

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received APR 3 1985

date entered MAY 2 1985

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

1. Name

historic Israel Putnam Wolf Den

and/or common Putnam Wolf Den

2. Location

street & number off Wolf Den Drive

N/A not for publication

city, town Pomfret

N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut

code 09

county Windham

code 015

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name State of Connecticut, c/o Commissioner Stanley J. Pac,
Department of Environmental Protection

street & number State Office Building

city, town Hartford

N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pomfret Town Clerk

street & number Route 44

city, town Pomfret Center

state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1985 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

city, town 59 South Prospect Street

Hartford

state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Israel Putnam Wolf Den is a small cave formed from a natural fissure in an outcropping of grey gneiss ledge overlooking a branch of Wolf Den Brook in Pomfret, Connecticut. Part of the extensive state-owned Mashamoquet Brook Park, the wolf den is located about 1000' off Wolf Den Drive and is reached by a well-maintained hiking trail leading through deciduous forest (Photograph 1). The opening to the cave is about 3' high and 2' wide and is shaped as a parallelogram inclined to the left. The passageway inside (Photograph 2) runs about 20' straight back into the ledge and is gradually reduced in size by leaves, debris, and perhaps some fill added for safety reasons.

Attached to the rock at the right of the entrance is a wooden plaque (Photograph 3) placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Titled "Putnam and the Wolf," it recounts a colorful version of the event which occurred there in 1742, the killing of a wolf by Israel Putnam, a deed which earned the future Revolutionary War-era hero the respect of his fellow farmers and townspeople.

The cave retains the appearance it had in the late 18th century, when the Putnam legend was codified. The early accounts give detailed descriptions of the cave which closely match the present appearance, and Barber's Connecticut Historical Collections includes an engraving (1838) which shows the entrance to the cave rock for rock as it is today (Photograph 4). Reportedly, the wolf den's passageway eventually opened onto a small chamber, but because of the accumulation of fill, such a chamber is no longer evident.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
..... prehistoric	..... archeology-prehistoric	..... community planning	..... landscape architecture	..... religion
..... 1400-1499	..... archeology-historic	..... conservation	..... law	..... science
..... 1500-1599	..... agriculture	..... economics	..... literature	..... sculpture
..... 1600-1699	..... architecture	..... education	..... military	..... social/
X 1700-1799	..... art	..... engineering	..... music	..... humanitarian
..... 1800-1899	..... commerce	X exploration/settlement	..... philosophy	..... theater
..... 1900-	..... communications	..... industry	..... politics/government	..... transportation
		..... invention		..... X other (specify) folklore

Specific dates 1742 - wolf killed **Builder/Architect** N/A

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Israel Putnam Wolf Den is significant because of its association with the early career of Israel Putnam, a leading Connecticut figure during the Revolutionary War period and for many generations a major American folk hero (Criterion B). This cave is the site of an exploit which first established Putnam as a leader within his community: the killing of a wolf which had attacked the livestock of Pomfret's farmers and, until Putnam, had eluded its pursuers. According to the most often repeated version, that first published in David Humphrey's 1788 biography, a female wolf had for several years devastated the flocks and herds of Pomfret. One night the wolf killed seventy sheep on the farm of Israel Putnam, who had recently moved to the sparsely settled area from Danvers, Massachusetts. Putnam and some others set out to track down the wolf, in one trek following her to the Connecticut River and back, whereupon she took refuge in this cave. Unable to get either his dog or his black slave to flush out the beast, Putnam himself entered the cave with torch in hand, discovered the wolf, shot her, and was pulled out with the body in tow by a rope tied to his ankles. Putnam's courage won for him the admiration of the townspeople and established his reputation for bravery in the face of unknown odds.

