

by DAVID NOYES

A Wild Cave Experience

Photography by Gary Berdeaux & David Noyes



WALKING IN SINGLE FILE: Cathy Munisteri leading our Wild Cave tour group through Cathedral Dome in Mammoth Cave's spectacular canyon lands.

2500 B.C.

The Earliest known prehistoric Indian explorers in the caves of Joppa Ridge, Mammoth Cave Ridge, and Flint Ridge. Numerous artifacts and cave drawings have been found including Native American "mummies."

1798

The first recognized owner of Mammoth Cave, Valentine Simons, registers 200 acres known as "the Mammoth Cave Tract" in the courthouse at Bowling Green, Kentucky.

1812

As war broke out in the East, Mammoth Cave became an important producer of saltpeter. When the conflict ended in 1815 the price for saltpeter plummeted but the cave's reputation as a tourist attraction was just beginning.

1841

Cave guide and slave Stephen Bishop discovers the "Snowball Room." In prior years, Bishop discovered the Echo River, and Mammoth Dome. Bishop was set free in 1856, and died a year later at the age of thirty-six.

1925

The Nation mourns the death of Floyd Collins who dies after being trapped in Sand Cave for seventeen days. Eight years earlier in 1917, Collins discovered Crystal Cave in Flint Ridge.

1926

President Calvin Coolidge signs a bill authorizing the creation of Mammoth Cave National Park and the acquisition of no less than 20,000 acres of surrounding land.

1941

Mammoth Cave is officially accorded full National Park status on July 1, 1941 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The dedication ceremony was postponed until September 1946 by the outbreak of WWII.

1972

Cave explorers make the final connection between the 86.548 miles in Flint Ridge with the 57.9 miles of Mammoth Cave. The combined 144.4 miles of the Flint Mammoth Cave System is declared the longest cave in the world.

I WAS A COLD FEBRUARY MORNING in 1925 when all hope of rescue was finally lost. Thousands of people had gathered and millions more followed the drama on radio and in newsprint. After seventeen days locked in a rock vise fifty-five feet below ground, Floyd Collins was dead. It was a story I found hard to forget as guide Johnny Merideth described our next challenge at the harmless-sounding No-Name Pass. “You will start with a hands-and-knees crawl,” he explained as my heart started to pound, “then down on your bellies for a few hundred feet as the ceiling slowly gets lower and lower until it is only about nine inches high. And then,” he added, “it will get really tight.”

By this point in the trip we knew that Johnny and our second guide, Park Ranger Chuck DeCroix, had a well-developed routine that intermingled serious professionalism with a good dose of cave humor, wit, sarcasm, and boyish tomfoolery; but that knowledge didn't help as thoughts of Floyd Collins streamed into my consciousness. I can't imagine a more disturbing circumstance than being trapped alone in the darkness unable to move as panic turns to resignation. Ever since I first heard the tragic tale of Kentucky's great cave explorer in 1999, I have contemplated writing a story about exploration at

Mammoth Cave and following in the footsteps of Floyd on my own wild cave experience. But as my trip grew near, the story proved to be more of a burden than an inspiration.

Floyd Collins was born in 1887, but the events that led directly to his death began shortly after the War of 1812. For years, the owners of Mammoth Cave had mined the huge quantities of calcium nitrate found in the cave for use in making gunpowder. Saltpeter was no longer needed following the war, so the owners turned to tourism for much-needed income. By the turn of the twentieth century, sophisticated marketing packages and partnerships with railroads made Mammoth Cave a well-known attraction, drawing thousands to view its huge underground caverns. This inspired other land owners in the area to develop the caves found on their own property and start offering public tours, which in turn instigated a period of intense competition known locally as the “Cave Wars.”

At the time, Floyd and his family were hard working farmers, but Floyd was also a very well respected and experienced underground explorer. When he found a cave with beautiful gypsum flowers on family property along Flint Ridge, it didn't take long for Floyd to build steps and tourist trails. Floyd's Crystal Cave was opened for business in 1918. Despite being one of the most beautiful caves in the area, Crystal Cave was unfortunately located four miles from Mammoth Cave and at the end of a long stretch of other commercial caves. So in 1924, after six years of running the cave without a profit, Floyd set out to locate property along the road leading to Mammoth. This brought him to Sand Cave in 1925.

