implementation Strategies

- Identify and obtain funding.
- Identify ecology, environmental studies, and anthropology programs at regional universities that may provide student assistance and research help on development of wayside interpretive themes.

Benefits

- New waysides and an expanded hillside trail offers new opportunities for recreational walkers, bird-watchers, and others interested in enjoying the quiet and tranquility of the park.
- Natural history waysides with ties to the Native American story further enrich visitors understanding of the RUCA story.
- A trail and waysides passing near the picnic area may entice new individuals

who currently utilize that area but not the rest of the park to explore further.

15 Update visitor center exhibits.

The existing visitor center exhibits are about eleven years old and were rated by 97% of 2007 visitor survey respondents as “good” or “very good”. Photos and a timeline tell the story of the people that lived at Russell Cave long ago, as well as the history of the archeological excavations there. Artifacts and reproductions of items found in the cave shelter are on display. Park staff members describe the exhibits as adequate from the visitor point of view but problematic from the staff point of view: access to the display cases for periodic inventory and cleaning is very difficult. In addition, by current accessibility standards, the exhibits, though creative and engaging in their employment of archeological “mysteries”, are not very interactive and are not accessible to people with visual or hearing impairments. Funding for completely replacing the exhibits is unlikely in the park service where many exhibits have been in place for 25 or more years. Instead, this report recommends selective upgrading of the exhibits to concretely address interpretive themes and to introduce tactile and interactive elements.

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This report recommends that only the central module be modified or replaced. Currently it includes a diorama of cave life, and a very general timeline seeking to relate the Native American cultures represented at Russell Cave with events elsewhere in the world. The timeline is spread loosely across several sides of the module. There is the strong likelihood that this element packs minimal interpretive “punch.” This central module should be replaced with or modified to offer more theme-focused elements. A title/introductory panel should face the entry door. This panel, highlighted with an engaging exhibit title and introductory text highlighting the park’s significance, will provide a “starting point” for visitors. Other sides of the redesigned central module should provide clear, brief summaries of the four cultures: Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian along with a visual diagrammatic cross-section of the cave’s excavation, that locates that culture within the excavation and within an overall time span. Interpretive text should highlight unique features of the cultures and ways in which the successive cultures had “advanced” from their predecessors. Accompanying the interpretive text should be descriptive photographs, illustrations, artifacts and hands-on interactive elements – touchable recreations of artifacts, flip panel questions related to the use of cultural items, and other elements that reinforce interpretive themes while also making the exhibit more accessible.

Implementation Strategies

- Identify and obtain funding.
- Select and work with exhibit designer to modify or replace central exhibit unit.

Benefits

- Exhibits more succinctly focused on primary interpretive themes will help visitors more fully understand the Russell Cave story.



16 Enliven cave shelter interpretation and expand interpretation of archeology interpretive theme.

A wheel-chair accessible raised boardwalk leads visitors to the cave shelter where a series of waysides provide interpretation of the cave shelter and the successive groups that occupied it. In addition, mannequins representing the different groups of people who have occupied it have been commissioned. The intent is to have a grouping for each main period (Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian). This planner, however, questions the interpretive efficacy of the mannequin vignettes. Currently the groupings look not too different from each other and do little to express the cultural evolution from one to the next. Due to security and vandalism concerns it is doubtful that the vignettes could be sufficiently enhanced to accurately represent this evolution as well as the richness of material and social culture that is evidenced in each group in the archeological findings. There results a risk, then, that visitors will leave with a stereotypical image of these ancient and ancestral Native American groups as living a crude and austere existences.

The challenge, then, is by what other means might the cave’s story be brought to life? The story is more than just the people who lived there, but is also the story of the



archeological process that brought the cave's story to light. Thematic mapping highlighted the cave as the best place to represent the archeological story. The boardwalk loops around the area of excavation, now filled in. In this area an active archeological dig could be recreated – with the tools of the trade, scattered on the ground as if in process, but left for a short break. The items themselves would be secured with hidden attachments and the guard rail/fence that separates visitors from the interior could be repeated on the inside of the boardwalk circle to provide modest protection for this archeological vignette. A freestanding interpretive panel could provide information on the importance of archeology in understanding the people who inhabited the cave. It could also provide a more detailed overview of successive cultures, with detailed illustrations of lifestyle paired with photographs of actual cave artifacts and a description of the objects use.

