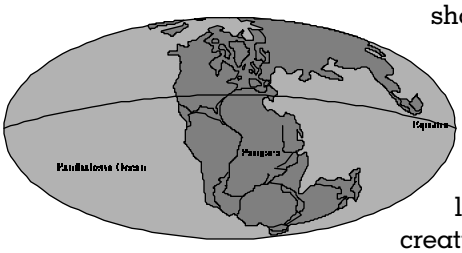
THE ANCIENT WORLD

Over 300 million years ago, the landscape in Mammoth Cave National Park looked vastly different. A shallow, saltwater sea covered the entire region, a sea teeming with life. The fish-dominated seas of the Devonian Period had changed to the coral-dominated seas of the Mississippian Period. As the corals, shellfish, snails and other forms of life died, their hard-shelled bodies sank to the bottom, mingling with layer upon layer of muck and ooze. The muck and ooze formed naturally as a by-product of ocean chemistry, a process that continues today. In time, and under the pressure of successive layers on the seafloor, the muck and ooze, and the bodies of the sea creatures, became the limestone body of the Cave.

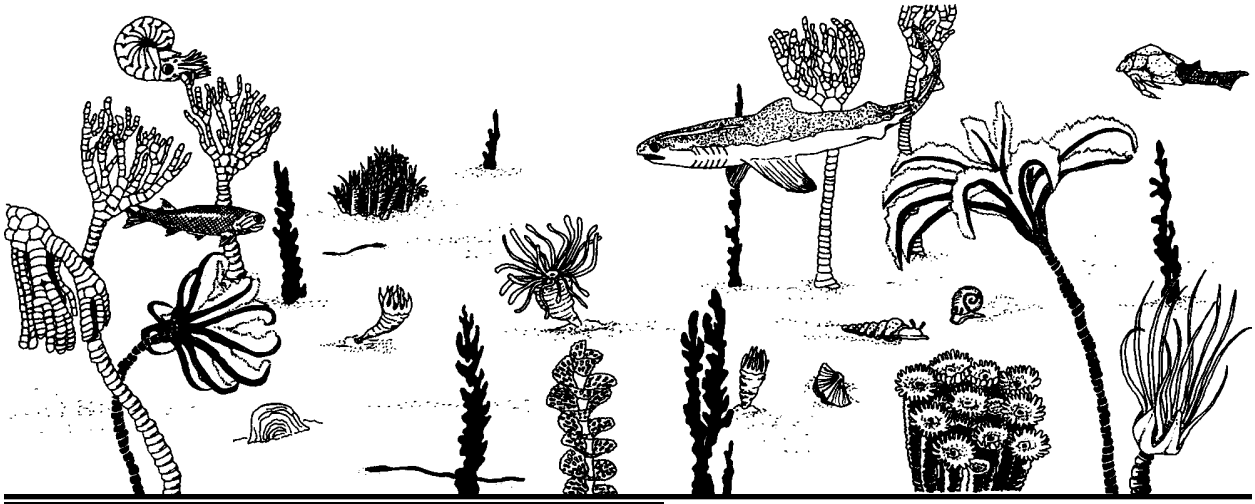
Science tells us that our seven familiar continents were once, 350 million years ago, all jammed together into one great landmass — a supercontinent we call **Pangaea.**

Surrounding Pangaea on all sides was a single World Ocean we call **Panthalassa.** The Earth was much warmer than today, the ice caps were smaller, and the oceans were higher.

The part of Pangaea that would become North America was a tropical land, and Kentucky was 10 degrees into the southern hemisphere. The entire southern United States was covered by a shallow saltwater sea. And that sea was full of life. As the creatures of that sea died, their bodies sank into the muck and ooze on the bottom. Over time and under pressure, the bodies, muck and ooze became the hundreds of feet of limestone rock that contains Mammoth Cave.



Millions of years later, an ancient river began to flow from Canada across Michigan, to meet the sea in central Kentucky. We call the river the **Michigan River,** and it dumped sand and mud in its delta by the sea. The sand and mud, in time, became the "waterproof" sandstone and shale that makes up Mammoth Cave's protective caprock.



1. Cephalopod 2. Hexagonal Coral *(Lithostrotion)*
3. Bony Fish 4. Crinoids – Sea Fans *(Cyathocrinus)*
5. Brachiopods 6. Horn Corals 7. Primitive Shark *(Cladoselache)* 8. Bryozoan *(Archimedes)*
9. Colonial Coral 10. Gastropods 11. Crinoids *(Stelatocrinus)* 12. Placoderm – Primitive Fish
13. Blastoid *(Pentremites)*