

# Timeline of a Timeless Place

Though one easily loses track of the passage of hours when traveling in Mammoth Cave, even the Monarch of Caves is subject to time. From its origins in the depths of prehistory to the present day, follow the timeline of the cave's remarkable history of exploration, discovery and unfolding wonder.

1792 • Kentucky Statehood

Recorded high-water flood stage at River Hall

1775 • Daniel Boone cuts the Wilderness Road through Cumberland Gap into Kentucky.

1790 • John Houchin moves from Virginia and settles on the Green River near the cave. Legend suggests this early settler became the first European to find the cave.

1792 • Many Kentucky settlers manufacture their own gunpowder from "nitre" found in cave dirt.

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1798 • Valentine Simons buys 200 acres of land containing two saltpeter caves.

1799 • Simons sells the 200 acres and two caves to John Flatt. The larger cave became known as Flatt's Cave. Flatt sells the property to John McLean and his two brothers.

1813 • The mummy "Fawn Hoof" is found in Short Cave and taken to Mammoth Cave for display to visitors.

1813-1814 • Enslaved men mine vast amounts of saltpeter at Mammoth Cave and send it to gunpowder factories in the east to supply American military war efforts, including fighting the British during the War of 1812.

1815 • Saltpeter operation ceases. Nahum Ward makes a trip into Mammoth Cave, draws a new cave map, and writes long description of the cave and mummy. His writings will make Mammoth Cave famous.

1,000,000 BCE • The large passages that are the namesake of "mammoth" cave begin to form.

10,000,000 BCE • Rainwater begins dissolving the limestone to form the first passages of Mammoth Cave.

325,000,000 BCE • Prehistoric seas of the Mississippian Era deposited layers of limestone in what would become Kentucky.

1808 • McLean brothers sell Flatt's Cave to Fleming Gatewood and Charles Wilkins.

1810 • First published use of name "Mammoth Cave", in a Richmond, Virginia, newspaper. Seven hoppers constructed at Booth's Amphitheater for making saltpeter.

1811 • First shock waves of the great New Madrid earthquake are felt. The cave is undamaged.

1812 • Declaration of War with England. Gatewood sells his interest in Mammoth Cave to Hyman Gratz of Philadelphia.

1840 • Stephen Bishop crosses Echo River. He later discovers Mammoth Dome.

1839 • Franklin Gorin sells cave and 1,610 acres to Dr. John Croghan.

1838 • Franklin Gorin and A.A. Harvey purchase Mammoth Cave and 1,600 acres from Hyman and Simon Gratz. Gorin enlarges and improves the Mammoth Cave Inn, and hires Archibald Miller, Jr. as manager.

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1816 • First known formal tour of Mammoth Cave.

1816 • Indiana  
1817 • Mississippi  
1818 • Illinois  
1819 • Alabama  
1820 • Maine  
1821 • Missouri

1830 • Bell's Tavern is built.

1834 • Michigan

1838 • Wandering Willie walks from Cincinnati to Mammoth Cave, and spends a night in the cave. Charles F. Harvey is lost in the cave for 39 hours. Gorin's Dome discovered. Stephen Bishop crosses Bottomless Pit.

1837 • The top entry of the Corkscrew is discovered.

1835 • Edmund F. Lee makes an instrument survey and map showing eight miles of Mammoth Cave and publishes his guidebook *Notes on Mammoth Cave*.

1834 • George S. Gatewood holds religious services in the cave at a site later known as Methodist Church.

1841 • Dr. Croghan builds two huts in Audubon Avenue for use by tuberculosis patients. Stephen Bishop and two visitors discover Cleaveland Avenue.

1842 • Stephen Bishop prepares a new map of cave. In May, tuberculosis patient Dr. William J. Mitchell enters Mammoth Cave, the first of ten. Some die in the cave, and all ultimately perish. Last patient leaves the cave in March 1843; the experiment shows that cave air does not cure tuberculosis. First description of blind fish in River Styx appears in a scholarly article in Philadelphia.

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1843 • Croghan enlarges and improves Mammoth Cave Hotel.

1844 • Alexander C. Bullitt visits Mammoth Cave and is given credit for writing *Rambles in the Mammoth Cave*.

1845 • Renowned Norwegian violinist Ole Bull visits Mammoth Cave, and plays his violin in a cave chamber now known as Ole Bull's Concert Hall.

1849 • Dr. Croghan dies. Mammoth Cave is placed in a Trust, known as the Mammoth Cave Estate, and this Trust owns and manages the cave until the 1920s.

1845 • Florida & Texas  
1846 • Iowa  
1848 • Wisconsin  
1849 • Nebraska  
1850 • California  
1851 • Oregon  
1852 • Minnesota

1850 • Ralph Waldo Emerson visits Mammoth Cave in June and later writes an essay titled "Illusions" after seeing the "night sky" in Star Chamber.

1851 • Celebrated opera diva Jenny Lind visits the cave in April. Contrary to reports, she does not sing in the cave.

1856 • Stephen Bishop is given his freedom, but remains at Mammoth Cave.