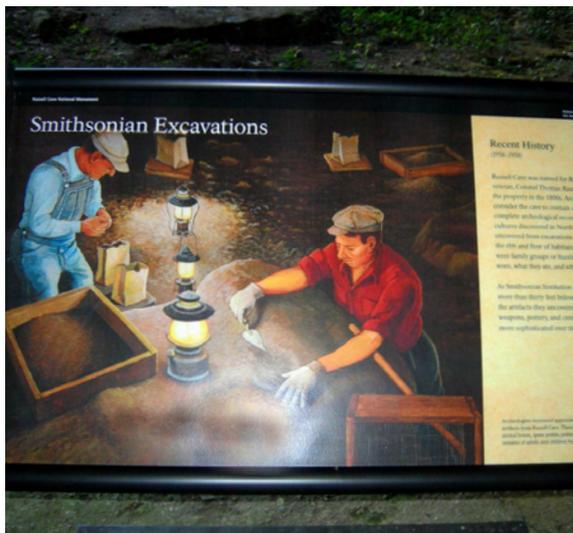
cave dwellers. This opportunity for rest and reflection would add another element to the interpretive experience of the cave.

Implementation Strategies

- Identify funding sources
- Develop interpretive features

Benefits

- New interpretive elements would enliven and strengthen cave interpretation and provide engaging interpretation of the archeology primary theme.



The final element that should be added to the cave, is a "pullout" from the boardwalk where a bench would be placed facing outward from the cave. This outward facing view is refreshing, especially on hot summer days when one can soak in the cool of the cave while enjoying the verdant green of the forest outside. This view, free of modern appurtenances, allows the visitor to imagine a different time and reflect on a view very similar to that taken in by ancient



Recommendations 17 and 18 are very ambitious goals that could be implemented only with the support of a major outside donor/partner.

17 Expand boardwalk through woods and along meadow edge. Add recreations of traditional housing styles of Woodland and Mississippian peoples along extended boardwalk along with waysides interpreting them.

An extended boardwalk through the forest and to depictions of traditional housing styles would expand and enliven the park's interpretive story. Elements of the demonstration program could be moved to the vicinity of these structures providing an expanded awareness of what life might have been like for people of these cultures. A hide and bark covered wigwam and wattle and daub house could be constructed by volunteer groups. A scouting group or Native American group might take on research, construction, and maintenance of structures as a special project.

Implementation Strategies

- Identify and pursue possible funding sources.
- Form partnerships with service organizations, scouting groups, Native American groups or others with an interest in the topic.
- Develop boardwalk, houses, and accompanying interpretive waysides.

Benefits

- Recreated traditional houses would expand the Russell Cave story.
- The houses would serve as a new venue for park interactive demonstrations and for interpretation of universal themes.

18 In conjunction with the above, add an educational building with flexible multi-purpose room able to hold 60 to 70 children for structured programs.

The park currently hosts school groups of 100 to 120 people. This size is difficult to manage in the visitor center and can be disruptive of other visitors. With increased efforts in development of school partnerships and programs, school visitation may increase substantially in the next ten years. A new educational facility would allow increased programming and flexibility for school groups without disrupting visitors and activities in the visitor center. The building would be environmentally controlled, include restrooms, and should be designed to a gold LEEDs standards. Though primarily reached by foot, the building would require a service vehicle access. This project would be an ambitious one for the park and could only be achieved with significant support of local communities and school districts and with substantial funding by an independent donor or granting organization.

Implementation Strategies

- Build partnerships with school districts.
- Identify and pursue possible major funding sources.

Benefits

- Expanded education program.
- Increased park visitation.
- Increased programmatic flexibility.

Conclusion

Russell Cave National Monument offers a strong interpretive program appropriate to its size and visitation. The wide range of recommendations offered here build upon the park’s strengths to increase visitation, enrich the visitor experience, and expand the park’s exposure and relevance to new audiences.

These expanded efforts should be combined with on-going staff training and on-site evaluation of programs to help assure that efforts are cost effective and achieving their intended goals.

The next ten years will bring many changes to our nation. A park’s interpretive success will depend in large part on its ability to adapt to changing conditions and take advantage of new technologies in creative, engaging, and park-appropriate ways.

Appendix



Workshop Participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Organization</i>
John Bundy	Superintendent	Russell Cave NM/Little River NP
Mary Jo Blevins	Administrative Officer	Russell Cave/Little River
Shelia Reed	Park Guide	Russell Cave National Monument
Mary McAllister	Park Guide	Russell Cave National Monument
Antoine Fletcher	Park Guide	Russell Cave National Monument
Shawn Williams	Park Guide	Russell Cave National Monument
James Holtzclaw	Park Guide	Russell Cave National Monument
Sue Dewitt	Teacher	Scottsboro Indian Education Program
Lisa Barrett	District Manager	Southeast Region NPS
Jim Ogden	Historian, Park Ranger	Chickamauga and Chattanooga NMP
J. P. Parsons	Director	Jackson County Tourism Department
Billy Mac Steele	Water Color Artist	n/a
Laura Bundy	Volunteer	Russell Cave National Monument
Rick Jones	NPS – Planner, COTR	NPS-HFC
Charles Davis	Principal	Edquist Davis Exhibits