The central features of the story -- that Putnam killed a wolf in this cave and thereby increased his standing among his neighbors -- are probably factual. A recent scholarly biography of Putnam concluded "of all the tall tales told of Israel Putnam, this is one which is probably authentic." Even Putnam's greatest detractor, John Fellows, after ridiculing the details of the story (uncharitably attributing the seventy sheep to a mishearing of seven or seventeen caused by Putnam's speech impediment) came to the conclusion after interviewing local people in 1843 that the story had its basis in fact. Independent accounts include unpublished family correspondence, in which a relative recalled being shown the cave by Putnam himself, and Samuel Peters' history, published in London several years before Humphreys' account. Peters described the cave quite accurately but had Putnam killing a bear with a club.

Israel Putnam (1718-1790) was a farmer, large landholder, and tavernkeeper in the section of Pomfret, Connecticut, which later became Brooklyn. He served several years as an officer in the French and Indian Wars, and was prominent statewide in the period leading up to the Revolution as a leader of the Sons of Liberty. Major commands during the Revolution included the defense of Bunker and Breed's Hills in Boston and several periods leading colonial troops in the New York City-Connecticut region. Although judgements of his competence as a military commander are mixed, his life itself had great popular appeal. For Humphreys and other Federalists, Putnam was a real-life Cincinnatus, a rough and ready farmer willing to leave his fields for the defense of his community (Humphreys' Essay was written while he was suppressing Shays' Rebellion and was dedicated to the Connecticut Society of the Cincinnati).

(continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Barber, John Henry. Connecticut Historical Collections. New Haven, 1838.

Cutter, William. The Life of Israel Putnam. New York, 1847.

(continued)

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Danielson

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

19	252	150
18		

 Zone Easting Northing

B

 Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification The nominated property includes the cave and all the exposed rock which surrounds the entrance. The nominated portion is a circle centered on the opening with a radius of 100 feet.

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

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bruce Clouette and Matthew Roth, edited by: John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Historic Resource Consultants date November 1, 1984

street & number The Colt Armory 55 Van Dyke Avenue telephone (203) 547-0268

city or town Hartford state Connecticut

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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date 3/13/85

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the National Register

date 5/2/85

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Significance (continued):

In the 19th century, the legend of Putnam expanded to include many tall tales (wrestling with a bull, sitting on a keg of gunpowder) and became part of a heroic, frontiersman genre. Putnam's move to Pomfret was seen as migration to the back woods, and his exploit with the wolf an example of the American subjugation of the wilderness. Washington Irving, N.H. Bannister, and Samuel Goodrich (Peter Parley) all wrote of his life, and Putnam became a staple of boys' literature.² Combining physical strength, courage, the pioneer spirit, conservative values, and military service, Putnam was a hero to generations of Americans. The plaque placed adjacent to the cave shows that even in the 20th century, the Putnam legend continues to grow through the addition of ever more implausible details. Despite such exaggeration, the Wolf Den remains a worthwhile historic site, one with reasonable claim to veracity, one which illustrates an important early phase in the career of Israel Putnam, and one which explains something of the real character of Putnam which lay beneath the legends.

¹John Niven, Connecticut Hero: Israel Putnam (Hartford, 1977), 17.

²As examples of boys' literature, see Paul Pryor, The Life of General Putnam (Uncle Sam's Big Picture Series, New York: McLoughlin Brothers, 1873) and Richard Henry Stoddard, The Story of Putnam the Brave (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1870).

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Israel Putnam Wolf Den

Continuation sheet Pomfret, CT

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Bibliography (continued):

Fellows, John. The Veil Removed, or Reflections on David Humphreys' Essay on the Life of Israel Putnam. New York, 1843.

Humphreys, David. An Essay on the Life of Life of the Honorable Major General Israel Putnam. Hartford, 1788.

Niven, John. Connecticut Hero: Israel Putnam. Hartford: American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Connecticut, 1977.

Peters, Samuel. A General History of Connecticut. London: priv. pr., 1781.

Putnam, Alfred P. A Sketch of General Israel Putnam. Salem, Mass., 1893.

Whitney, Josiah. A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Honorable Major General Israel Putnam. Windham: John Byrne, 1790.