1857 • Stephen Bishop dies in July. Mat and Nick Bransford remain as the principal guides.

1859 • Charles Darwin publishes *Origin of Species*. His theory of evolution continues to inform many studies of creatures uniquely adapted to cave life.

1870 • Guide William Garvin discovers the Corkscrew from below. Ralph Seymour Thompson publishes *The Sucker's Visit to the Mammoth Cave*.

1875 • Bill Cutliff and Tom Lee discover the "Little Alice" mummy in Salts Cave. The mummy is displayed in Long Cave, and then in Mammoth Cave until the 1950s, where it is called the "Mammoth Cave Mummy", and later, "Little Al".

1876 • Brazilian Emperor Dom Pedro visits the cave in May. Dr. Horace Carter Hovey makes the first of many visits to the cave. He publishes books and articles about the cave from 1878 through 1912. Actor Edwin Booth visits the cave and recites a soliloquy from *Hamlet* at Booth's Amphitheater.

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1879 • Thomas Edison invents the light bulb, but it will not dispel the dark in Mammoth Cave until 38 years later.

1880 • The Jesse James Gang robs the Mammoth Cave stagecoach on September 3.

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1896 • Utah

1881 • Mushroom growing operation begins between Bunker Hill and Olive's Bower.

1883 • A Christmas Tree is placed in the cave by holiday revelers.

1886 • W. F. Richardson is the first passenger to ride the Mammoth Cave Railroad.

1891 • Francis Benjamin Johnston visits Mammoth Cave and takes flash pictures used in an article for *Demorest's Family Magazine*.

1895 • Lute and Henry Lee discover Colossal Cave. They connect Colossal to Bedquilt cave the next year.

1897 • Horace Carter Hovey and Richard Ellsworth Call publish their first edition of *The Mammoth Cave of Kentucky*.

1900 • Curtis G. Lloyd of Cincinnati is lost in the Corkscrew for 12 tours. Guides Bob McDaniel and John Nelson find him. An inscription Lloyd left on the cave wall reads: "It is Hell to be lost."

1903 • Marty Charlet draws a map showing Unknown Cave in Flint Ridge.

1904 • The first automobile arrives at Mammoth Cave, from Indianapolis.

1906 • Lock and Dam No. 6 opens for river traffic, raising the water level in Gorin's Dome, cutting off access to Stevenson River. The *Chaperon* is the first steamboat to make the run from Evansville to Mammoth Cave.

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1938 • University of Chicago Psychologist Dr. Nathaniel Kleitman and post-graduate student Bruce Richardson live in Mammoth Cave for 32 days to study circadian rhythms.

1935 • Upside-Down Well is drilled. First All Day Tour from Natural Entrance to Frozen Niagara Entrance. Snowball Dining Room opens for these tours. Guides Grover Campbell and Lyman Cutliff discover the "Lost John" mummy.

1933 • Mammoth Cave National Park Association and the Kentucky National Park Commission create a Joint Operating Committee. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) begins major projects at Mammoth Cave through 1942.

1931 • The Kentucky National Park Commission purchases George Morrison's New Entrance land holdings. Carmichael and Violet City Entrances opened.

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2016 • Centennial of the founding of the NPS

75th Anniversary of the establishment of Mammoth Cave National Park

2010 • Cave Research Foundation team discovers Colleen's Irish Croft in the Mammoth Dome area.

2009 • Rick Olson, Mickey Cundari, and Dave Stahl discover River Acheron in September. Procedures are begun to attempt to contain the spread of White-Nose Syndrome.

1998 • Robin's Run, a large passage with undisturbed prehistoric artifacts, is found in the Historic Section of the cave by Rick Olson and Dick Market. The next day Olson and Rickard Toomey discover a similar passage they name Watson Trace.

1997 • A paved walkway and boardwalk is constructed from the Historic Entrance to the Methodist Church.

1996 • New Bat Gates and airlock doors installed at Historic, New, Frozen Niagara, and Carmichael Entrances. Audubon Avenue designated as bat sanctuary during the hibernation season.

1994 • January 20 • Rockfall in the Rotunda caused by severe cold weather estimated at 32 tons. Another rockfall is discovered at Lake Lethe in the spring.

1992 • Guides Tres Seymour and Kenneth Sanders conduct the last Echo River Tour.

1991 • Kämper Avenue found by Greg Sholly, Bob Osborne and Julie Sotsky.

1990 • Park accepted by UNESCO as the core of an International Biosphere Reserve. Torch-throwing discontinued by year's end. Guide James Minyard throws the last torch.

1989 • March 24 • Floyd Collins reentered in the Mammoth Cave Baptist Church Cemetery.

1987 • A 1,200-pound rock falls in Audubon Avenue, following a 3.2 earthquake near Erlanger, Kentucky.

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This blue line represents the last one million years in which the newest levels of Mammoth Cave have formed. The small blue mark above it on the right represents the length of time humans have interacted with the cave. The tiny mark above that is how long guides have given tours here – a mere 200 years.