

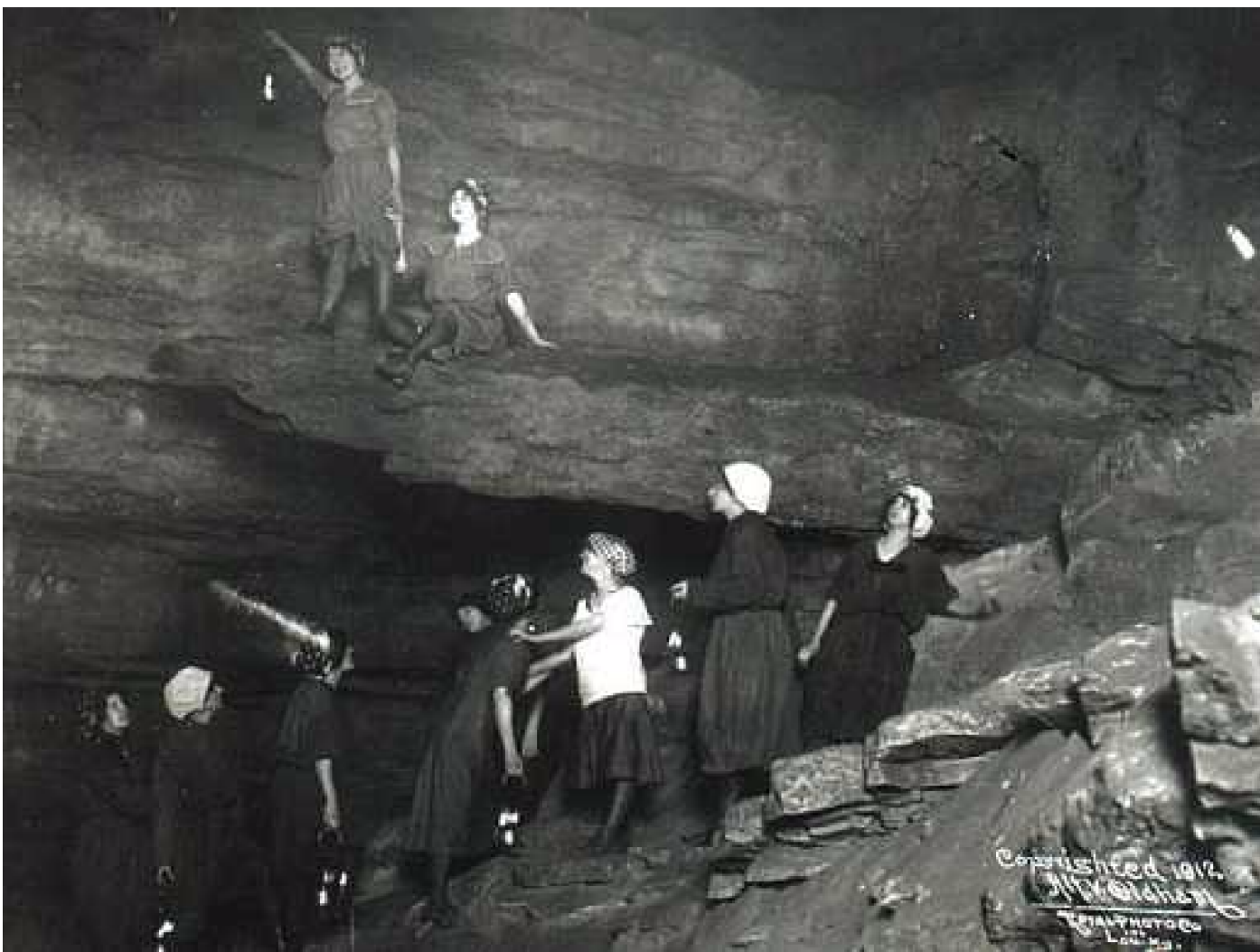
World Heritage Sites of the United States  
Mammoth Cave National Park (150), Inscribed on October 30, 1981  
Kentucky