Floyd spent two weeks exploring a promising piece of land, but the only entrance he could find was a narrow fissure with loose rocks and tight twisting turns through large areas of breakdown. When his progress slowed, he set dynamite to open a hole that he believed would lead to a larger cave.

A couple of days later Floyd returned to Sand Cave. He crawled back through the narrow passageways to find that the explosion had in fact revealed a large room. However, before Floyd could get too excited or start exploring the pit, his light began to flicker. He knew that without light his exit would be almost impossible, so he quickly turned back.

Floyd proceeded through the tight crawlway, carefully pushing his lantern in front of him, when suddenly it fell over and went out. In total darkness and alone, Floyd wiggled forward until a large rock fell and trapped his left foot in a V-shaped groove. To make matters worse, his arms were now pinned at his sides in a small crevice, holding him in a rock straightjacket one hundred and fifteen feet from the mouth of the cave.

The next morning, Saturday, January 31, Floyd's partners and friends went looking for him, and a few hours after finding him, were joined by Floyd's brother, Homer Collins. They didn't panic. They figured that as long as they could crawl down to Floyd with food and water, it was just a matter of time before they could get his foot loose. As hours turned to days, news started to spread around the region. The Louisville Courier-Journal sent William Burke “Skeets” Miller down to investigate the rumor of a trapped caver. Skeets was a little man and the only reporter to venture into the cave. He worked alongside Homer at great personal risk to help free Floyd while he continued to file his reports back to Louisville—reports that later earned Miller a Pulitzer Prize.

By Monday, February 2, firefighters and experienced cavers were on the scene along with hundreds of reporters and photographers. Huge crowds gathered, in an almost carnival atmosphere, to watch the rescue attempts which were now going on around the clock. Electricity was run down the cave passageway to provide Floyd with both light and warmth. The whole nation was gripped with anticipation.

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Headlines from around the country made Floyd's story a national sensation. Radio programs were interrupted with hourly bulletins.

On Wednesday, disaster occurred: the tunnel above Floyd collapsed. With an ensuing sense of desperation, the governor enlisted the Kentucky National Guard to take control of the situation. After six days with no progress, a parallel shaft was proposed over the objections of Homer Collins, who feared

it would lead to a major cave-in. Homer was physically removed from the scene as digging began by local miners.

As the nation followed events at Sand Cave, digging was slowed by rain and snow. After five days, the shaft was less than halfway to Floyd. It had been a long time since Floyd had received food or water and nobody knew if he was dead or alive. On Friday, two weeks into the ordeal, hope was rekindled when miners heard coughing as their shaft drove deeper into the hard rock. On Monday, a lateral tunnel was finally dug into the passageway where Floyd was trapped. They found Floyd dead.



Photo composite: Created by David Noyes for *The Floyd Collins Story*, a Peridot Pictures production which premiered at Cave City, Kentucky, 1999.



IF I DID GET STUCK, I REASONED, IT CERTAINLY WASN'T GOING TO BE WITH BOTH ARMS PINNED AT MY SIDES



UPPER LEFT: Megan White emerging from the Bare Hole. **UPPER RIGHT:** The other end of Megan White as she emerged from the Bare Hole. **ABOVE:** Cavers navigating the tricky canyon walk into the Lantern Room. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Brianna Richardson squeezing through the crack at Split Rock.

At the time of Floyd Collins' death in 1925, Mammoth Cave (as well as the other caves in the region) was privately owned. It was a proven tourist attraction for over a hundred years, and an effort was made to establish Mammoth Cave as a National Park as early as 1911. Congress, however, repeatedly responded that "just a cave" was not enough. In the ensuing years, the Mammoth Cave National Park Association petitioned Congress to include the topside wilderness encompassing the Green River, Nolin River, and Bylew Creek. Many locals, including Floyd Collins, also believed that caves found in the Joppa Ridge and Flint Ridge were connected to Mammoth Ridge in one huge system.

