



## Exploration of Mammoth Cave

June 11-16, 2023

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**Course Description:** This course is an intensive study of the exploration of Mammoth Cave, with a special emphasis given to the explorers, their discoveries, their motivations, and the incorporation of caves and karst features into the world's longest cave system. Illustrated lectures, maps, photographs, and first-hand accounts of discovery will be used to promote understanding of the caves prior to daily field trips. Many underground trips will follow tourist trails closed long ago to the public, while other trips will require more strenuous walking and crawling in undeveloped passages on trips lasting 6-8 hours. Participants must be in good physical condition.

This course is intended to introduce students to the history of cave exploration at Mammoth Cave. The course topics will focus on the exploration of the world's longest cave during different time periods and will be covered in chronological order (for the most part). Content will be covered in both a classroom setting and in the field. Classes will begin and conclude daily at the Cave Research Foundation's Hamilton Valley Research Station.

**Required Text and Equipment:** There are no required textbooks for the course but participants will receive software and handouts/publications that relate to class topics.

**Suggested Readings:**

- The Longest Cave* – Roger W. Brucker and Richard A. Watson  
*The Caves Beyond: The Story of The Floyd Collins' Crystal Cave Exploration* – Joe Lawrence, Jr.  
and Roger W. Brucker  
*Beyond Mammoth Cave: A Tale of Obsession in the World's Longest Cave* – James D. Borden  
and Roger W. Brucker  
*The Kentucky Cave Wars: The Century That Shaped Mammoth Cave National Park* – David R.  
Kem  
*The Mammoth Cave of Kentucky* – Horace Carter Hovey and Richard Ellsworth Call  
*Rambles in the Mammoth Cave* – Alexander Clark Bullitt

**IMPORTANT Need to Know:** Much of this course will take place in the field, meaning extended cave trips to remote sections of Mammoth Cave. Participants should be prepared for physically strenuous trips. **Expect around 5-8 miles of hiking in the cave each day!** Participants are expected to provide their own caving equipment: helmet, 3 sources of light (to include a headlamp), sturdy boots (lace up, aggressive tread), kneepads, gloves, and cave pack. It is strongly suggested that participants be in good physical condition. Water, food, and first aid supplies are strongly suggested for extended cave trips. Several trips will require that we eat lunch in the cave. Participants should be prepared for lunch in the field and be prepared to remove any and all trash. We will leave no trace! Finally, if nature should call while underground, participants should be prepared with a means of removing any and all waste from the cave as well.

**Attendance:** Students are expected to participate in all classes and field trips, except under special conditions (e.g., health). Field trips involve easy to moderately challenging caving. In the rare circumstance that students are unable to fulfill the field requirements they will be invited to drop the course. In general the rigor of the trips are adjusted to the abilities of the class. **All participants will receive a Certificate of Participation on the last day of the class for their full participation in the class. This does not constitute the final grade for those taking the course for academic credit.**

**Grading:** Courses can be taken as non-credit workshops, Undergraduate and Graduate credit, or for Continuing Education Units. Students who take the course for credit will develop an independent research project in consultation with the instructors during the week, which must be submitted to instructors within 2 weeks of course completion. Project grading is based on the insight and quality of work demonstrated, with some accommodation for those with limited background. Research reports may be conducted on a variety of topics related to cave exploration and do not need to be specific to Mammoth Cave.

Due to the amount of course content that will take place in the field, participation in all class activities is a must. Participants that are enrolled in the course for college credit must participate in all course activities to receive credit – no exceptions! It is strongly recommended, that all participants eat breakfast each morning to avoid cavers “burning out” in the cave.

Grade Scale (based mainly on project, but weighted according to participation in class):

- A = equivalent to the finest work that is expected of a student at this level
- B = good work, but with a few flaws in procedure and interpretation
- C = average work
- D = poor work, sloppy presentation
- F = no redeeming features, or failure to turn in project by deadline

**General Class Conduct and Policies:** During class periods, cell phones should be turned off and smoking is not allowed. While in cave, safety and conservation are primary concerns. On the surface, it is essential to drive carefully and to obey the speed limit. Beware of snakes, ticks, chiggers, and poison ivy. \*\* Cell phones should be turned off during class! \*\* Please treat your colleagues and their desire to learn with appropriate respect.