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



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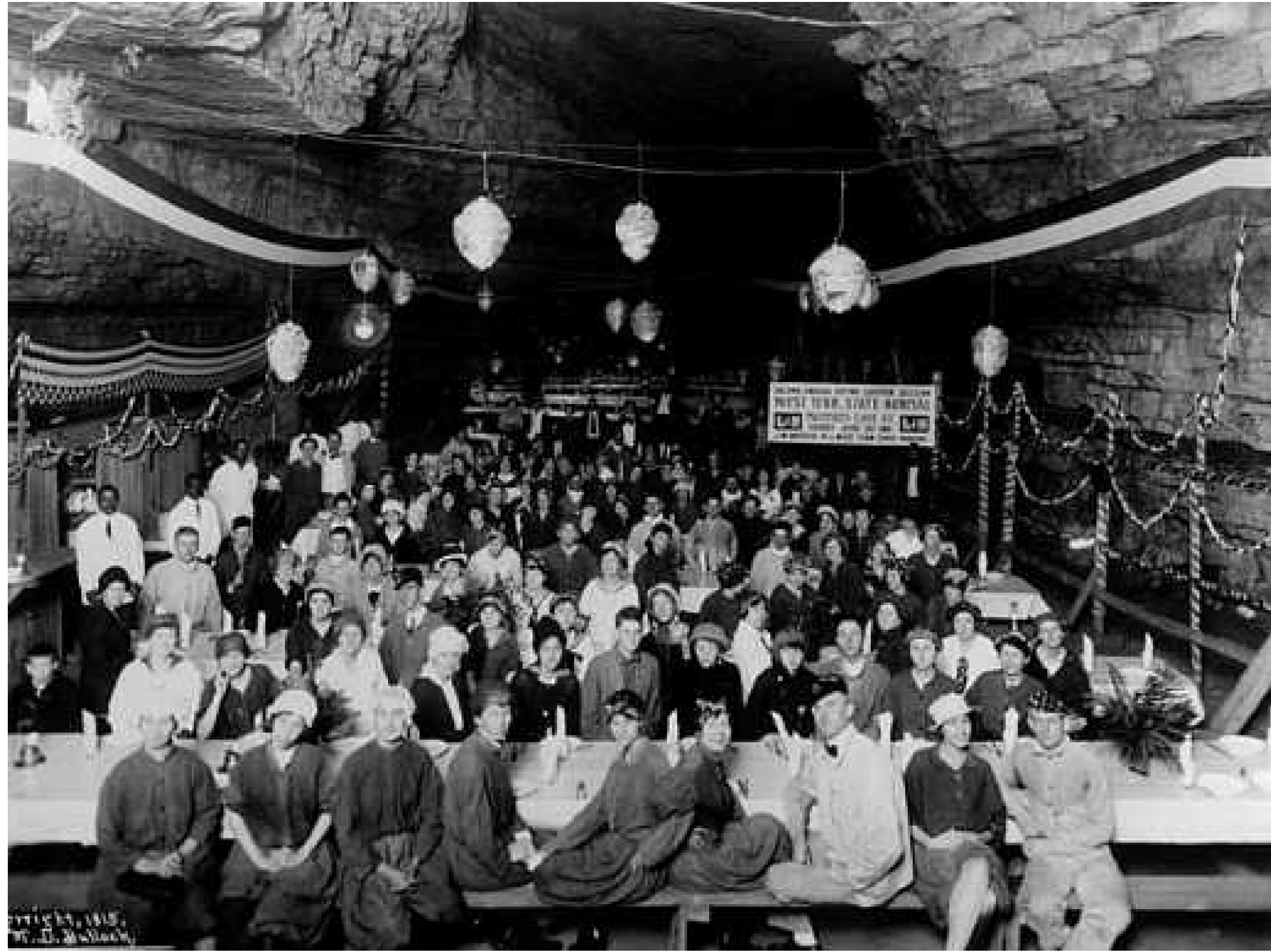
Mammoth Cave NP World Heritage Area



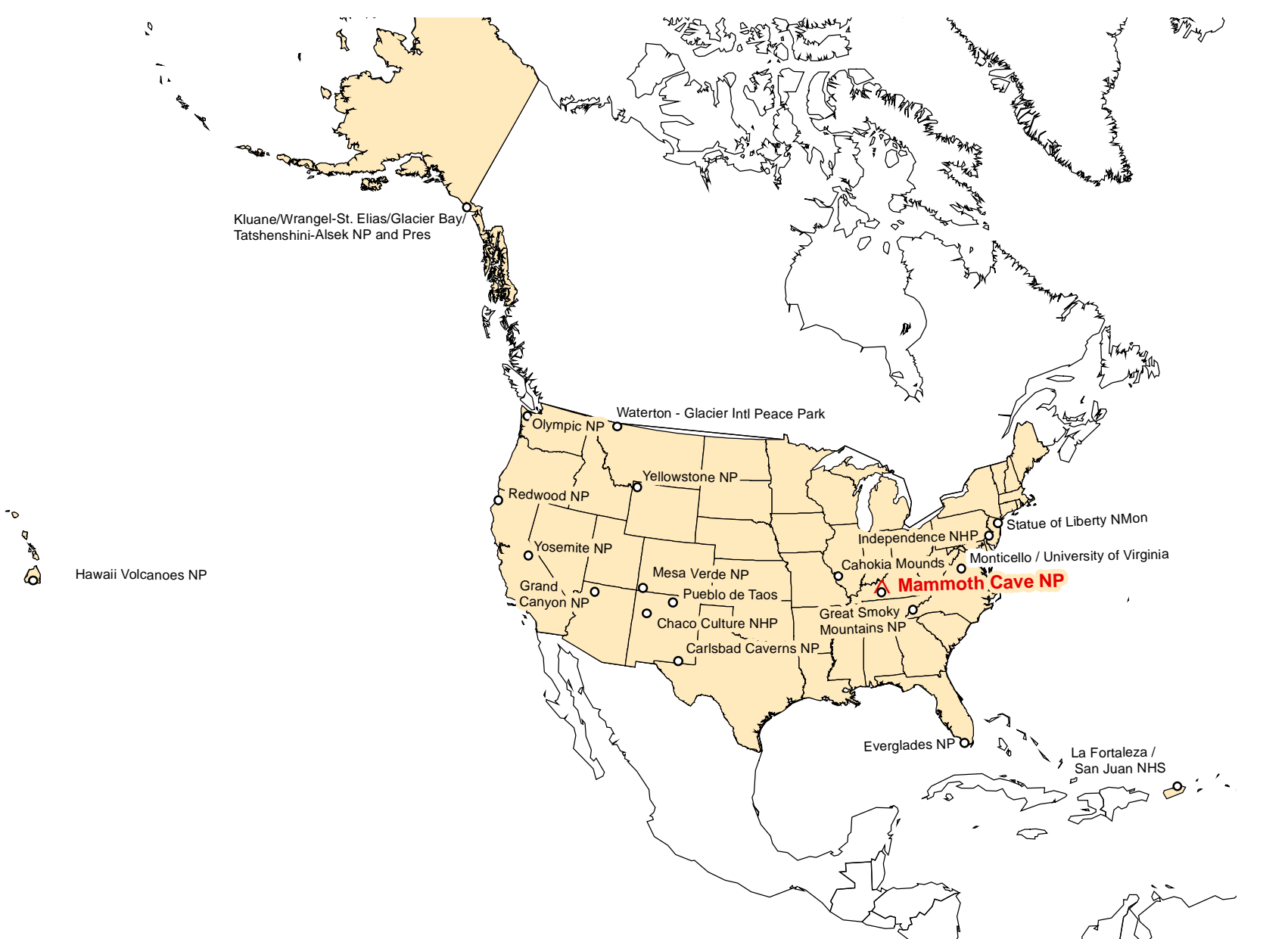
Visitors to Mammoth Cave.  
Photographer: Alt. V. Oldham, ca. 1912 (National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection)

