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# Flint Ridge Cave History and Legends

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# Flint Ridge Cave History and Legends

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## Barrel Hoop Cave

This is a shallow cave in a sinkhole near the bottom of Three Sisters Hollow. It was shown on an early topographic map of the area, so it may have been more extensive in the past.

## Bedquilt Cave

Col. Bennett H. Young wrote this part of Colossal Cave was “- so named because of the finding there, some years ago, of an Indian mat resembling a quilt.” (Young 1910, p. 298) The cave served as a gypsum formation mine for locals, especially the Lee family.

When Milton H. Smith and the Louisville and Nashville Railroad were enjoined from entry into Woodson-Adair Cave in January 1896, Smith leased the Bedquilt entrance. Ed and Henry Lee found the way to connect to Colossal Cave from Bedquilt that allowed Edgar Vaughan and W. L. Marshall to survey the new entrance location. On October 14, 1896 for \$10, Isaac. N. Holton sold the cave rights on the land where the entrance to Bed Quilt lay to M.H. Smith of the L & N Railroad.

The cave entrance was open from about 1885 until the depression. Cave Research Foundation (CRF) caver Burnell Ehman entered the cave on a tour in the early 1930s. The entrance was 35 feet wide then, and visitors walked in the first part of the cave. Knowledge of the entrance location was lost until a CRF survey party on December 31, 1962 surveyed a crawlway to emerge on the surface.

## Brill Cave

This small pit is not far from the Austin Entrance road. Donald and Frank Brill found the cave in June 1956 during a Central Ohio Grotto trip to Crystal Cave.

## Breathing Cave

In Three Sisters Hollow there is an 8” high x 4’ wide cave entrance that blows much air and goes 90 feet to a waterfall. Bill Austin and Jack Lehrberger entered the cave as well as a later CRF survey party.

## Buzzard Cave “alias” Cathedral Cave

According to Homer Collins in “The Life and Death of Floyd Collins,”

*“The many-spined formations and columns in the cave led to the name Cathedral Cave. Originally, it was called Buzzards Cave. The buzzards roosted there and in the rock shelters nearby. Floyd used to climb up to their nests to steal eggs...”*(Collins and Lehrberger 2001, p. 36).

Dr. Thomas ran an extended electrical line to the cave with several light bulbs in the cave. If visitors paid for a FCCC ticket, one got to visit Cathedral for “free,” as competition for Great Onyx Cave which also had electrical lighting.

The cave is important because of its rich fauna. Bro. G. Nicholas studied nocturnal migration of *Hadenoeus subterraneus* in the cave for his doctoral dissertation from November 1960 until 1962.

### **Colossal Cave**

William Garvin sold on May 18, 1896, to Milton H. Smith, president of the L&N and 'trustee' for the Colossal Cavern Co. five acres ... "to make a surface entrance unto any and all caves and caverns under the land..." and ... "right of way for an electric railroad over the top" of the remainder of land owned by William Garvin.

The Colossal Cave was considered the large trunk passage reached by crossing over Colossal Dome from the Woodson-Adair entrance. Lyman Hazen had a 1/3 interest with Mary Isenberg and her father, Billie Adair, to develop Woodson-Adair Cave as a show cave. His 6-months interest was due to expire January, 1896, so Hazen sold his interest to Smith on Jan 24, 1896 for \$4500 in stock in the Colossal Caverns Company, with an additional \$500 to be received when he proved the river in Proctor Cave owned by L&N connected to the river in Colossal Cave.

As part of the agreement Hazen was to buy surrounding land for the Colossal Cavern Company as the railroad was not to take land for non-railroad purposes. Hazen was made manager of Colossal Cave when the new entrance opened in the summer of 1896.

At Woodson-Adair, then later when Colossal was opened, Hazen mined large quantities of formations from the cave. His contracts allowed him to sell formations and get revenue from any cabins, but he was deemed to be mining too much. Furthermore, he was not to compete with Colossal Cave by opening other caves.

Hazen fell into disfavor, and did not turn land over to the railroad's agent Daniel Breck on request as he had agreed.

L&N called for him to transfer his land on February 13, 1897, but he only transferred part of his holdings. He opened Hazen's Cave into Colossal Cave, forcing L&N to purchase this tract. All his rights at Colossal Cave were lost and he soon opened the Pike Chapman Entrance of Salts Cave in competition with Colossal Cave. J. M. Hunt replaced Hazen and became the manager of the Colossal Caverns in 1898.

### **Curd Cave**

This Cave is located on land purchased from Richard Colman Estes in 1919 by E.C. Curd. His heirs sold 460 acres to the park movement in 1934. The cave was surveyed by CRF in the 1970s and consisted of winding canyons below the large sink shown on topographic maps on the east side of Houchins Valley.

### **Dickey Pit**

Fred Dickey found this 50-foot shaft entrance to a low stream passage in Rigdon Hollow on a surface hike during CRF's Thanksgiving 1963 expedition.

