

# SITE DESCRIPTION

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## 100 Words

Majestic Caverns is a family-owned historic cave site in Childersburg, Alabama, federally documented in 1796 by Benjamin Hawkins during the Washington administration. Listed on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage, the cavern contains documented Indigenous archaeological history, visible Civil War saltpeter mining features, and more than a century of continuous preservation by the Mathis family. Open to the public since 1965, the site serves as an educational and heritage destination for approximately 40,000 to 70,000 visitors each year.

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## 250 Words

Majestic Caverns is a historic limestone cave located in Childersburg, Alabama, and one of the earliest federally documented natural landmarks in the United States. The site was officially recorded in 1796 by Benjamin Hawkins, U.S. Superintendent of Indian Affairs during the Washington administration.

Archaeological research identifies the cavern as a Woodland-period Indigenous site with documented Copena burial traditions. During the Civil War, the cave was mined for saltpeter used in gunpowder production, and original trenches and wells remain visible inside the cavern today.

In 1912, Ida Elizabeth Brandon Mathis purchased the property and began a tradition of family stewardship that continues more than a century later. Her son opened the cave to the public in 1965 as an educational show cave.

Now listed on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage, Majestic Caverns welcomes approximately 80,000 to 100,000 visitors annually through guided tours, field trips, and historical interpretation programs.

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## 500 Words

Majestic Caverns is a family-owned historic cave site located in Childersburg, Alabama, recognized for its archaeological, geological, and cultural significance. The limestone cavern is among the earliest federally documented natural landmarks in the United States, having been

officially recorded in 1796 by Benjamin Hawkins, U.S. Superintendent of Indian Affairs during the administration of President George Washington.

Long before this federal documentation, the cavern served as a place of importance to Indigenous communities in the Southeast. Archaeological studies identify the site as a Woodland-period cultural location and document Copena burial traditions. These findings place human activity in the cave centuries before European settlement.

During the Civil War, Majestic Caverns played a role in the wartime industry. The cave was mined for saltpeter, a key ingredient in gunpowder production. Original trenches, wells, and mining features remain visible today, providing rare physical evidence of 19th-century extraction methods.

In 1912, Ida Elizabeth Brandon Mathis purchased the property. Although initial onyx mining efforts were unsuccessful, her family chose to preserve the cavern. In 1965, her son Allen W. Mathis opened the site to the public as a guided show cave, beginning a legacy of education and heritage tourism that continues today.

Listed on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage in 1976, Majestic Caverns now serves approximately 80,000 to 100,000 visitors annually through guided tours, field trips, and interpretive programming. The cave remains a “living” geological environment, with formations that continue to grow.

Few historic sites in the United States combine Indigenous heritage, early federal records, Civil War industry, and continuous family stewardship in one place. Majestic Caverns offers visitors and researchers a tangible connection to multiple layers of American history within a single preserved landscape.