Mammoth Cave National Park includes by far the longest cave system in the world, with known passages extending some 306 kilometres and perhaps an equal length of as yet undiscovered passages. It is of geological importance due to the 100 million years of cave-forming action by the Green River and its tributaries; nearly every type of cave formation is known within the site, and the geological processes involved in cave formation are continuing. The long passages with huge chambers, vertical shafts, stalagmites and stalactites, typtsum "flowers" and "needles", and other natural features of the cave system are all superlative examples of their types. The flora and fauna of the cave is the richest caverniculous wildlife known, numbering some 300 species, of which 12 species are rare and endemic to the cave system. Outside the cave, the karst topography is superb, with fascinating landscapes, luxurient vegetation, and abundant wildlife; all of the features of a karst drainage system -- vast recharge area, complex network of underground conduits, sink holes, cracks, fissures, and surface and underground springs -- are found within the site. Mammoth Cave has been important in the development of human culture, with four distinct cultural periods described: Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian. The early Woodland period is particularly important because it marked the independent development of horticulture in the Western Hemisphere.

**CULTURAL HERITAGE** The park contains evidence of four pre-Columbian Indian cultures: Mississippian, Woodland, Archaic and Paleo-Indian. The early Woodland culture period is of special archaeological importance because it shows the first evidence of organised horticulture in North America, with primitive agriculture on river floodplains. These indians used the caves for shelters and chipped gypsum and mirabilite off the walls; more than 150 archaeological sites have been identified within the national park. Saltpetre deposits were discovered on the cave walls and this valuable nitrate was removed and sent to be processed in gunpowder factories between 1809 and 1819. After the 1812-1815 war Mammoth Cave became a national and international tourist attraction. Three churches and fourteen cemeteries still exist in the park and are used by the public.



Mammoth Cave, Audubon Avenue Dining Hall.  
Photographer: M.D. Bullock, ca. 1915 (National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection)



Mammoth Cave National Park: Longitude 86°00'00 -86°17' W / Latitude 37°07'30 -37°17'30 N



Visitors floating on an underground river (Echo River?).  
Photographer: Unknown ca. 1900s (National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection)

Modern man, who discovered Mammoth Cave around 1798, continued to follow the steps of the earlier explorers and miners. In the early 1800's, someone noted that the dirt on the floor of the cave was rich in nitrate, a substance used in the manufacture of gunpowder. With the advent of the War of 1812, exploitation of Mammoth Cave began. The rich "peter dirt" was mined and the nitrate was leached from it. Cave visitors today can see some of the relics of this period including leaching vats and wood pipes. This industry began in 1809 and flourished for nearly a decade, ending after the close of the war.

Visitors hearing of the immensity of the cave began to come and public tours guided by Negro slaves started in 1816. The guides explored and discovered many passages and in time, Mammoth Cave was extolled as the seventh natural wonder of the world. The cave is considered to be the second oldest tourist attraction in the United States.

In 1842, Dr. John Croghan, seeking a cure for tuberculosis, established an unsuccessful treatment center within the Mammoth Cave system. Two of the six patients' huts, erected in the cave, remain today.

Text extracted from the World Heritage Nomination for Mammoth Cave National Park. Map compiled by Cultural Resources GIS Facility, Historic American Landscapes Survey, Heritage Documentation Program. March 2006

