Chapter 2

Historical GIS as a Platform for Public Memory at Mammoth Cave National Park

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ABSTRACT

The Mammoth Cave Historical GIS (MCHGIS) fosters new understandings of a national park landscape as a historic farming community and offers a web-based platform for public memory of pre-park inhabitants. It maps the 1920 manuscript census at the household level over a streaming topographic map and georeferences Civilian Conservation Corps photographs of dwellings for visualization and analysis of the area’s population on the eve of creation of Mammoth Cave National Park. A web interface to the MCHGIS permits broader dissemination of archival holdings. Public participation GIS techniques are adapted to initiate a virtual site of public memory to supplement the history presented by institutionally-held materials with those donated from private holdings.

INTRODUCTION

GIS has proven a valuable tool for historical geographers in facilitating integration of data from diverse sources, permitting visualization and analysis of past places, and allowing dissemination via the Internet of both digital databases and the tools to explore them (Gregory & Healey, 2007). This article describes a historical GIS created to document and enhance understanding of the history of the pre-park inhabitants of Mammoth Cave National Park (Figure 1). The national park was authorized by U.S. Congress in 1926, the same year as Great Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah National Parks, part of a wave of park-creation intended to meet the recreational and psychologi-
Figure 1. Mammoth Cave National Park is located in the karst region of central Kentucky and is easily accessible from Interstate 65, a modern roadway that roughly follows the route of the old Dixie Highway of the 1920s.
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