

THE FLASHLIGHT



A Newsletter of
Mammoth Cave
National Park

Superintendent's Message -

New Construction Begins

By Ronald R. Switzer

This is it! New park facilities and roads are on the way! For the last two years we have talked about the numerous construction projects, mostly reconstruction projects, planned to repair or rehabilitate aging park facilities. (Most of the infrastructure of Mammoth Cave National Park is worn out, dating back to the 1960s and some to the 1930s.) The plans, schematic drawings, and environmental/archeological compliance is complete, and funding is in place. The year 2003 will be the first of several years of the reconstruction of Mammoth Cave National Park.

Park construction projects slated for 2003 include:

- Reconstruction and paving of 7.9 miles of park roads (south of Green River) through the Federal Lands Highway Program, under U.S Department of Transportation: Chaumont to the visitor center; Sloan's Crossing to Silent Grove; one mile of the Maple Springs loop road; visitor center parking lot and a new bus loading area. The work at Maple Springs will begin in March. The contract for the rest of the work will be advertised in April.
- Five rainwater runoff filters, to keep parking lot oil, grit, and heavy metals out of the cave, will be installed at the major drainage points in the headquarters area and at Sloan's Crossing. Construction to begin in April - dependent on a new federal budget.
- Three prescribed burns are scheduled in the park this year, at Bruce Hollow Glade, Chaumont, and Onyx Meadows. The burn "window" runs from February 1 to April 30, before Indiana bats begin "nesting" in trees and the spring green-up occurs.
- The Headquarters Campground will receive a new entrance station this year; its contract will be let in March.



Roads Foreman Mark Davis examines damage in the park's roads.

Other projects are still in the works and should be coming up in the next few years:

- Phase I of the visitor center rehab (renovation of the administrative building) will most likely begin in fall of 2004 - this is a recent change due to funding requirements. In preparation, the administrative staff will move their offices to the park housing area in 2003.
- Replacement of the cave's 40-year old electrical system will begin this year. The contract will be let in July or August; work will begin in 2004.
- The park's 60-year old waterline, which runs along "old 70," will be replaced. Construction should begin in 2004.
- The first segment of cave trail, from Methodist Church to Giant's Coffin on the Historic tour route, will be rehabilitated beginning in the fall. Other cave trails are scheduled for reconstruction in 2007.
- Mammoth Dome tower will receive a fresh coat of paint in late 2003, to help maintain its structural integrity until it can be replaced, hopefully in 2006.

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• Replacing the concrete steps at the top of the Mammoth Dome tower with steel will remove any possible barrier to airflow through that area. Project planned for 2004.

This is the best information we have at this time. Negotiations with contractors will determine a more exact work schedule for each project. To keep the public well informed, we plan to issue regular updates, through the media and online, of any changes in traffic routing and the availability of parking, campsites, and cave tours as affected by park construction projects.

Hang in there with us – better things are coming! –Ronald R. Switzer

Park News

Ginseng Indictments

The U.S. Attorney has returned an indictment charging Lawrence T. Faith, Beaver Dam, Ky., and Dallas L. Fraim, Centertown, Ky., with stealing property of the United States, that is ginseng, of a value exceeding \$1,000, from Mammoth Cave NP. If convicted, the maximum potential penalties are 10 years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, and supervised release for a period of three years. At their arraignment on January 22 in Bowling Green, the pair pled not guilty. The next court date is February 31.

Being Green

Mammoth Cave NP, one of 20 NPS Centers for Environmental Innovation, is the cover story of the NPS web publication, *Sustainability News*. The article chronicles the park's green methods of protecting the park in the transportation realm: developing hydrologic maps for emergency responders' use at hazard spill sites; promoting grass-lined waterways and passive retention basins along the reconstructed areas of I-65; converting the park vehicle fleet to alternative fuels, ethanol and biodiesel; installing rainwater runoff filters in visitor parking areas; helping Forever/NPS Resorts convert its tour buses to propane fuel; and coordinating the establishment of the Southeast Tourism Policy Council, a consolidated voice for the tourism industry in 11 southeastern states. Read about it at www.nature.nps.gov/sustainability. Detailed NPS Environmental Leadership Program information is located on the web at www.nps.gov/renew.

The Elevator – The Latest News

An incident in May 2002 has caused park management to completely reevaluate all use of the elevator into the cave. At that time a cable broke, stopping the car mid-shaft. The ranger on the car crawled through the 2'x2' door in the roof of the car and ascended a ladder approximately 100 feet. Under normal circumstances, the cable should have a 15-year life expectancy; because it was in the damp cave environment, park managers cautiously decided to replace it every two years. This particular cable had been on the elevator for 18 months.

The elevator accesses the Snowball Room in Cleaveland Avenue, about 267 feet beneath the surface, five miles from the natural entrance of the cave, and one mile from Carmichael Entrance, a man-made shaft blasted in 1931 when the cave was still privately owned. Installation of the elevator (in 1954) was one of numerous construction projects completed after Mammoth Cave became a national park in 1941. It was a freight elevator used to facilitate lunch delivery and garbage removal from cave. Mobility Impaired tours, using the elevator to access the cave, began in the late 1960s or early 1970s, at first informally, but later as regularly scheduled tours. Thousands of people experienced the cave via the elevator. Out of hundreds of show caves across the country, Mammoth Cave was one of a mere handful that could accommodate people using wheelchairs.

