NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bell Witch Cave

other names/site number 40RB18

2. Location

street & number 430 Keysburg Road NA☐ not for publication

city or town Adams NA☐ vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county Robertson code 147 zip code 37010

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

E. Patrick McIntyre Jr. February 1, 2008

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined eligible for the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register

☐ removed from the National Register.

☐ other,
(explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Bell Witch Cave
Name of Property

Robertson County, Tennessee
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- [x] private
- [ ] public-local
- [ ] public-State
- [ ] public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- [ ] building(s)
- [ ] district
- [x] site
- [ ] structure
- [ ] object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
1		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

NA

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation NA
walls NA
roof NA
other STONE

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations N/A
(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION
OTHER: tourism

Period of Significance
1817-1958

Significant Dates
NA

Significant Person
(complete if Criterion B is marked)
NA

Cultural Affiliation
NA

Architect/Builder
NA

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Bell Witch Cave
Name of Property

Robertson County Tennessee
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approximately 2.4 acres Adams 303 SE

UTM References
(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	495032	4049347	3			
2				4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Claudette Stager
organization Tennessee Historical Commission date December, 2007
street & number 2941 Lebanon Road telephone 615-532-1550 ext 105
city or town Nashville state TN zip code 37214

Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 0r 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO) or FPO for any additional items

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Walter and Helen Kirby
street & number 430 Keysburg Road telephone 615/696-3055
city or town Adams state TN zip code 37010

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

Description

Note: all figures and the bulk of the description of the cave come from *Caves in Tennessee.*

Located about one-half mile from Adams (pop. 600) near the Red River, the Bell Witch Cave is 470 feet above sea level and comprised of St. Louis Limestone. Beginning in 1817 with the first mention of the Bell Witch, the cave became a popular spot for tourists or thrill seekers. *Caves in Tennessee* notes that while Robertson County's "...caves are not especially large, they are rich in folklore, and some of the more interesting legends ..."[1] This is certainly true for the Bell Witch Cave. Tennessee has a wealth of caves and recent reports put the number at 7,000 or as much as 8,900.[2] None of these caves can compare to the Bell Witch Cave for having an enduring legend.

The Bell Witch Cave is classified as a karst cave. This type of cave is formed when water containing carbon dioxide makes a weak carbolic acid and dissolves limestone. Water flows through cracks in the limestone, since limestone is impermeable. Stalagmites and stalactites form, and may eventually grow to form columns. Flowstone, a smooth formation caused by water running down the cave walls, is another common cave formation. For the Bell Witch Cave, according to *Caves in Tennessee*

> The mouth is a half-shell 60 feet wide and 30 feet high. The cave stream issues from an opening 12 feet wide and 8 feet high, cuts down through a small canyon, and drops 60 feet to the river. The main passage trends southwest from 520 feet and averages about 8 feet high and 6 feet wide (fig. 102). An upper level is reached through a hole in the roof of a room 125 feet from the mouth. A passage in the upper level, which is about 15 feet above the stream level of the cave and crosses over the stream passage, is 190 feet in length. A second room is developed 330 feet from the mouth. The cave ends in breakdown. Several attractive flowstone formations were seen, but many of them have been broken or chipped.
>
> The cave stream enters the cave through a sinkhole 200 yards southwest (sic) of the mouth. It emerges from a spring on one side of the sink and flows into breakdown on the other.[3]

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[1] Thomas C. Barr, Jr., *Caves of Tennessee* (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Conservation and Commerce, 1961, Nashville: Tennessee Department of Conservation, 1990), 394. Citations are to the reprint edition.
[2] Ruth Keenoy and Robbie Jones, "Caving and Clogging: Keepin' Cool in Tennessee Caves" in *Looking Beyond the Highway: Dixie Roads and Culture*, ed. Claudette Stager and Martha Carver, 168 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006) and Tennessee Caves Survey, Inc. www.webwhisper.com/tcs/default.html accessed 11/7/07.
[3] Barr, 394-5. Note: According to the property owner the sinkhole is actually southeast of the mouth.

