



MAJESTIC CAVERNS

America's Most Historic Cave
Childersburg, Alabama

PRESS KIT
2026

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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

A Federally Documented American Landmark Still Open to the Public

Majestic Caverns is a federally documented historic cave located in Childersburg, Alabama. With verified human history spanning thousands of years, the site represents one of the most continuously known natural landmarks in the southeastern United States.

Archaeological evidence confirms Indigenous Woodland-period use of the cave system, including documented Copena burial traditions recognized by the State of Alabama under Criterion D for Archaeology.

In December 1796, during the presidency of George Washington, Benjamin Hawkins, General Superintendent for Indian Affairs, visited and documented the cave in official correspondence.

This record places Majestic Caverns among the earliest federally documented caves in the United States, predating Alabama statehood.

During the American Civil War, the caverns were mined for saltpeter, a key ingredient in gunpowder production. Physical evidence of mining trenches remains visible today.

In 1912, the property was purchased by agricultural reformer Ida Elizabeth Brandon Mathis. Her stewardship marked a transition from extraction to preservation. The cave has remained in her family for five generations and has operated as a public show cave since 1965.

Majestic Caverns remains privately owned and open to the public.

QUICK FACTS

Location

5181 DeSoto Caverns Parkway
Childersburg, Alabama 35044

Former Name

DeSoto Caverns (renamed Majestic Caverns in June 2022)

Federal Documentation

1796 — Benjamin Hawkins, under President George Washington

Historic Designation

Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage (1976)

Archaeological Significance

Woodland-period Copena burial evidence

Civil War Role

Saltpeter mining for Confederate gunpowder production

Ownership

Family-owned since 1912

QUICK FACTS (Continued)

Public Tours

Open to the public since 1965

Cave Temperature

Constant 60 degrees year-round

Tour Length

Approximately one hour

Approximately 1/3 mile walking distance

Accessibility

Wide, gently sloped tunnel entrance

Family-friendly and beginner-accessible

NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE & AMERICA 250

As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary, Majestic Caverns represents a rare natural site that intersects Indigenous history, founding-era federal documentation, Civil War industry, and modern preservation.

The 1796 federal record under the Washington administration establishes the cave as part of America's earliest documented landscape history. Few natural landmarks can point to written correspondence from the founding era.

Majestic Caverns offers a perspective on the American story that extends beyond battlefields and cities — revealing how the land itself has witnessed and shaped the nation's development.

"America's story is not only written in cities and battlefields, but in the land beneath them."

INDIGENOUS HERITAGE & ARCHAEOLOGY

Long before European documentation, the limestone chambers beneath present-day Childersburg served Indigenous communities.

Archaeological findings confirm Woodland-period Copena burial traditions within the cave. In 1965, University of Alabama archaeologists documented skeletal remains of five individuals.

Following consultation, the remains were respectfully reburied within the cave.

The site is formally recognized on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage under Criterion D for Archaeology, acknowledging its prehistoric significance.

The first chamber, known today as the Healing All Cathedral, derives its name from the Native word “Kymulga,” meaning “healing all.”

FOUNDING-ERA DOCUMENTATION (1796)

In December 1796, Benjamin Hawkins, General Superintendent for Indian Affairs, visited the cave while traveling through Creek territory.

In official correspondence later published in Letters of Benjamin Hawkins (1796–1806), he described the cave's physical structure and noted the presence of saltpeter crystals.

This documentation places Majestic Caverns among the earliest federally recorded caves in the United States and establishes the site within the historical record of the Washington administration.

CIVIL WAR INDUSTRY

During the American Civil War, caves throughout the South were mined for saltpeter (calcium nitrate), a critical component in gunpowder production.

Majestic Caverns became part of this wartime industrial network. Original trenches, leaching trough evidence, and mining features remain visible inside the cave.

These physical remnants provide tangible evidence of the site's role in Civil War logistics.



Civil War–era saltpeter mining reconstruction inside Majestic Caverns, Childersburg, Alabama.

IDA ELIZABETH BRANDON MATHIS

Ida Elizabeth Brandon Mathis (1857–1925) was a nationally recognized agricultural reformer credited with helping stabilize Alabama’s economy during the cotton collapse of 1914.

Referred to as the “Economic Moses of the South,” she advocated for crop diversification and agricultural reform and was later inducted into the Alabama Women’s Hall of Fame.

In 1912, she purchased the cave with the intent to mine decorative onyx. When mining proved unprofitable, she retained ownership, preserving the property during a period when many historic sites were permanently altered or destroyed.

Her descendants continue to operate Majestic Caverns today, representing five generations of continuous family stewardship.

“With her credit system she had done more toward winning the War than any other person in the United States.”

— John Skelton Williams, U.S. Comptroller of the Currency (1917)



GEOLOGY & NATURAL FEATURES

Majestic Caverns is a limestone karst cave formed over millions of years through the gradual dissolution of carbonate rock.

The cave features:

- A cathedral chamber taller than a 10-story building
 - Extensive flowstone formations
 - Stalactites and stalagmites
- One of the largest accumulations of gemstone-quality onyx formations in the United States
 - The longest hanging drapery formation in America
 - An underground waterfall visible during guided tours

The cave remains a “live cave,” meaning mineral formations continue to grow.

MODERN PUBLIC EXPERIENCE

Majestic Caverns operates as a year-round historic destination serving families, school groups, scouting organizations, church groups, and educational organizations.

On-site offerings include:

- Guided cave tours featuring seasonal laser light programs
 - Gemstone panning
 - 3/4 acre outdoor maze
- Archery and climbing experiences
 - Park train
- Seasonal water attractions (March–November)
 - RV and primitive campground
 - Café and gift shop

The cave's constant 60-degree temperature allows visitation and filming year-round.

MEDIA ACCESS & FILMING

Majestic Caverns offers unique access for media production.

The cave features a wide, gently sloped tunnel entrance that accommodates wheeled equipment and rolling camera cases when coordinated in advance.

Filming is possible year-round due to the cave's climate stability.

The site is suitable for:

- Documentary production
 - Historical features
- Educational programming
- Broadcast and digital media

All media visits must be arranged in advance.

STORY ANGLES FOR EDITORS

- The Cave George Washington Placed on Record
 - America 250 Beneath the Surface
 - From Saltpeter Mining to Preservation
 - A Five-Generation Family Stewardship Story
- Indigenous Heritage Recognized by the State of Alabama
 - A Founding-Era Landmark Still Open to the Public
 - The Agricultural Reformer Who Preserved a Cave

PHOTO & MEDIA ASSETS AVAILABLE

Available on Media Resources webpage and also upon request:

- High-resolution interior cave photography
 - Civil War mining trench images
 - Archival imagery
 - Ida Mathis historical materials
 - Drone exterior photography
 - B-roll footage
- Historical timeline documentation
- Interview access with ownership

Images may be used for editorial purposes with attribution to Majestic Caverns.

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

- Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage
- Alabama Tourism Department featured listing
 - Tripadvisor Travelers' Choice Award (2024)
- Recognized in regional and national travel publications

About Majestic Caverns

Majestic Caverns, formerly known as DeSoto Caverns until 2022, is a federally documented historic cave located in Childersburg, Alabama. First recorded in 1796 during the presidency of George Washington, the site preserves Indigenous archaeological significance, Civil War industrial history, and over a century of continuous family stewardship. Open to the public since 1965, Majestic Caverns remains privately owned and operated by descendants of Ida Elizabeth Brandon Mathis.

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