The tragic death of Floyd Collins brought worldwide attention to the region, and in 1926 Congress finally authorized the preparation of Mammoth Cave as our 26th National Park. Over the next two decades, lands were acquired, roads and trails were constructed, and new buildings were built. The fifty-thousand-acre park was made official by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on July 1, 1941. Today, the National Park receives over two million visitors a year who enjoy cave tours, canoeing the Green River, hiking, camping, and relaxing; but it is only the truly adventurous who choose to follow in the footsteps of Floyd on the seven-hour, six-mile, Wild Cave Tour.

FOURTEEN OF US GATHERED NERVOUSLY on a beautiful sunny day outside the Carmichael Entrance before Johnny and Chuck led us down the 290 feet to Cleaveland Avenue. My eyes slowly began to adjust to the sudden darkness that was broken only by the light of sixteen headlamps scouring the walls and ceiling that line the manicured tourist trail. We had walked less than a quarter of a mile when Johnny led us off the avenue onto a pile of rocks for a brief moment to relax and introduce ourselves. We were a large group of assorted ages and sizes. I had already informed everyone that I was working on a story, so they knew that a professional cave photographer would be following us on our spelunking experience.

As we sat around the pile of rocks getting to know one another, we could hear the voices of photographer Gary Berdeaux and his crew coming from a small black hole below us and to our left. When we saw a brief flash of light glow white in the hole, the connection was made: he was waiting for us—down there!

"We aren't going down there, are we?"

"Oh, yeah," Johnny replied to an inquisitive caver. "This is the start of your tour."

After a tricky climb down some sharp rocks, we began our first knee-crawl toward Gary, who would leapfrog in front of us all day and position lights to capture images of the tour's great places. The crawlway we were in was a twisting and turning passage with a fine layer of dust that permeated the air as



the group slid its way forward. I very quickly experienced pain in my back, brush-burns on my elbows, and every time I tried to lift my head to look forward, my helmet would slide down, jamming into my old glasses from the late 1980s that had lenses half the size of my face. This was not a good start.

We soon came to an area in the tunnel where we could walk upright. We were given a choice to go right and crawl through a tiny crack in the rock called "Split Rock," or go left and hang out with Gary photo-

graphing the folks who chose the path less traveled. I went left. As I got over to Gary, I heard one of the women in our group yell out from behind a rock wall, "You gotta be kidding." I smiled as half the group popped up one at a time between two rocks that didn't appear to be separated by more than a few inches.

Following some picture taking at Split Rock, we again started a knee-crawl on our way to my first cave test — the tiny Bare Hole (notice that it is called Bare Hole—not Bear Hole, because some folks can't get through with their clothes on). I was positioned in the middle of the pack following a couple of big guys, and directly after Ms. Megan White, who volunteered to let me photograph her going up the hole as Gary photographed her coming out. I also figured that I would be less likely to panic and start crying if others went before me and a few big guys were still behind me ready to push.

As I approached the small hole leading back up to Cleaveland Avenue, I put one arm directly out in front of me and tucked the other under my body to help propel me forward. If I did get stuck, I reasoned, it certainly wasn't going to be with both arms pinned at my sides. I inched slowly into the mouth of the hole and was relieved to see people standing in front of me. The really tight part was only a couple of feet long. Once my head was up, I wiggled forward without much trouble. I hadn't panicked in the few tight places we had traveled or whimpered like a baby at the Bare Hole—things were looking better, for now.

We followed the tourist trail for a little while, venturing off only occasionally before coming to our last long crawl before our lunch break. Our pace was quick, but we had taken time for a few photographs which put us a bit behind schedule. Suddenly, I noticed that the group had stopped. As I approached, I could see Johnny standing just off the side of the trail pointing down to a hole in some broken rock leading to Kathleen's Crawl. Kathleen's Crawl (aka "one curvy lady") was a 125-foot belly crawl with a small crack in its ceiling, allowing us to emerge back onto Cleaveland Avenue and the Snowball Room, where we would break for lunch. The passageway was discovered in 1970 by a Mammoth Cave Park Ranger named Kathleen Dickinson who chose to follow a small opening nobody seemed to care about—truly going where no man had gone before.