Statement of Significance

The Bell Witch Cave is nominated to the National Register under criterion A for its local and statewide significance in tourism and entertainment/recreation. Soon after the first reported sightings of the Bell Witch by John Bell, Sr. and his family in 1817, visitors started coming to the cave in the hope of seeing the witch. The legend of the Bell Witch and the cave has been extensively written about but little has been written on the site as a tourist attraction. In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there has been a constant stream of visitors lured by the tale of the witch and the natural features of the property. Most commercial show caves advertise in attempts to entice tourists. However, the Bell Witch cave did not need to do this, relying on the legend of the witch rather than advertising. Early in its history, the story seemed to be regional but over the years, the legend has extended further. The site maintains a high degree of integrity. Approximately 17,000 people visit the cave each year.

Caves have been used for shelter, industry, storage, dance hall venues, and a variety of other uses over the years. One of the most popular uses for caves was as commercial show caves, caves that are opened to the public for touring. Until the mid-nineteenth century visits to natural sites like caves were considered pilgrimages and nature was something held in awe.[4] The traveler could pay to see spectacular arrays of cave formations, sometimes enhanced by lighting. The Bell Witch Cave did not follow this traditional path. Instead, the story of the Bell Witch brought travelers to the cave.

The earliest accounts of the Bell Witch occur in 1817 when John Bell, Sr. and his daughter Betsy are said to have seen the witch. Bell purchased 220 acres of farmland in Robertson County in the early nineteenth century.[5] Bell and his wife Lucy had nine children, two girls and seven boys. Bell apparently was tormented by the witch from 1817 until his death on December 20, 1820. The witch spoke, cursed, swore, and quoted from the bible. She is supposed to have liked Mrs. Bell and would tell her of events in North Carolina, Mrs. Bell's home state.[6] Odd sounds, whispering, and moving things such as bed covers are supposed to have occurred in Bell's house. One early story has a friend of Betsy's caught in the cave and a spirit admonishing him for exploring the cave. The witch allegedly was the reason Betsy and neighbor Joshua Gardner broke off their engagement. Some accounts say that John Bell had purchased land from Kate Batts and that she felt cheated in the deal. Her revenge was to haunt Bell. Most legends about the witch say she killed Bell. A 1955 newspaper article about the witch and Bell's death states that Bell's neighbor said, "The damned witch did this," to which a voice responded, "He will never get up" and "I did it."[7] Later accounts simply call the witch Kate, Kate Batts' Witch, or Old Kate.

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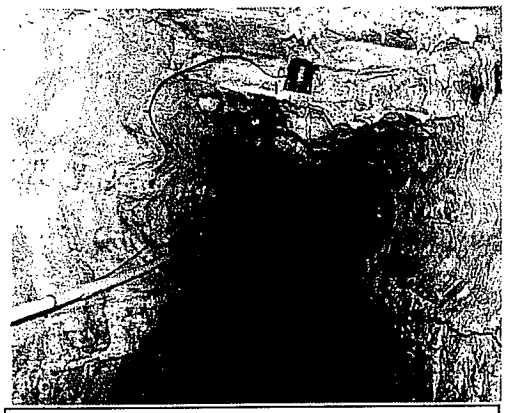
[4] John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 5.
[5] Letter from Yolanda Reid, Robertson County Historian, June 22, 2006. Other accounts have Bell owning 1,000 acres.
[6] Jack Tucker, "Return of the Bell Witch Welcome If She Can Give Dade Park Tips," *Nashville Tennessean*, August 3, 1937. Kirby Collection.
[7] Allan M. Trout, "Greetings," *The Courier Journal*, December 29, 1955. Kirby Collection.

There is an underground lake, roughly forty feet by forty feet, below the sinkhole in the cave. Today the cave remains much the same as the above 1961 description. All but the last thirty or forty feet of the cave has been used for tours. The upper level is not used for tours today. There have been accommodations for tourists. There are twenty-one lights, but unlike most caves, there is no walkway over the limestone paths. Lights were placed in the cave at least by 1975 and the current property owner replaced the older lights with a twelve-volt system in April 1993. Numerous flowstone formations are visible, with whimsical names such as the Eagle, Mooning Man, and Demon Face. In very rainy weather, the cave floods.

Today, the cave can still be traveled for about 330 feet. After entering the cave, it is about 125 feet to the first room. A Native American stone box grave is located in the first room. Above this area there is another area reached through a hole at the side of the cave. About 200 feet from here is a back room and after this, the passage is blocked. There is a waterfall and water in the cave, along with spiders, crawfish, bats, salamanders, and crickets. Entry to the cave is the natural entrance. The entrance to the cave is at a limestone bluff near a stream.