Participants are also required to follow all safe caving practices!

Our first priority in caving is safety. We will not tolerate cavers who are not following instructions and putting their safety or the safety of others at risk.

Our second priority is resource protection. We have been given a unique opportunity to visit places in Mammoth Cave that very few will ever get the opportunity to see. We will take every precaution to protect all cave resources and to have as little impact on the cave as possible. Once again, we will have zero tolerance for participants who are not respecting the resource protection policy.

Our third priority (and the purpose of this course!) is education. We fully expect to have a great time together this week. Caving is one of the most enjoyable things in the world. We will all meet new people and make new friends this week. We must remember why we are here – to learn about the awesome history of exploration at Mammoth Cave! Have a great time this week, just remember why we are here!

**ADA Statement:** Students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Director of the Karst Field Studies Program, Dr. Leslie North at [leslie.north@wku.edu](mailto:leslie.north@wku.edu) or (270) 745-5982 so proper accomodations can be considered and made as necessary.

**Schedule Change Policy:** The Department of Earth, Environmental, and Atmospheric Sciences strictly adheres to University policies regarding schedule changes. It is the responsibility of the student to meet all admissions deadlines. Only in exceptional cases will a deadline be waived (you will be required to fill out an appeal form). The form requires a written description of the extenuating circumstances involved and the attachment of appropriate documentation. Poor academic performance, general malaise, or undocumented general stress factors are not considered as legitimate circumstances.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

### Sunday, June 11 – Meet & Greet

6:00 PM      Meet at the Conference Room at Hamilton Valley to meet your instructor and fellow participants, as well as representatives of WKU, Mammoth Cave National Park, and the Cave Research Foundation. We will spend 1-2 hours introducing ourselves, preparing participants for the coming week, orienting everyone to Hamilton Valley, Mammoth Cave National Park, and the surrounding area, and addressing any questions and/or concerns. This will also provide participants that have arranged to stay at Hamilton Valley the opportunity to check into their rooms. **The Meet & Greet is mandatory for all participants – not just for those staying at Hamilton Valley!** By addressing questions/concerns, gear-related issues, etc. on Sunday night, we can avoid dealing with these issues on Monday and delaying cave trips.

### Monday, June 12 – Introduction to Exploration and Early Explorers of Mammoth Cave

8:00 AM      Introduction to the Geology and Nature of Mammoth Cave  
9:00 AM      A Very Quick History of Mammoth Cave  
9:30 AM      Aboriginal Exploration of Mammoth Cave  
10:00 AM      Cave Trip w/lunch in the cave  
4:00 PM(ish)    Recap of Day's Trip

### Tuesday, June 13 – The Roots of Modern Exploration

8:00 AM      Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century History  
9:00 AM      Cave Trip w/ lunch in the cave  
4:00 PM(ish)    Recap of Day's Trip

### Wednesday, June 14 – Exploration During the Cave Wars Era

8:00 AM      Late 19<sup>th</sup> & Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century History  
9:00 AM      Cave Trip w/lunch in the cave  
4:00 PM(ish)    Recap of Day's Trip

### Thursday, June 15 – The Park Years and the Push for the Longest Cave

8:00 AM      C-3, NSS, Austin & Pohl, CRF, & the 1972 Connection  
9:00 AM      Cave Trip w/lunch in the cave  
4:00 PM(ish)    Recap of Day's Trip

### Friday, June 16 – Modern Exploration of Mammoth Cave

8:00 AM      Cave Research Foundation, NPS, Roppel, and Current Exploration of Mammoth Cave  
9:00 AM      Cave Trip w/lunch in the cave  
4:00 PM      Recap of Day's Trip & Closing of the class.  
5:00 PM      Dinner and Celebration!