Although my helmet stayed put and I had figured out how



LEFT: Author David Noyes returning to Cleaveland Ave. from Kathleen's Crawl. RIGHT: Jerry Simpson working his way down to Lower Boone Avenue.



to belly crawl without using my elbows; muscle fatigue, scrapes, and bruises now replaced the mild discomfort I felt earlier. The temperature inside the cave is a constant fifty-four degrees, but I found myself sweating like it was a mid-summer afternoon. As the ceiling became lower and lower, I had to take off my small pack and push it in front as I brought one knee at a time to my chest in a slow and exhausting rhythm. All I could see were the walls to my left and right and the two anonymous boots in front of me—which were a welcome reminder that I wasn't alone.

In our dirty coveralls, helmets, and headlamps, the group must have looked like a team of coal miners as we entered the large circular cavern called the Snowball Room. The Snowball Room was named for the remarkable round balls of gypsum hanging neatly from the ceiling. It was truly a strange site to behold 267 feet below ground. There were rows of picnic

tables forming a dining room, a cafeteria-style buffet line, electric lights, and restrooms with running water. It was perfect timing for a quick bite to eat and to wipe the dust from our eyes, but within a few short minutes, I was chilled from the lack of activity and ready to start the next part of our adventure.

The trip thus far had us venturing off of a well-traveled tourist trail into small horizontal tubes for a taste of the wild cave experience. However, we were less than halfway into the hike and would soon be heading far away from the grand avenues into more remote areas of the cave system. Johnny gave everyone one last opportunity to leave the tour and to join one of the other groups for a leisurely walk out of the cave—there were no takers. We were excited and reinvigorated after our sandwich and warm soup. I could sense the enthusiasm as we headed down Boone Avenue and into the canyon lands of Mammoth Cave.

IT WAS CLEAR WITHIN MINUTES that we were in a very different cave. Unlike the wide avenues we had been following, we were now trekking through twisting and turning slot canyons created millions of years ago by fast moving water rushing to find the path of least resistance through cracks in the soft limestone. After passing a tour group at Thorpe's Pit, we climbed down a thirty-five foot breakdown of jagged rocks and boulders leading from Boone Avenue to Lower Boone Avenue. We were now entering lower cave passages seen only by tourists adventurous enough to join the Wild Cave Tour.

Gary had photographed the group at the climb-down and once again hustled out in front while we amused ourselves in a side canyon called the Humming Hole. He was waiting for us at the bottom of a steep canyon walk leading into the Lantern Room. We had all done very well on the tight squeezes early in the trip, but this experience was unexpected and totally different.

Standing with our feet on a slippery ledge of protruding rock, we had to lean across a two-foot crevasse and shimmy along, all the time looking down into darkness. Everyone, including the typically jovial Johnny and Chuck, became very quiet and serious as we slowly moved into another section that required us to straddle across a fifteen-foot dropoff. As one person successfully moved from foothold to foothold, Johnny, Chuck, and Gary patiently guided the group through the most dangerous areas from their vantage point down below.

We all gathered at the bottom of the canyon walk with a huge sense of accomplishment. The belly crawls were tight and uncomfortable, but not particularly dangerous—there was no place to fall wedged between two large sheets of

Mammoth Cave *Other Tours*

Historic Tour

View ancient artifacts and explore the the rich human history of Mammoth Cave on this classic tour. **Length:** 2 miles, 2 hours, **Difficulty:** Strenuous

Frozen Niagara Tour

Explore huge domes and Mammoth Cave's most decorative drip-stone formations, stalactites and stalagmites. **Length:** 3/4 mile (500 steps), **Difficulty:** Strenuous

The Great Onyx Lantern Tour

Visit Flint Ridge and some beautiful drip-stone formations by lantern light. **Length:** 1 mile, **Difficulty:** Moderately Strenuous

The Making of Mammoth Tour

Discover the geologic beginnings of Mammoth Cave and investigate its origins 325 million years ago. **Length:** 2.5 miles, **Difficulty:** Strenuous

Grand Avenue Tour

Travel from the Charmichael Entrance to Frozen Niagara through Cleaveland, Boone, and Kentucky Avenues. Stop for lunch at the Snowball Room. **Length:** 4 miles, **Difficulty:** Very Strenuous

Violet City Lantern Tour

View a saltpeter mining operation, the tuberculosis hospital ruins, and some of the largest rooms in the cave by lantern light. **Length:** 3 miles, **Difficulty:** Strenuous

