

Pulaski County Caves!

Two sergeants on duty at the Fort Leonard Wood Prisoner of War Camp in 1944 put their G.I. haircuts together and came up with an idea to provide Sunday fun and sugar-coated education for hundreds of soldiers stationed at the base during World War II without costing anyone a cent.

Staff Sergeant Jonas Christianson and Staff Sergeant William R. Zieg put together a project to give tours of Maxey Cave (now known as Great Spirit Cave) 12 miles west of the post. The tours left the PW Camp each Sunday at 12:30 and returned in time for evening chow. Tours sponsored by the Prisoner of War Camp Rec Council under the direction of Lt. P.L. Summerhays also toured other area caves.

The two sergeants became interested in caves near the post during the summer of 1943 and spent a dozen

Sundays wandering through underground passages, digging into prehistoric ashpits and interviewing Ozark natives on whose land the caves were found. The natives had no objection to visitors touring their subterranean wonderlands, and often accompanied the touring soldiers to point out interesting features of the caves and relate the theories scientists evolved concerning the caves. According to an article in the Fort Wood News, the owners of Maxey Cave were convinced at the time that their cave was the site of a rich vein of gold and were willing to sell (the cave.) Zieg and Christianson explored part of the cave but there was no gold found. Maxey Cave has a main room 200 feet wide and 75 feet high which branches off after 300 yards. Nobody (at the time) had explored the entire cave, but there must

be other entrances because a gust of cold air continually sweeps down some of the branches leading from the main room.

Years before, an amateur speleologist (cave expert) got lost in Maxey Cave and spent 31 hours trying to get out. The soldier speleologists didn't take any chances on that. They strung a cord from the entrance, unreeling it as they go, and they carry both gasoline lanterns and flashlights. In some caves they encountered pockets of carbon dioxide, which snuff out the gasoline lanterns and provide adequate warning against foul air.

Spring Creek Cave, east of the post, was cited by Zieg as a "typical" cave. It's on the side of a cliff, protected from weather and marauding animals and an ideal refuge for the unknown men who lived in it from 800 to 1,500

years ago. Nearby is a source of fresh water, and on a small adjacent plateau Zieg found evidence of a prehistoric village site. He dug up hundreds of "artifacts" including arrowheads, beads, bone needles and fishhooks, plus human bones and teeth. The artifacts were similar to those found in Central American excavations, indicating this area was once inhabited by roving tribes from far south of the border.

Inside the cave were numerous ashbeds, relics of long cold fires. The cave floor around these ashbeds was rich with artifacts, as were the deposits of talus (loose rock, bat dung and other debris) which in some places were eight feet deep. The only animal life found in the caves were bats and tiny, almost transparent lizards.



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