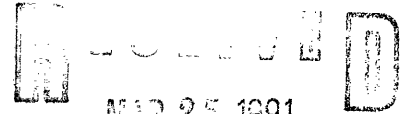


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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service



MAR 25 1991

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Great Onyx Cave Entrance

other names/site number E-16

2. Location

street & number Mammoth Cave National Park (MACA)

not for publication NA

city, town Mammoth Cave

vicinity NA

state Kentucky

code KY

county Edmonson

code 061

zip code 42259

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal (checked)

Category of Property

- building(s), district (checked), site, structure, object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing: Historic Resources of Mammoth Cave National Park

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official: Edmund C. Barred

Date: March 29, 1991

State or Federal agency and bureau: National Park Service

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official: David L. Morgan

Date: Jan. 8, 1991

State Historic Preservation Officer, Kentucky Heritage Council

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. (checked)
determined eligible for the National Register.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper: Patrick Andrews

Date of Action: 5/8/91

Signature of the Keeper: [Handwritten Signature]

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Recreation and Culture

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Recreation and Culture

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation limestone

walls limestone

roof limestone

other steel door, metal door frame

NA: No style

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

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Continuation Sheet**

Historic Resources of Mammoth Cave National Park, MPS
Edmonson, Hart, and Barren Counties, Kentucky
Great Onyx Cave Entrance

Section number 7 Page 1

7. Description of present and historic physical appearance.

Great Onyx Cave entrance is set into a hillside facing west, approximately 1.5 miles north of the junction of Flint Ridge Road and Onyx Meadows Road, 2.5 miles northeast of park headquarters. This entirely man-made entrance is enclosed with a structure made of irregularly shaped, cemented limestone blocks which measures 18 feet wide, 16 feet deep, and 9 feet high. The hillside serves as the rear of the structure. The steel doorway, measuring approximately 6.5 feet high by 3 feet wide, is set just slightly right of center of the western side of the entrance structure. Inside the structure, concrete-covered stone steps of varying height lead through the opening cut into the limestone and into the cave. Limestone retaining walls keep the entrance intact. The metal frame of an earlier door outlines the cave opening. A small graveled visitor gathering yard surrounds the entrance. Nominated resources include two contributing sites, the cave entrance and the gathering yard; three contributing structures, the entrance building, stone retaining walls, and metal door frame surrounding the cave opening; and two noncontributing structures, the metal door of the entrance building and the concrete covered rock stairs.

L. P. Edwards and his employee, Edwin Turner, created Great Onyx Entrance in 1915 by digging and blasting through the limestone with dynamite. They then supported the entrance with limestone retaining walls. Although the exact date of its construction is unknown, judging from the evidence of an earlier door at the cave's opening, the structure around the entrance was probably built a few years after the opening was constructed. A small visitor gathering yard surrounds the entrance structure. In the 1920s Edwards constructed a hotel and cottages on the hillside above the cave entrance, which were operated until 1961, when the National Park Service acquired the property and had them removed. Edwards, and later Lucy Edwards Cox and Perry Cox, his successors as owner/operators of Great Onyx Cave, lived on the property and farmed some of the land nearby.

The opening to Great Onyx Cave that was constructed by Edwards and Turner is only slightly altered, in good condition, and remains a significant representative of the era of commercial cave exploitation in the Mammoth Cave area. Integrity of location, immediate setting, feeling, and association are maintained. The entrance structure, added soon after the opening was con-

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Great Onyx Cave Entrance

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structed, is original, though the present steel door was added when the National Park Service began interpreting Great Onyx Cave for visitors in 1975. The original stone steps that lead into the cave were covered with concrete at some unknown, but probably fairly recent date. Gravel has been added to the yard where visitors gathered before entering the cave, although the space itself is intact. The hotel, cottages, and residential structures on the property were razed and later replaced with a picnic shelter for park visitors.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/recreation

Period of Significance

1915 to 1926

Significant Dates

1915

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

L. P. Edwards

Architect/Builder

L. P. Edwards

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67)
has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings
Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering
Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property _____

UTM References

A
Zone Easting Northing

C

B
Zone Easting Northing

D

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kelly A. Lally, consultant

organization Kentucky Heritage Council

street & number 701 D Daniels St.

city or town Raleigh

date June 1989

telephone 919-828-9123

state NC zip code 27605

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Historic Resources of Mammoth Cave National Park, MPS
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Section number 8 Page 1 Great Onyx Cave Entrance

8. Statement of significance, criteria justification, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance.

Great Onyx Cave entrance is historically significant in the area of Entertainment/recreation and represents the property type "Commercial Cave Entrances and Related Structures" (for property type information, see Section III of the Historic Resource Study, pages C-7 to C-9).