Travertine

Visit the Frozen Niagara entrance and view the cave's most beautiful formations on this short tour. **Length:** 1/4 mile, **Difficulty:** Easy

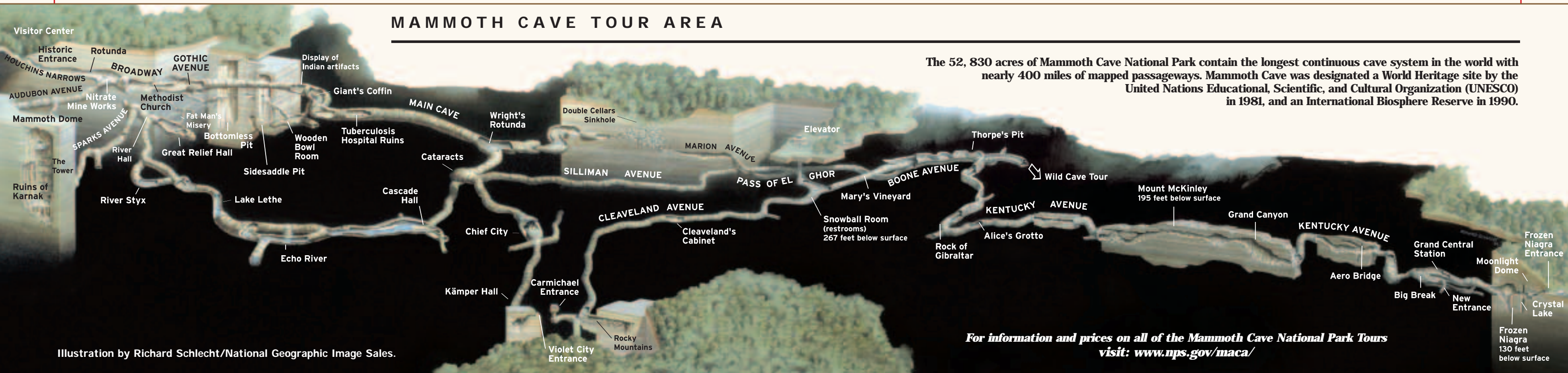
Introduction to Caving

Hand and knee crawls, and twisting passageways highlight this mini Wild Cave Tour for families - kids (over 10) and adults. **Length:** 1.5 miles, **Difficulty:** Very Strenuous

Trog Tour

Just for kids (8-12). Put on a hard hat and headlamp to go where no parents can follow. **Length:** 2.5 hours, **Offered during the summer**

MAMMOTH CAVE TOUR AREA



The 52, 830 acres of Mammoth Cave National Park contain the longest continuous cave system in the world with nearly 400 miles of mapped passageways. Mammoth Cave was designated a World Heritage site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1981, and an International Biosphere Reserve in 1990.

For information and prices on all of the Mammoth Cave National Park Tours visit: www.nps.gov/maca/

limestone. The crawls were a psychological challenge that we all overcame without incident, but the canyon walks left us exhilarated and a bit shaken. After a brief moment to gather ourselves, we continued to climb down rocks until we were once again walking on a horizontal layer toward our next destination—the large canyon at Cathedral Dome.

Mammoth Cave has five distinct horizontal levels of interconnected passageways connected by breakdowns and vertical shafts to the level above and the level below. The upper levels are protected by a sandstone caprock (the roof) at the surface that diverts rainwater down the sides of the ridge, keeping most of the cave system dry and dusty. Vertical shafts formed when small cracks and sinkholes allowed water to seep into the limestone and cut its way down to the Green River, connecting horizontal rivers and passageways along the way.

Our first stop after the Lantern Room was a sightseeing excursion on our way to Cathedral Dome. We crammed into the small entryway of Edna's Dome, shining our headlamps up at the towering ceiling. We had to work pretty hard to get here, so we all felt pretty special for seeing the wonders most visitors to Mammoth Cave will never see. Something also happened after the intensity of the canyon walk — our group had bonded. We had spent several hours working together in a few challenging situations and now we were having fun. We assumed the hard part was behind us—we were wrong.

