



March 2020

License Plate Goes Underground



*Like many diversion seeking Civil War soldiers, this battlefield preservation supporter visited the underground and popular music venue, **The Caverns** at the foot of the Cumberland Mountains near Pelham. The Caverns, also known as "Big Mouth Cave," is part of a series of caves common in the karst geology of southern Middle Tennessee. George Wagner's brigade of Indiana and Ohio soldiers camped in this area for six weeks during the summer of 1863 after helping force the Confederates over the Cumberland Mountains in early July.*

Soldiers on Pause Explore the Caves

For five weeks in July and August 1863 the Army of the Cumberland paused the Campaign for Chattanooga in order to await repair of the Nashville and Chattanooga railroad, the amassing of supplies, and the ripening of the corn crop for forage. Letter writing and foraging helped pass the time not committed to military duties, but a new diversion offered another way to occupy their time

– exploration of the area’s mountain caves. “Near half a mile to the left {of the camp} was a large cave and a clear spring of water. From the spring flowed a clear, cold stream.” (historian of the 57th Indiana). Another soldier recorded in his diary, “in the evening Richter and Bryant and I went to a very large cave ½ mile south of camp-interesting confab with an old gentleman.” In at least one cave in the area Confederates mined calcium nitrate – a compound needed to produce potassium nitrate (saltpeter) for gunpowder. John Marshall (97th Ohio) wrote: “Spend the day in writing and in the evening visit a saltpeter cave in the mountain. The enemy manufactured saltpeter here, but on approach of our army they destroyed their works.”



Nickajack Cave, southeast of Pelham, on the edge of Nickajack Lake, was one of the largest Confederate nitrate mining operations in the area. This September 1863 image depicts the cave entrance and some of the abandoned works after Confederates were forced from the area with the arrival of Federals in August. (photo from Vol. 4, The Photographic History of the Civil War, 1912, Francis Trevelyan Miller, editor)

Disruption of the Confederacy’s access to vital war resources as copper, coal, iron and calcium nitrate in the growing Confederate industrial heartland was another important outcome of the Campaign for Chattanooga, opening the way for Federal thrusts into the area in 1864.

We Need Your Help

Our inventory of photos with the **Save Our Battlefields** license plate at a Civil War Battlefield or related site in Tennessee is running low. Please stop by a site - near or far - snap a photo and send to info@tcwpa.org. Help us tell the stories of Tennessee Civil War history. Thank you.

Campaign 2020

We’re already at work promoting **Save Our Battlefields** license plates in every county of Tennessee. If you don’t have a plate please consider joining the more than 1200 Tennesseans who display their support for battlefield preservation by purchasing the license plate. With purchase, you’re eligible for a complimentary one-year membership in TCWPA. Visit tcwpa.org/license-plate for more details.



You can purchase the license plate at your County Clerk's office for \$35.00 plus your regular registration fees. Proceeds from the sale of the plate will help protect and interpret important battlefields in Tennessee.

For more information, visit: tcwpa.org/license-plate

The Tennessee Civil War Preservation Association preserves and interprets Tennessee's Civil War Battlefields and their contributing landscapes for present and future generations.

Become a member: tcwpa.org/join Make a donation: tcwpa.org/donate [Purchase a license plate](http://tcwpa.org/license-plate)



Copyright © 2020 Tennessee Civil War Preservation Association, All rights reserved.