The period of significance, 1915-1926, refers to the years from the construction of the entrance in 1915 to the transfer of the property from Edwards to his daughter and son-in-law in 1926, the same year that the legislation authorizing the creation of Mammoth Cave National Park was passed into law. The entrance to Great Onyx Cave, which connects the surface with the underground passages, is the most visible extant feature associated with the commercial operation of the cave.

Mammoth Cave has been a well-known tourist attraction since the early nineteenth century. In the latter part of that century local residents searched for other caves that might draw tourists. Between 1895 and 1924, several major commercial caves, Colossal Cave, Great Onyx Cave, Crystal Cave, New Entrance Cave, and the Frozen Niagara portion of Mammoth Cave were opened to visitors. These caves competed with Mammoth Cave and each other for the local tourist business.

Early in 1915, L. P. Edwards and Edwin Turner began exploring Edwards's property on Flint Ridge in hopes of discovering a major cave. After unsuccessfully searching for a natural entrance, Edwards and Turner blasted and dug an entrance to Great Onyx Cave on June 12, 1915. The following winter Edwards opened the first tour route to the public. Later his business was successful enough to warrant the construction of a hotel and cottages on the property to accommodate visitors. His daughter and son-in-law, Lucy and Perry Cox, purchased the majority interest in the Great Onyx property in 1926 and managed it until 1961, when it was acquired by the National Park Service for Mammoth Cave National Park.

Commercial caves, such as Great Onyx Cave, were business ventures for their owners and recreational adventures for the visitors who paid to tour them. L. P. Edwards and Edwin Turner uncovered and developed the Great Onyx Cave and surrounding area in hopes of profiting financially from the project. Within a decade of its discovery, Great Onyx Cave was drawing thousands of

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Historic Resources of Mammoth Cave National Park, MPS
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visitors who had their choice of two tour routes. In 1926 the Great Onyx property was valued at \$396,000. Edwards, a prominent community businessman in the Mammoth Cave area, was able to successfully fight the condemnation of his property by the federal government for the development of Mammoth Cave National Park.

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Historic Resources of Mammoth Cave National Park, MPS
Edmonson, Hart, and Barrer Counties, Kentucky

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Great Onyx Cave Entrance

9. Major Bibliographical References

Goode, Cecil E. World Wonder Saved: How Mammoth Cave Became A National Park. Mammoth Cave, KY: The Mammoth Cave National Park Association, 1986.

Great Onyx Guide Manual. Mammoth Cave National Park Library, Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, n.d.

Reinartz, Kay F. "The Great Onyx Cave War: Edwards v. Lee." Manuscript, Mammoth Cave National Park Library, Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, publication data unknown.

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National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Historic Resources of Mammoth Cave National Park, MPS
Edmonson, Hart, and Barren Counties, Kentucky

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Great Onyx Cave Entrance

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property: less than one acre