After making our way from Edna's Dome to Cathedral

Dome, we again met up with Gary, who was waiting with a series of lights positioned for our “big shot” of the journey. It was hard to see the immensity of the domes and canyons with the weak lights of our headlamps, so it was a huge surprise when Gary fired his strobes, illuminating the entire canyon for a spectacular instant. Our last formal shoot lasted just a few minutes. Soon we were once again moving

quickly through endless jagged slot canyons on our way to our final squeeze before a long casual walk to our exit at the Frozen Niagara entrance.

Johnny and Chuck had been preparing us for No-Name Pass with hints and jokes about what was ahead. By this point we had developed a fair amount of confidence as cavers, but it was hard to tell if they were teasing us about the belly crawl with a nine-inch

ceiling—or not. We stopped along the way at Becky's Alley, and just after popping up the “Man Hole” to level two, Chuck gave us a demonstration of his carbide headlamp while Johnny told a few more lame cave jokes to an increasingly anxious audience. As we neared the moment of truth at No-Name Pass, Johnny told us with seriousness in his voice that we would be making a very long 300-400 foot crawl (most of it on our bellies), but he also said that there was a bypass leading around the really tight spot. Several people quickly lined up toward the back of the group to follow the bypass with Chuck. I moved to the front.

I started the crawl in second position just behind Johnny, with Tara Gupton (a former cave guide) and her husband

**I COULD FEEL
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Dustin right behind me. I had my pack off in front of me and was determined to take some photographs of Tara from inside the crawl. Early on we joked and talked without much tension. The crawl was actually quite fun. It had been three or four hours since our last belly walk, so I felt comfortable and excited as Johnny reported the distance as we inched closer to the tight spot. Just before we got there, I took out my dirty and scratched camera and made a few photographs, trying not to hold up the group very long in this inhospitable place.

Johnny was already waiting past the tight spot as I chose which side I wanted to turn my head. This was no small decision because once I started, I wouldn't be able to turn my head again for ten or fifteen feet. I chose to look to my right. It just felt more comfortable. As I came to the nine-inch spot, I noticed a large hump in the rock and chose to squeeze around it to the left. At this point the walls of the crawl had also gotten tighter, leaving only a foot or two on each side of the hump. Just like my choice at the Bare Hole, I reached out in front with my left arm pushing my bag and kept my right arm to my side. I could feel my helmet scrape the ceiling as my hipbone was grinding into the rock hump. I slowly forced myself through the tight spot trying to control my breathing and not panic. In seconds the ceiling opened up and I moved off to the side of the cave next to Johnny. The two-foot ceiling felt huge as I looked back to watch Tara.

