

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

OCT 16 1980

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Lookout Mountain Caverns and Cavern Castle

and/or common Ruby Falls

2. Location

street & number Scenic Highway N/A not for publication

city, town Chattanooga N/A vicinity of

state Tennessee code 047 county Hamilton code 065

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" 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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Jack Steiner c/o Ruby Falls

street & number Scenic Highway

city, town Chattanooga N/A vicinity of state Tennessee

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Hamilton County Courthouse

street & number 600 Georgia Avenue

city, town Chattanooga state Tennessee

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date N/A N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" 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

Situated on and in Lookout Mountain in Hamilton County, Tennessee, the Lookout Mountain Caverns and Cavern Castle complex is comprised of two limestone caverns connected by an elevator, Ruby Falls, the Cavern Castle building and two stone arches. The complex first opened for tours in 1929 and has continued to be a popular site to visit. Today, only the upper caverns, which contain the falls, are open for tours. The three story Cavern Castle was constructed using limestone excavated when the elevator shaft was drilled and blasted in 1928-1929. The elevator is housed in a fifty-five feet tall tower at the east corner of the Cavern Castle. Several parts of the upper cavern have been widened and in 1975 the third story roof top garden area of the Cavern Castle was enclosed but few other alterations have occurred. The complex retains much of its architectural integrity.

In 1928 the Lookout Mountain Cave Company, recently established to develop the lower cavern in Lookout Mountain for tours, hired Solomon and Cowin of Birmingham, Alabama to begin blasting and drilling a 420 feet deep, eleven feet square shaft that would house an elevator to take tourists into the lower cavern. At the 260 feet level a second cavern was discovered and the company decided to open both caverns for tours. The excavation took ninety-two days and cost approximately \$20,000. A Westinghouse elevator was installed in 1929. It ran on electricity but had an auxiliary gas motor. (This may have been the first elevator placed in a commercial cave.) In 1981 some parts of the elevator were replaced but the 1929 cab is still in use. The elevator shaft itself is now covered with permastone.

The Lookout Mountain Caverns are two of fifteen caves known to be in Hamilton County. The State of Tennessee has approximately 700 caves of which 77% are in Middle Tennessee and 23% are found in East Tennessee, where the Lookout Mountain Caverns are located. The limestone upper cavern is 850 feet above sea level and extends west from the elevator shaft for a short distance and then southwesterly for approximately 2,000 feet until it reaches the 145 feet tall Ruby Falls, the source of which is unknown. (The entire cavern has not been explored and extends past the falls but only the section up to and including the falls is being nominated). The cavern also extends southwest from the elevator shaft for 300 feet, then swings northeast for approximately 400 feet to the railroad tunnel. This section was widened in 1974 and 1984 for use as an emergency exit. In 1934 a stonework rim was placed around the thirty feet wide waterfall pool. A walkway was built around the pool in 1954.

The upper cavern averages fifteen to twenty feet in height and three to five feet in width. The cavern is relatively dry and contains stalactites, stalagmites, columns, flowstone and dripstone formations. It has been open for tours since 1929. In 1956 colored, indirect and fluorescent lights replaced the original white lightbulbs. The cavern floor is paved and over the years various parts of the cavern have been widened to accommodate the increase in tourists. The cave lighting system was improved in 1970 and lighted maps and recorded messages were installed the same year.

The limestone lower cavern, closed to tourists since 1935, is 690 feet above sea level. From the base of the elevator shaft the lower cavern extends west-southwest approximately one and two-tenths miles and averages fifteen feet wide and ten feet high near the elevator, although it narrows to a crawl space in some spots. A stream level occurs fifty to seventy-five feet below this and can be reached from the main level. The lower cavern contains stone formations similar to those in the upper cavern. It is five feet high and eight feet wide in most areas, although there are several areas that are fifty feet high and sixty

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
				Tourism/recreation

Specific dates 1929-1935

Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Located in Chattanooga, Tennessee, near the community of Lookout Mountain, the Lookout Mountain Caverns and Cavern Castle are being nominated under National Register criterion A for their historic significance in the area of tourism and recreation. Now an important statewide industry, tourism in Hamilton County began to develop in the late 1800s and expanded after World War I when better transportation made the area more accessible. First opened in 1929, Lookout Mountain Caverns and Cavern Castle, popularly known as Ruby Falls, are an excellent example of an early twentieth century commercial/tourism complex. The caverns, Cavern Castle, elevator, and two arches have retained their integrity and contribute to the significance of the nominated property.

With the advent of the railroad in Chattanooga in 1850, a recreation and tourism industry began to develop as visitors from the lower south came north to avoid the hot summers and resulting epidemics. On Lookout Mountain, a toll road and the Lookout Mountain Hotel were built in 1860. The Lookout Mountain Post Office opened in 1860 and the municipality was incorporated in 1890. Five years later the Lookout Mountain Incline Railway (NR 1973) began bringing tourists and area residents from the base of the mountain to the top. On nearby Signal Mountain, the Signal Mountain Inn opened in 1913.