### **Donkey's Cave or Floyd's Cave**

This was Floyd Collins' first show cave. He purchased land across the valley from his home from George W. Cline. Floyd was plowing around the hillside in the winter of 1910 when the mule that was pulling the plow, fell through into a sink when the ground suddenly gave away, hence the name "Donkey's Cave."

Floyd died owing money on the property. Lee Collins, Floyd's father and heir, later simply "re-sold" the land back to Cline since it hadn't been paid for. Floyd built a

cabin over the shaft entrance and led some tours in the cave. Edmund Turner and Floyd Collins performed a survey of Salts Cave. This might have been to enable Collins to find further passages of Floyd's cave or a connection to Salts Cave, the Pike Chapman Entrance, which was just up the same hollow.

The Central Ohio Grotto re-explored and surveyed the cave in January 1956. Resurvey of the cave beginning Thanksgiving 2009 has led to connection of the cave to shafts off Pohl Avenue and integration into the Mammoth Cave System.

### **Elmore Cave**

Short sandstone cave near the ridge top shown on topographic maps. The cave is named for African-American cave guide and underground worker Elmore Smith. He later worked for the Mammoth Cave Estate in the kitchen of the Mammoth Cave Hotel. The mystery about the cave is why this insignificant feature is shown on an early topographic map and those that follow.

### **Great Crystal Cave (Floyd Collins Crystal Cave)**

According to Homer Collins, (Collins and Lehrberger 2001, p. 69) Floyd Collins first noticed the potential cave entrance in September 1917, with breakthrough December 17, 1917 beyond an entrance pit to the passages leading on. For several years, this and the other major Flint Ridge caves made up the longest surveyed cave system in the world.

### **Gothic Cave**

The cave name is ambiguous but it does have limited speleothems that might have resembled to someone a miniature gothic cathedral. The cave is 132 feet long and is rich biologically. Gothic Cave and Curd

Cave were located on Richard Colman Estes' 460 acre tract of land at the time of the discovery of Woodson-Adair Cave. E.C. Curd later purchased this land, with his heirs selling it to the U.S.A. when the park was developed.

### **Great Onyx Cave**

Much has been written on this famed Flint Ridge show cave discovered by Edmund Turner under the employ of L. P. Edwards beginning in 1915. A signature in the cave indicates Floyd Collins and Turner might have already been exploring the cave in 1914.

### **Hazen Cave**

The Colossal Caverns Company (L&N Railroad) called for Lyman Hazen to transfer his land bought as land agent for the company on Feb. 13, 1897. Hazen only transferred part of the land. To the disgust of Smith, Hazen bought land adjacent to Colossal Cave property and forced an entrance into Colossal. He successfully opened Hazen's Entrance, which forced the L&N to buy the property to maintain control of all access to the cave. The shaft in Hazen's cave that led down to Colossal Cave was blasted shut.

### **Hog Cave**

Hog Cave is located in sandstone at the valley edge on the Jacob Locke land near Bedquilt Cave. The cave resembles Elmore Cave around the ridge to the northwest. The five-foot drop at the entrance and very small stream make it unlikely it was used for livestock.

### **Ice Cave**

Elkanah Cline on CRF recordings states:

*"Dr. Hazen went into Salts, crossed*

*the valley, and came out Ice Cave. He blasted the passage in Ice Cave and it hasn't been found. Dr. Thomas was interested in Ice Cave because of this story. One used to enter Ice Cave, but it is now closed. It was used to store eggs in an alcove on the right side going in. It belonged to Tommy Johns."*

Cline went back into the crevice 3-400 feet. Russell Neville photographed the entrance and wrote that locals got ice from the cave up until the summer months. Sawdust from the nearby Sell sawmill washed down the steep valley into the cave.

### **Johnson Cave**

The Franklin Johnson homesite, spring, Johnson Cemetery and nearby Johnson Cave are close to the valley bottom between Collins Spring and the Dennison Ferry Road. CRF surveys began in November 1991. In July 1992 a survey party broke through the apparent cave end to discover virgin cave passages doubling the length of the cave.

### **Logsdon Cave**

The Oscar Logsdon house site with the chimney still standing is directly across the hollow from the shallow sandstone Logsdon Cave entrance. Logsdon once worked for Floyd Collins Crystal Cave and also solicited for the New Entrance to Mammoth Cave.

### **Natural Tunnel**

Bill Austin related a legend that the Collins' stored produce in Natural Tunnel before taking it to Horse Cave for sale. CRF entered the cave in 1968 and did a limited survey. No names or cultural items were recorded.

In May 2008 the cave was resurveyed and cultural features of the cave studied. There

is a small trail and dates suggesting Floyd Collins took individuals to the cave in 1920. There is no evidence of produce storage in the cave. A surface traverse over the cave revealed no evidence there ever was a developed back entrance.

### **Pagoda Cave**

This cave name is as enigmatic as that of Gothic Cave. The cold trap entrance leads 140 foot in a high-ceilinged large migrating dome.

### **Potato Cave**

The cave's name suggests that it was used store potatoes although it would have been a difficult endeavor to move potatoes in and out of the steeply sloping pit entrance of the cave. Famed Mammoth Cave guide Owen Josh Wilson owned the cave. His family retained ownership of the cave when they sold the rest of their land to W.O. Holton. Lyman Cutliff was familiar with the cave. The cave was the first cave CRF surveyed on the northwest part of Flint Ridge beginning in 1961.