We regret that the elevator is no longer in use, but we cannot ignore the hazardous situation riders would be subjected to if it should fail. The present state of the elevator does not meet emergency safety standards that require:

- elevators to be encased (the cave elevator is not encased), *and*
- two side-by-side cars (the cave elevator shaft is wide enough for only one car), *or*
- the ability to move the car to the nearest floor to exit (the cave elevator passes through 267 feet of solid rock with the only exits at the top and bottom).

At this time, the elevator has been repaired, but is only used to haul freight up and down the shaft. Park managers are looking at several planning options with the goal of providing a Mobility Impaired cave tour again in the future. The solutions and alternatives would require new construction and additional funding. While not impossible, but they would take time to accomplish.

Thanks from an Illinois Dad

“...my wife, my son, Nick, and I visited the park earlier this month. I want to thank you for the interesting time we had. Nick was excited when he got to turn the lights off and on in the cave. Our trip took us to George Rogers Clark, Lincoln Birthplace, Mammoth Cave, Big South Fork, Great Smoky Mountains, and back to Lincoln Boyhood Home. Six National Parks and five Jr. Ranger programs in a week! Mammoth Cave was particularly memorable because of the way the Rangers went out of their way to encourage Nick in his interest in our National Parks. Ranger Johnny (Meredith) was particularly friendly, and we really enjoyed Ranger Don's (Lindsey) humor. While working on some Cub Scout requirements, I was asking my son what public service activity he had done recently. He said he had picked up trash at school, and had gotten some other boys to help him, rewarding them with some candy he had in his backpack. I asked if a teacher had asked him to do this? He said, “No, I'm a Junior Ranger, that's what I'm supposed to do!” Sometimes the results of the Junior Ranger programs remain unseen to the Rangers, but you do make a difference in a child's life. Keep up the good work!”

*If you have a
modem...*

...then you have access to a wealth of information about Mammoth Cave National Park. Set your World Wide Web browser to:

<http://www.nps.gov/maca>

Reservations!

For cave tour, campground, and picnic shelter reservations online:
reservations.nps.gov

More Park News

There are several other recreational opportunities in the park that have been specifically designed to accommodate wheelchair users:

- camping at the Headquarters Campground;
- picnicking at Headquarters Picnic Area and Sloan's Crossing Pond;
- shopping, dining, or staying overnight at the Mammoth Cave Hotel;
- programs in the visitor center and amphitheater; and
- three boardwalks – the Heritage Trail overlooking the natural entrance of the cave and the Green River valley; Sloan's Crossing Pond, encircling an old farm pond; and Sand Cave, where Floyd Collins died in 1925.

Spring Visitors, According to Mary Anne Davis, Spring Psychic

Spring at Mammoth Cave brings new leaves, flowers, migrating and resident birds, and park visitors. The staff here, as well as local businesses, want to know when to expect visitors in order to have increased staffing coincide with peak visitor demand for services. Over the years we've learned that a large number of visitors drive here from Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio. Informal polling during Earthspeak! events confirmed this as well. Other states well represented in visitor numbers are Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Checking vacation dates for urban and suburban public schools (89 districts) in these six states is a fairly reliable indicator of when mom, dad, and the kids will hop in the car and make the cave area an end destination or a stop while traveling I-65. Easter, another determining factor, falls late this year on April 20.

- And the winner is ... April 12-21 or 22 is the spring break selected by most of the schools that were canvassed.
- Second runner up – March 22-30 ran as a close second.
- Notable mention – Kentucky schools do not follow suit – most of them scheduled April 5-13 as spring break and a few March 30-April 6.

People

Sympathies: Leon Liscomb, NPS retiree and Mammoth Cave ranger, died Thursday, January 2. Leon came to Mammoth Cave from Cumberland Gap NHP in 1976 as a supervisory ranger, living at Maple Springs. He transferred to Delaware Water Gap NRA in 1981, where he retired in the 1990s. His funeral was held in Somersville, Maine, on Tuesday January 7. Four uniformed NPS employees from Acadia attended the service. Memorial donations may be made to the Pentecostal Lighthouse, P.O. Box 416 Mount Desert, ME 04660. Condolences may be sent to Leon's wife, Rose Liscomb, at 56 Fogg Road, Bar Harbor, ME 04509.

Personnel: Brice Leech, guide and past NPS career employee, was reinstated to a permanent position as a biological science technician in the Science and Resource Management Division. Brice will take on most of John Fry's past projects.

The Flashlight is produced by the Division of External Programs and Communications. Our Web Page address is www.nps.gov/maca. Please contact us if you need further information. – Jim Carroll, Vickie Carson, Tres Seymour, and Mary Anne Davis, Mammoth Cave National Park, P.O. Box 7, Mammoth Cave, KY 42259; by telephone at (270)758-2254, or (270)773-2111; by e-mail at Vickie_Carson@nps.gov.

Calendar

February 11-13	National Cave/Karst Institute Research Workshop at MACA
March 1	Headquarters Campground, picnic area, and Houchins Ferry open for the season
March 15	Spring cave tour schedule begins
Mar 29 - Apr 1	Southeast Tourism Society meeting, Birmingham, AL
April 26	Wildflower Day!
April 21-27	National Park Week
May 20-22	Environmental Leadership Conference, MACA Hotel
May 25, 1926	Mammoth Cave NP authorized by Congress (Shenandoah and Great Smokies authorized May 22, 1926)
July 1, 1941	Mammoth Cave NP established
July 6-25	Earthwatch volunteers at MACA
July 21-25	River Institute, EE/WKU
August 25, 1916	NPS Founders Day
September 25-27	Kentucky Folk Festival in Frankfort
September 27	National Public Lands Day
October 5-24	Earthwatch volunteers at MACA (tentative)
October 10=12	Colorfall: "Roots in the Cave"



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