UTM References

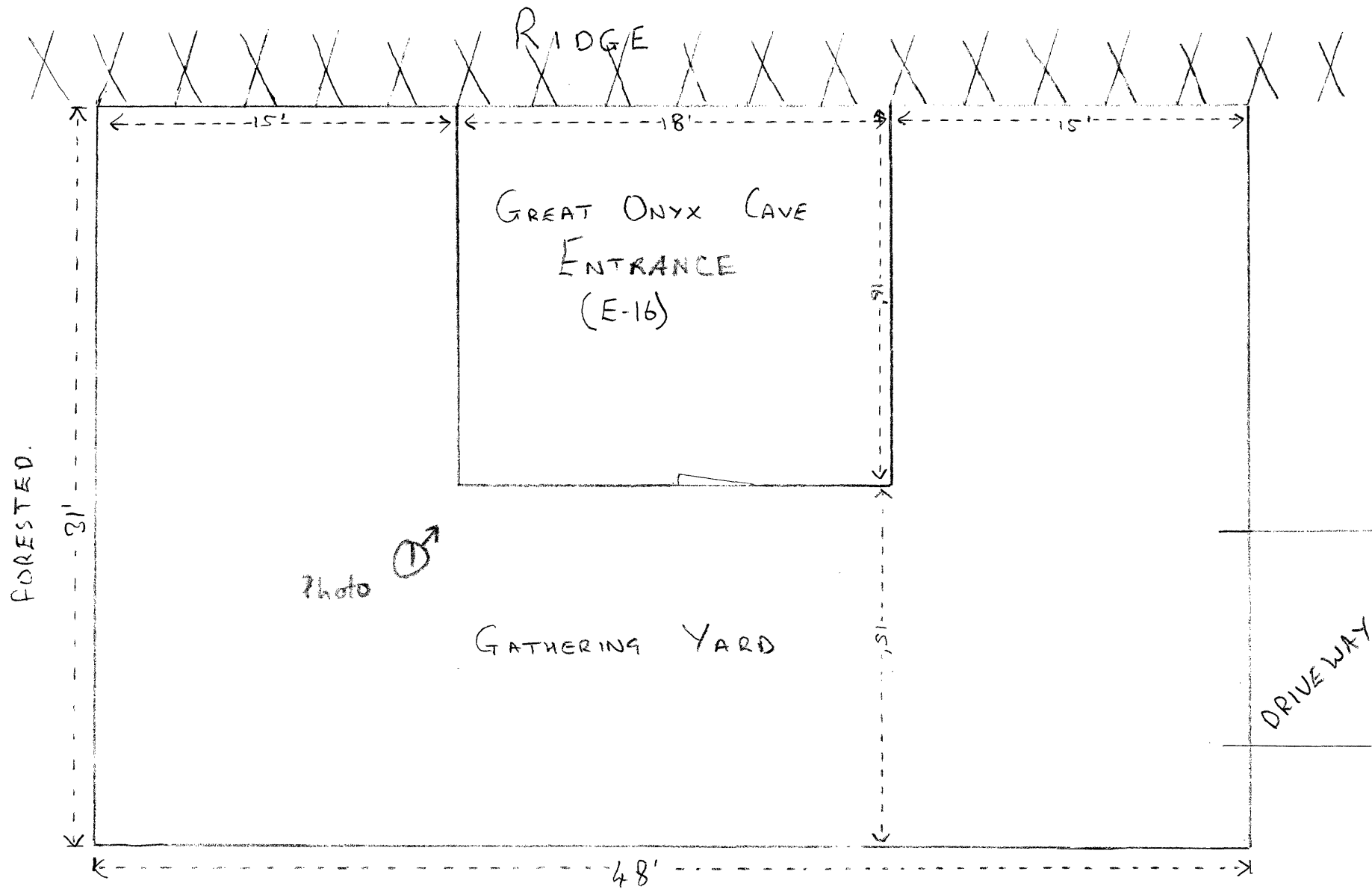
A 16 4119360 581800

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary forms a rectangle measuring approximately 31' by 48'. The eastern boundary is the ridge makes up the rear wall of the structure. The northern, western, and southern boundaries are each 15' from the northern, western, and southern walls of the structure and enclose the space which served as a visitor gathering yard.

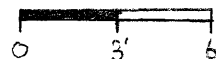
Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the cave opening, entrance structure, stairway, retaining walls, and the land immediately surrounding the entrance structure which served as a visitor gathering yard.



FORESTED.

1 INCH = 6 FEET



1 photo

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 91000490 Date Listed: 5/8/91

Great Onyx Cave Entrance Edmonson KY
Property Name: County: State:

Mammoth Cave National Park MPS
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick W. Andrews
Signature of the Keeper

5/8/91
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

It is not clear whether this property was being nominated under Criterion B - the blank in the form for Significant Person has been filled-in, but Criterion B is not checked. Bob Ward, NPS Historian at the park, says that the property is not being nominated under Criterion B. The form is now officially amended to include this clarification.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)