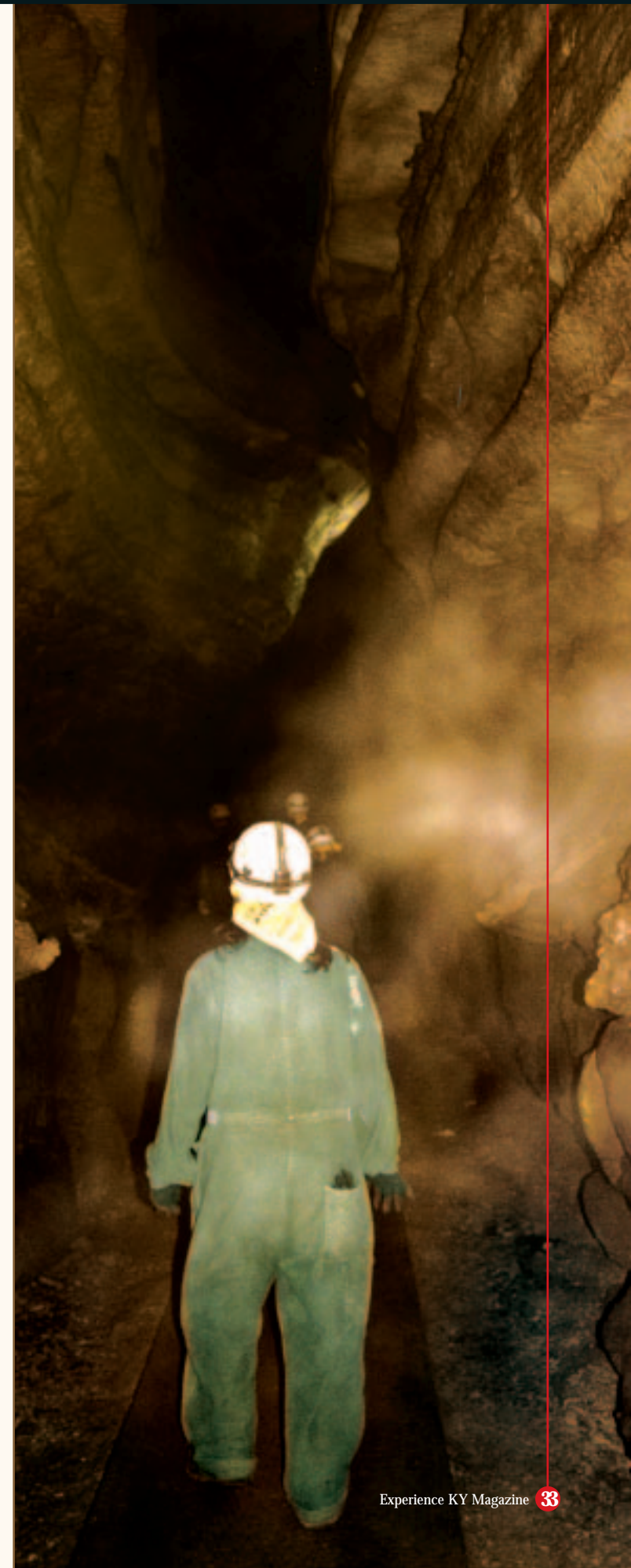
ONE AT A TIME CAVERS EMERGED from No-Name Pass tired and excited. We shared stories while we waited for Chuck and his group to join us for a break on the boulders scattered alongside the large passageway. As we told the others about the tight spot, they all shook their heads back and forth, confirming in their own minds that they had made the right choice. After we all found a seat and settled in, Johnny had us turn off our headlamps and remain perfectly quiet to experience the absolute stillness of the cave. I could almost hear my heart still pounding from the Pass. As the others tried to relax in the immense blackness, my thoughts were of Floyd Collins and that first night he spent trapped alone in the darkness so long ago.

In the wake of the Cave Wars and the death of Floyd Collins in 1925, few would have imagined that millions of people from around the globe would experience the magnificence of the world's longest cave. It is staggering to consider that all of the public tours combined explore only a tiny fraction of a cave system that has been mapped at nearly 400 miles and is still growing.

Since the first Native Americans entered the cave thousands of years ago, adventurous men and women have ventured deeper and deeper into the maze of tunnels under south central Kentucky for both their practical need for shelter and their human desire to explore the unknown. Starting with the discoveries of cave guide and slave Stephen Bishop during the 1830s and 40s, there has been an almost continuous quest to find the outermost reaches of Mammoth Cave that some expect may eventually extend as far as a thousand miles.

For much of the last hundred years it was believed that the intricate system of caves scattered throughout the region in several ridges were somehow connected. In a competition

BELOW: Tara Gupton nearing the “tight spot” in the No-Name Pass.
OPPOSITE PAGE: Following a single file line on Boone Avenue in the canyon lands.



rivaling the quest to climb Mount Everest, dozens of modern cave explorers have pushed the limits of human endurance to find these connections. But when the National Park Service took over Mammoth Cave in 1941, a ban was imposed on private cave exploration. This sent members of the newly formed National Speleological Society to Floyd Collins' Crystal Cave, which was one of only two remaining private caves on Flint Ridge. Permission to launch expeditions was finally granted to the society in 1953, and expert cavers from around the country began to map and explore Crystal Cave with their eyes toward Mammoth.

One of the most elaborate and publicized expeditions took place in 1954 (called the C-3 expedition for Collins Crystal Cave). Thirty-two men and women explored the cave from February 14 through February 20 — almost exactly twenty-nine years after the death of Floyd Collins. The irony that the most ambitious cave exploration in history was being conducted out of Collins' Crystal Cave was certainly not lost on the members of the expedition. They reverently joked about talking to Floyd's ghost as they passed his casket, which had been on display in the cave since 1927, against the wishes of Floyd's family (who had sold the cave to Harry Thomas in 1927—which inadvertently included Floyd's corpse). Crystal Cave was finally sold to the government in 1961 and Floyd



was buried again—this time a mere six feet underground.

