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PHO 677701

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

MAR 20 1979

DATE ENTERED

MAY 15 1979

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME** Salts Cave Archeological Site

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

Salts Cave Archeological Site (H-4)

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Mammoth Cave National Park,  
CITY, TOWN

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

Second District

STATE  
Kentucky

CODE  
21

COUNTY  
Hart

CODE  
99

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC Archeology
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

National Park Service Southeast Region

STREET & NUMBER

1895 Phoenix Blvd.

CITY, TOWN

Atlanta

VICINITY OF

STATE

Georgia

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

Hart County Courthouse, Edmonson County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Hart County - Munfordville  
Edmonson County - Brownsville

STATE

Kentucky

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

National Park Service, Branch of Engineering

DATE

August 1944

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Southeast Regional Office, National Park Service

CITY, TOWN

Atlanta

STATE

Georgia

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The entrance to the cave is gated to prevent unauthorized entry. Salts Cave was never intensively commercialized but there are indications that it was shown to the public occasionally. There is a delapidated, crude cave stone stairway down the entrance slope and at the bottom of the slope some beams and the remains of one or two wooden benches (initially constructed in the late 1890's, refurbished 1920's). Numerous dates and signatures such as "John West, June 15, 1809" and dates from the last quarter of the 19th century to the first quarter of the 20th century are common, included are dated signatures of Floyd Collins. The activities of prehistoric man are betrayed by chip marks on cave walls, smoke darkened walls and ceilings, fecal material and bits of clothing and torch sticks. In the vestibule, the cave floor has been disturbed by archeological investigations (1963). The cave still maintains its basic natural characteristics of large, dry passageways littered with massive rocks and powdery dirt.

Salts Cave is part of the Flint Ridge Cave System--the longest known cave system in the world--in Mammoth Cave National Park. The natural entrance to Salt Cave is at the [REDACTED]. The area is wooded with oak, hickory and dogwood. Salts is a large cave with three levels. The upper level is comprised of large passages and big rooms (30-40 feet high and 40-50 feet wide). The floor is littered with boulders of every shape and size (called breakdown by spelologists) that makes walking about very difficult. Evidence of human activity is found both on top and beneath the boulders that form the rough floor of upper Salts Cave indicating that though most of the collapse predates human use, some post dates occupancy by prehistoric man. Middle Salts is characterized by series of canyon-like passages. Here aboriginal debris is very much in evidence and much less disturbed than Upper Salts. Lower Salts is similar to middle Salts in configuration. Prehistoric people penetrated this area also--one remote passage (Indian Avenue) contained remains that were undisturbed until discovery of the passage in the early 1950's.

Traces of prehistoric man within all three levels of the cave include torch and hearth fire remains, woven slippers, cane torches, fragments of gourd and squash containers, desicated human feces, fiber cord and miscellaneous hand tools. These traces, though most prevalent in the upper two levels were also found on the lower level of Salts Cave.

Utilization of Salt Cave began with the Early Woodland period. These people cultivated squash and gourds, but neither maize nor beans. Cultivation of native plants and harvesting of some wild foods provided the majority of their foodstuffs.

Investigation of Salts Cave dates back to 1875 when F. W. Putnam referred to "relics" he had removed from Salt Cave [REDACTED]. These items (bundles of faggots, moccasins, pieces of cloth, twine, fragments of torches and gourds) are located at the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. Colonel Bennet Young provided a more complete description of Salts Cave and its artifacts in his book published in 1910 (Prehistoric Men of Kentucky). Most of Young's personal collection is at the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York City. The next scientific investigation was by the Cave Research Foundation beginning in 1963 under auspices of the Illinois State Museum. A summary of this investigation is found in Patty Jo

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Watson's, The Prehistory of Salts Cave Kentucky, 1969. This investigation consisted of observations and collections of surface material in Upper, Middle and Lower Salts Cave as well as the digging of two test trenches in Upper Salts at points A and B on the cave map. In 1969 seven additional trenches were dug in the vestibule or entrance area. Archeological investigations continued at Salts Cave into the early 1970's.

The boundary of the district is hard to define since the various caves--Salts, [REDACTED] Essentially, the bounds are the three levels of Salts Cave shown on the enclosed map. The extent of the cave is indicated by the red lines superimposed on the [REDACTED]

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1,000 - 300 B.C. BUILDER/ARCHITECT Early woodland cultural period

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The caves within the Salt-Mammoth Complex represent some of the best examples of pre-historic cave sites in midwestern North America. Salts is a dry cave and perishable as well as non-perishable material has been preserved. This data has been used to demonstrate the technological complexity of the cave users between 1000 BC and 300 BC. Also, considerable information has been gleaned regarding subsistence patterns of these prehistoric occupants.

A wide variety of data sets occurs within Salt Cave. Many of these sets rarely occur in other types of archeological sites, and thus the broad data base prevalent here provides unusual stimulus for research designs and topics that have to date included explanations of prehistoric technology and subsistence at this site as well as for the local region.