The area continued to develop but it was not until the end of World War I that substantial growth occurred. The automobile was rapidly becoming the principal means of transportation, making more areas accessible to more people. An increase in leisure time and greater prosperity resulted in the development of recreational and residential facilities on the mountains near Chattanooga. The booming economy of the 1920s stimulated growth and resulted in the organization of the Lookout Mountain Improvement League, a group formed to work for better roads, more schools and improved fire protection. The Fairyland Inn and Golf Club opened in 1925; soon Rock City Gardens (in Georgia) opened for tours; and in 1929 the Lookout Mountain Caverns opened.

The lower caverns had been used since prehistoric times and were probably mined for niter in 1812. (Although the prehistoric use of the cavern from the Archaic and Mississippian periods has been established, to date, no systematic archaeological investigations have been conducted). The first known written account about a visit to the lower caverns is that of Reverend David S. Butrick, a missionary at Brainerd Mission in Hamilton County, who saw the caverns in 1823. In 1833 Andrew Jackson visited the cavern and left his signature on the walls. Confederate soldiers mined the caverns for niter in 1862. One of sixteen caverns in Tennessee mined for niter during the Civil War, soldiers explored the caverns and left their signatures on the walls, as did numerous spelunkers in the following years.

In 1898 one J.B. Pound sold the underground rights for a tunnel in Lookout Mountain to the Southern Railway. Seven years later in 1905, the railroad announced plans to spend four million dollars for a new terminal, switching yards and tracks in order to expand service

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property Approximately 10 acres

Quadrangle name Chattanooga, Tennessee

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	6	6	5	1	5	8	0	3	8	7	6	4	4	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

1	6	6	5	1	4	9	0	3	8	7	6	2	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

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D

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E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title E. Raymond Evans and Vicky Karhu, Research Consultants

organization Association for Preservation of Cultural and Natural Resources

date June 1985

street & number 312 Crissman Street

telephone 615-875-9687

city or town Chattanooga

state Tennessee 37415

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature Herbert L. Hays

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

date 10/4/85

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for Allores Byers
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the National Register

date 11-26-85

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Lookout Mountain Caverns

Continuation sheet and Cavern Castle

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to Birmingham, Alabama and Memphis, Tennessee. Because the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad already had tracks located around the mountain (the preferred route), Southern had to blast a tunnel through the eastern side of the mountain. The tunnel intersected the only natural opening to the lower caverns, thus effectively limiting easy access.

Leo B. Lambert of Indiana moved to Chattanooga in 1916. An avid spelunker, he soon found the entry to the lower caverns in Lookout Mountain. In the ensuing years Lambert moved back to Indiana but frequently returned to Chattanooga to visit relatives. He began exploring the possibilities of opening the caverns for tours and in 1928 formed the Lookout Mountain Cave Company to begin developing the caverns. Of the \$250,000 raised to begin the venture, \$200,000 came from investors in Gary, Indiana while \$50,000 came from Chattanooga sources. The first company officers were from Indiana. Lambert was named secretary and he immediately moved to Chattanooga to supervise the development of the project.

Thirty acres on Lookout Mountain were purchased. It was decided that, because of highway and railroad rights-of-way, a new entry into the caverns would be drilled and blasted from the top of the mountain and an elevator used to transport sightseers down 420 feet to the caverns. The blasting began in November, 1928 and in December, 1928 the eleven feet square elevator shaft had gone 260 feet down when it ran into another opening. This eighteen inch opening led to another cavern which contained a 145 feet tall waterfall (later named Ruby Falls). The Lookout Mountain Cave Company decided to open both caverns for tours and raised an additional \$67,000 to complete the development.

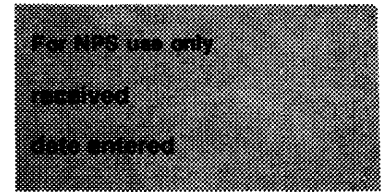
Before the lower cavern was reached 51,000 cubic feet of limestone had been removed in blasting the elevator shaft. A steel framework, Westinghouse elevator, wooden bridges and steps were installed. Telephones and electric lights were placed in the lower caverns; the railroad tunnel entry became the emergency exit. The upper caverns were narrow and required widening before people could walk through them, so only the lower caverns were opened to the public at first. A building known as the Cavern Castle was constructed from the excavated limestone. It housed the elevator, a gift shop, a restaurant and offices. There was parking space for 200 cars on the property.

On December 30, 1929, the lower caverns were opened with free tours, speeches and dancing in the Cavern Castle. Ten guides took groups of ten people on tour showing them the various rock formations. The Chattanooga News reported that "Confidence in Chattanooga's future as a scenic wonderland, as well as in its progress, has been expressed...by a heavy financial interest in Lookout Mountain Cave." The Lookout Mountain Cave Company began its own advertising campaign and the Chattanooga Sight-Seeing Company brought tourists to the caverns.