As the Flint Ridge cavers made progress, the National Park Service was negotiating with another group of cavers incorporated as the Cave Research Foundation (CRF) to allow cooperative research in Mammoth Cave. Beginning in 1959, cavers from both ridges were racing to make the final connection. Chronicled by Roger Brucker and Richard Watson in their book *The Longest Cave*, the biggest single jump in total cave mileage

came in 1972, when "connection fanatics" of the CRF finally joined the eighty-six mile network of caves in Floyd Collins' Flint Ridge with the fifty-eight known miles of Mammoth Cave, to create the 144.4-mile Flint Mammoth Cave System. Floyd would have been proud.

The last hour of my cave expedition was a casual walk and I am sure the smile never left my face. We had one last difficult climb up a level to Grand Central Station and once again encountered a large group of tourists on our way to the Frozen Niagara Entrance. I watched as eighty eyeballs stared at our laughing, dirty group as we passed with a new confidence in our stride. I would like to believe that the ghost of Floyd Collins was watching over us as we challenged ourselves in his house, but even if he wasn't, the story that I once found hard to forget has been replaced by an unforgettable experience. ■

People to See & Places to Go

MAMMOTH CAVE NATIONAL PARK

For Park information call: (270) 758-2328
For cave tour, campground, and picnic shelter reservations call: 1-800-967-2283

GETTING THERE

Mammoth Cave National Park is located off of I-65 (exit 53) in south-central Kentucky about 40 miles north of Bowling Green, 90 miles south of Louisville, and 90 miles north of Nashville, Tennessee. From exit 53, follow KY Hwy. 255 west to the visitors center.

MAMMOTH CAVE HOTEL

Located near the historic entrance of Mammoth cave, the hotel, restaurant, dining room, and cottages are the only accommodations within the park boundaries. Servicing visitors since 1816, the Mammoth Cave Hotel has a variety of lodging and dining options.

Heritage Trail Rooms: These comfortable rooms are conveniently located near the historic entrance and provide a scenic view of the Heritage Trail from a balcony window. **Sunset Terrace Rooms:** These rooms are located near the heritage Trail in a picturesque setting.

Historic Hotel Cottages: Fully furnished and comfortable cottages are tucked near the edge of the forest just a short walk from the hotel (available mid-May through September). **The Woodland Cottages:** These single, two, three, and four bedroom rustic cottages provide basic accommodations for visitors who spend most of their time on the trails. The hotel also provides home-style cooking in the Travertine Restaurant and Crystal Lake Dining Room. **For information Call: (270) 758-2225**
www.mammothcavehotel.com

IN THE AREA

AMERICAN CAVE MUSEUM & HIDDEN RIVER CAVE

Hidden River Cave features a subterranean river flowing 150 feet below the city of Horse Cave, Kentucky and is operated as part of the American Cave Museum, a year-round attraction. (270) 786-1466. www.cavern.org

CRYSTAL ONYX CAVE

(270) 758-2243

DIAMOND CAVERNS

Park City, KY (270) 749-2233
www.diamondcaverns.com

DINOSAUR WORLD

Cave City, KY (270) 773-4345, www.dinoworld.net

GUNTOWN MOUNTAIN AMUSEMENT PARK

(270) 773-3530

KENTUCKY DOWN UNDER & KENTUCKY CAVERNS

Horse Cave, KY 800-762-2869, www.kdu.com

LOST RIVER CAVE & VALLEY

Kentucky's only underground boat tour.
Bowling Green, (270) 393-0077. www.lostrivercave.com

TOURISM AND ORGANIZATIONS

KENTUCKY CAVE REGION

800-22-TRIP Ext. CA9. www.kycaveregion.org

CAVE CITY TOURIST & CONVENTION CENTER

800-346-8908 www.cavecity.com

ABOVE: Photographer Gary Berdeaux capturing cavers exiting Kathleen's Crawl. BOTTOM LEFT: guide Johnny Merideth leading the group on Robertson Avenue towards the end of the tour. BOTTOM RIGHT: The Group gathered around the exit hole from Kathleen's Crawl.