### **Rigdon Pit**

Rigdon Pit was found in 1963 during the discovery of nearby Dickey Pit but its difficult vertical shaft series was not surveyed until a series of CRF trips in the summer of 1971.

### **Salts Cave**

In 1910 Col Bennett H. Young wrote:

*"No definite statement as to the discovery of Salts Cave can be found. After inquiry among the oldest men now residing in that locality, including Squire O.P. Shackelford and Mr. A.B. Johnson, both of whom have lived all their*



*lives near the place, it is probable that the first white man who ever saw the cave was William West who it is said patented the land covering it about 1794. Squire Shackelford distinctly recollects his father telling him, when he was quite a young man, that the cave was explored first by Peter Kinser, who, upon entering it, remained in it a week examining its passages, and Squire Shackelford's wife found a moccasin in Salts Cave in 1851"* (Young 1910, pp 208-209).

At one time three different parties claimed ownership to this cave; i.e. the Mammoth Cave Estate, Mark Thompson, and Lark Burnett. At the creation of Mammoth Cave National Park, a court case resulted in the heirs of Burnett being the rightful owners and receiving compensation for the land and cave.

### **Pike Chapman Entrance to Great Salts Cave**

Jacob Jones purchased from Benjamin Payne, 150 acres of land on Flint Ridge in 1854. Jones began clearing the land and within twenty years had a good rail fence around his fields where he maintained a 'picturesque' farm, and the cleanest fence rows of any farmer on Flint Ridge.

However, he soon became restless and in 1877 sold the farm to Caroline and Lewis Vials of Horse Cave KY. Lewis Vials hired two French surveyors to survey Salts Cave and found that the cave ran beneath his property.

The Blue Grass Country Club was later located on this land in the early 20s. The large 440-acre survey had a section purchased by E.W. Johnson, brother-in-law of L.P. Edwards. Johnson sold this land to

L.W. Hazen in 1896. It was upon this land that the Pike Chapman entrance to Salts Cave was located. In July 1897, Hazen was enlarging the Pike Chapman entrance to show the cave when Pike, Hazen's nephew, died in an entrance rock collapse.

In August 1897, the Louisville Courier-Journal printed a full page article "Rivals the Mammoth Cave in Grandeur." It was the last straw for Smith and Daniel Breck. L&N took Hazen and his wife to court taking all of the land they had in the area, including the Pike Chapman Entrance, as the contract Smith and the Hazens signed had a provision that on demand they would turn over all the land they had in the area to Smith and the Colossal Caverns Company.

Floyd Collins and his brothers were hired by the Blue Grass Country Club to reopen the entrance in 1919 (Collins and Lehrberger 2001, p. 91) and guided cave tours for the club. The timbered entrance collapsed after the country club closed and has remained sealed.

### **Sheep Cave**

The cave is an open shaft on the undercut south wall of Ice Cave that was doubtfully used by sheep.

### **Woodson-Adair Cave**

This is the original entrance to Colossal Cave, and was named in for William Adair and Robert Garvin (alias Woodson), owners of the land under which the cave ran. It is likely that Woodson found the cave opening in early 1895 that was developed by Lute and Henry Lee.

Lyman Hazen moved his houseboat up the Green River to Mammoth Cave. The boat was moved overland to the Woodson-Adair Cave in September 1895 when Hazen reached an agreement with William Adair

and his daughter, Mary Isenberg, to develop the cave as a show cave.

Lyman and Sophronie Hazen lived in the galley while a five room one and a half story log house was constructed above the entrance to the cave. A trap door beneath the log house led down into the cave. Pike Chapman was lowered down a deep pit in the back of the cave named Colossal Dome and found the main trunk passages named “Colossal Cave.”

### **Unknown Cave**

The cave has its entrance under a cliff in Three Sisters Hollow. The early exploration history of this cave is obscure, but it can be assumed that the cave was visited many times in the 1800s. Names found on the cave walls include several members of the Hunt and Lee families, local cave guides, explorers over several generations and the name of Edmund Turner.

The 50-acre tract containing the cave was west of the Vials land and very near Floyd Collins’ Donkey Cave and the Pike Chapman Salts Cave entrance. A.J. Monas

and family were living here in the late 1850s. The land soon passed to P.C. Padgett. Padgett eventually sold this farm in 1897 to Lyman Hazen.

The cave subsequently was owned by L&N Railroad and leased to the Blue Grass Country Club. Exploration in 1954 down shafts in Unknown Cave by Louisville Grotto cavers and Bill Austin with Jack Lehrberger led to discovery of the central passages of the Flint Ridge Cave System.

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Collins, Homer, and John L. Lehrberger. 2001. *The Life and Death of Floyd Collins*. Cave Books, St. Louis, 206 pp.

Young, Col. Bennett H. 1910. *The Prehistoric Men of Kentucky*. Filson Club, Louisville, 314 pp.