In June, 1930 the upper caverns containing the falls were opened to the public. The grand opening went on for a week and included music and dancing. Despite extensive local and regional advertising, the caverns were not a financial success. Opened in the midst of the depression, the company lost money and defaulted on its loans. The bankrupt firm was placed in receivership and sold to Claude Brown (of Chattanooga) in August 1932. The selling

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price was only \$25,000. Lambert opened another cavern for tours but eventually sold it to Brown and returned to Lookout Mountain Caverns to work.

Dances in the Castle Cavern were held regularly to attract more tourists in the 1930s. Until 1935 tours of both caverns were given when it was decided to close the lower caverns because of the accumulation of soot from the railroad. Claude Brown died in 1944 and his son took over management of the caverns, selling off Lambert's old cave. The caverns were sold again in 1947 and 1949. In 1949 the proprietors of Lookout Advertising Company became partial owners of the caverns. With expanded advertising by their company, business increased. Bumper stickers and large roadside signs, many still extant, were used extensively in Tennessee and nearby states to promote Lookout Mountain Caverns and Cavern Castle. Because of the extensive advertising and its location near a major city and along a main highway, Lookout Mountain Caverns and Cavern Castle are today one of the best known tourist attractions in the state.

One of 145 commercial caves in the United States, of which approximately eight are in Tennessee, throughout the years the caverns and Cavern Castle have been remodeled (new lights, wider passages) to accomodate the increase in tourists. Today, approximately a half million visitors tour the caverns each year. During the peak summer season forty-five guides are at work taking up to 3,000 people per day through the caverns. (In contrast only 10 guides are employed in the winter). Additional help are hired to work in the gift shop and parking lot. Approximately 40% of the people touring the falls also visit the City of Chattanooga. There are currently plans to reopen the lower caverns for tours. Along with other natural attractions and historic sites in Hamilton County, the Lookout Mountain Caverns and Cavern Castle have made an important contribution to the development of tourism (now a \$188 million industry) in the early twentieth century in Hamilton County.

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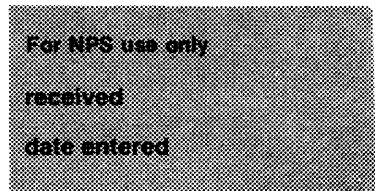
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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Continuation sheet

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA - Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is irregular in shape and approximately ten acres in size. The boundary encompassing the Cavern Castle and stone arches is as follows: beginning at a point on the west side of Scenic Highway approximately 400 feet south of the intersection of Scenic Highway and Gold Trail, the boundary moves southwesterly approximately 300 feet (and past a stone arch), thence northwesterly approximately 550 feet (past the Cavern Castle and a stone arch), thence northeasterly approximately 300 feet to the west side of Gold Trail, thence southeasterly approximately 200 feet to the point of the beginning. (see tax map) The boundary of the upper cavern is as follows: beginning at the elevator shaft the boundary extends westerly a short distance, thence approximately 2000 feet southwesterly until it reaches the back of the falls; the boundary also extends southwesterly from the elevator shaft approximately 300 feet, thence northeasterly approximately 400 feet to the railroad tunnel intersection.

The boundary of the lower cavern is as follows: beginning at the elevator shaft the boundary extends southwesterly approximately 1.2 miles; the boundary also extends northerly from the elevator shaft to the mouth of the cave (now intersected by the railroad tunnel). The lower cavern includes a stream level 50-75 feet below it. When both levels are combined, the lower cavern is approximately 2.5 miles.

This boundary includes enough land to protect the historic setting and architectural integrity of the Lookout Mountain Caverns and Cavern Castle.

1400'
155

SEE 1"=400'
MAP 155

TENNESSEE RIVER

SEE 1"=400'
MAP 155

stone arch
Cavern Castle (Elevator)

stone arch

Lookout Mountain Caverns and Cavern Castle
Scenic Highway
Chattanooga, Hamilton County, Tennessee

TAX MAP 1"=400'



- 6. PARCEL NUMBER
- 1. PARCEL NUMBER
- 2. INTERIOR TRACT
- 3. FENCE
- 4. CHURCH
- 5. SCHOOL
- 6. WOODED AREA
- 7. ROAD
- 8. SECTION CORNERS

- 9. PARCEL NUMBER
- 10. APPROACHMENT
- 11. FENCE
- 12. CHURCH
- 13. SCHOOL
- 14. WOODED AREA
- 15. ROAD

- 16. GREEN
- 17. STATE LINE
- 18. CORPS LIMITS
- 19. TRANSMISSION LINE
- 20. ROAD
- 21. RAILROAD
- 22. BRIDGE

54-2	155-2	155-B
54-3	155-3	155-G
54-4	155-4	155-J