The major artifactual data sets which are subject to study are as follows:

- (1) Botanical data are represented through a wide variety of material. The most common remains are cane stalks which were used for torch and campfire fuel. However, an extensive quantity of squash and gourd fragments, hickory nuts, seeds, and in a lesser quantity, grape tendrils, acorns, and other vegetable matter occur on both the surface and subsurface levels within the cave vestibule and passages. Additional evidence of plant use and seasonality are indicated by pollen analysis and botanical remains recovered from human paleo-feces. All of the evidence indicates the importance of a plant food diet.
- (2) Human remains can be divided into two data classes. The first class, skeletal bone has been recovered intermixed with occupational levels which include other remains such as plants, animal bone, and charcoal. The human bone is in a disarticulated state and is sometimes charred. Interpretation of these data is difficult, however, Watson (1974:160) suggests two possibilities. The first is that cannibalism may have been a normal pattern among the prehistoric cave population. The second is that the remains are from secondary burials that have become badly mixed, subject to tool exploitation, and charring from intermittent campfires.

The second data class are desiccated bodies or mummies. Mummies have been recovered from other caves in the area, but the one discovered in Salts Cave in 1875, "Little Alice" (later to be correctly identified as "Little Al") is the only one recovered from the area that has been made subject to intensive examination and autopsy. A range of data was collected from

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this analysis which included the determination of the mummy's blood type from blood cell antigens found in tissue. Also examined were the contents of the stomach.

The last meal(s) included sumpweed, marsh elder, seeds, and hickory nuts. An analysis of fecal material within the colon indicated the extensiveness of the plant food diet, and helped demonstrate the human origin of other fecal material recovered within the cave.

- (3) A large quantity of human feces has been recovered from throughout the cave system and has been subjected to a variety of analysis by specialists and has yielded data on diet, and parasites. In addition, five radiocarbon dates have been determined from these paleofeces. These dates are as follows:

SCM-1	710± 140 B.C.
SCM-5	400± 140 B.C.
SCU-38	290± 200 B.C.
SCU-39	620± 140 B.C.
SCU-105	320± 140 B.C.

- (4) Textile material has been well preserved within the dry cave environment and literally hundreds of items and fragments have been found here in the past century. Much of textile material is in the form of "moccasins" or shoes, cordage, bags, baskets, and garment fragments. Three basic techniques: twining, braiding, and weaving are represented in the collection.

Other artifactual data sets include faunal bone excavated from the cave vestibule which indicate which animals were being exploited as a food resource. In lesser quantity are lithic artifacts such as projectile points and celts. Perhaps one of the most unusual data sets are the aboriginal footprints that were found in Lower Salts Cave.

The prehistoric utilization of Salts Cave appears to have occurred for a 700-800 year period during Early Woodland times. Occupation appears to have been sporadic and probably centered around mining activities designed to exploit gypsum and mirabilite deposits within the cave. The data suggests that most mining probably took place from late fall to spring, with occasional trips during the rest of the year.

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The people who mined Salts Cave were horticulturalists. They were cultivating two plants of exotic origin (squash and gourd), as many as three (Helianthus, Iva, and possibly ~~the~~ cenopodium) plants of North American origin. These facts could be used to support Gilmore's (1931) and Jones (1936) ideas that the early eastern United States horticultural complex, which preceded the cultivation of maize, fleshy squash, and beans, was based primarily on native plants. However, this does not negate Quimby's (1946) hypothesis that the introduction of cultivated plants from Mesoamerica may have stimulated plant domestication of local species within the Eastern United States. The co-existence of both exotic and native plants does not resolve the question of whether horticulture was a local development or was stimulated by Mesoamerican examples. To date, no site has been located which contains the supposed older species used as cultigens in the absence of any Mesoamerican species. It is worth noting that the Salts Cave squash and gourd dates are among the earliest in North America. However, the Salts Cave data does make it clear that the first plant domestication in the Eastern United States, occurred previous to the occupation of Salts Cave, probably before 1100 B.C., and that endemic North American plants played an important role in the earliest horticultural complex.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

The Prehistory of Salts Cave, Kentucky, Patty Jo Watson, Reports of Investigations No. 16, Illinois State Museum, Springfield, Illinois

Archeology of the Mammoth Cave Area edited by Patty Jo Watson, Academic Press, New York and London, 1974.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

UTM REFERENCES

A [REDACTED]  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

[REDACTED]

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE Kentucky CODE 21 COUNTY Hart [REDACTED] CODE 099

STATE Kentucky CODE 21 COUNTY Edmonson [REDACTED] CODE 075

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Steven Q. Smith, Chief Park Interpreter

12-24-74

ORGANIZATION

National Park Service

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

Mammoth Cave National Park

502-758-2251

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Mammoth Cave

STATE

Kentucky

# 12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ NONE \_\_\_\_\_

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is \_\_\_\_\_ National \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

*Edward W. Miller*

DATE

1-26-78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

3-11-79

ATTEST

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*[Signature]*

DATE

5-15-79

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

5/14/79