The Bell Witch Cave has always been part of a larger farm. Today the cave is part of a 101-acre parcel adjacent to the Red River. It is composed of sixty-five acres of open land and thirty-six acres of woods. Only a small part of the property is used for commercial purposes - cave tours and canoe trips. The site has several modern buildings and historic buildings moved onto the property. Only the cave is being nominated.



Near entry to cave. From www.bellwitchcave.com

Back room of cave. From www.bellwitchcave.com

Statement of Significance

The Bell Witch Cave is nominated to the National Register under criterion A for its local significance in tourism and entertainment/recreation. Soon after the first reported sightings of the Bell Witch by John Bell, Sr. and his family in 1817, visitors started coming to the cave in the hope of seeing the witch. The legend of the Bell Witch and the cave has been extensively written about but little has been written on the site as a tourist attraction. In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there has been a constant stream of visitors lured by the tale of the witch and the natural features of the property. Most commercial show caves advertise in attempts to entice tourists. However, the Bell Witch cave did not need to do this, relying on the legend of the witch rather than advertising. Early in its history, the story seemed to be regional but over the years, the legend has extended further. The site maintains a high degree of integrity. Approximately 17,000 people visit the cave each year.

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[7] Allan M. Trout, "Greetings," *The Courier Journal*, December 29, 1955. Kirby Collection.

Soon after John Bell's experiences, the legend of the witch spread outside the family and people started to go to the cave in hopes of seeing or hearing the Bell Witch. During this era, nature was viewed as a "wilderness cathedral." People looked at nature, and natural features like a cave, as a sublime place, where you could get a sense of the spiritual in a picturesque countryside.[8] The spiritual nature of the Bell Witch cave was more sensational that at other natural sites, but the idea of visiting an untamed landscape was similar. Most early stories of the Bell Witch mention strange and unexplainable events that occurred. Later in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, the stories would change character. Tourism became more popular, and nature was "tamed" into a tourist attraction, not an awe-inspiring feature.[9] As people became more familiar with the witch stories and less afraid of the tales, stories became humorous and lighthearted, and more groups would visit the cave for fun.

There is a "well documented legend" that Andrew Jackson and friends visited the cave in 1819.[10] Some sources report that "Jackson stated that he would rather fight the whole of the British army again rather than to tangle with the wrath of the Bell Witch."[11] However, an 1894 account states that Jackson said "By the eternal, boys, this is better than fighting the British! I never had so much fun in my life."[12] After the first sightings, the Bell Witch was not seen until 1828 when it began prophesizing to cave visitors. Among them, the witch spoke to John Bell, Jr. about the future of the world. Even with the reappearance of the witch, the Bell family would picnic and gather around the cave, seemingly with no fear. Over the years, the witch has been seen in all parts of the cave, directly outside the cave, and on other parts of the former Bell farm. Most sightings have the witch in the cave.

Bell Witch Cave Postcard

Goodspeed's 1886 history of Robertson County includes an entry on the Bell Witch. It contains one of the more succinct descriptions of the legend, stating

[8] Kevin Patrick, "Seeing the Scenic Upland South: Mother Nature and the Morphology of Tourist Landscapes" in *Looking Beyond the Highway: Dixie Roads and Culture*, ed. Claudette Stager and Martha Carver, 244-5 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).
[9] Ibid. 248-52
[10] Robbie Jones, Director of Preservation, The Hermitage, Home of Andrew Jackson. Email to Claudette Stager on August 8, 2007.
[11] Harriet Parks Miller, *The Bell Witch of Tennessee* (Clarksville, TN: Leaf-Chronicle Publishing), 7 and Bell Witch Cave rack card, 2006.
[12] "Witchcraft in the Southland," *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), July 26, 1894. Accessed at Tennessee State Library and Archives 19th Century Newspapers http://www.tennessee.gov/tsla/resources/19th_newspapers.htm, September 28, 2007.

> A volume might be written concerning the performances of this wonderful being, as they are now described by contemporaries and their descendents. That this actually occurred will not be disputed, nor will a rational explanation be attempted. It is merely introduced as an example of superstition, strong in the minds of all but a few in those times, and not yet wholly extinct.[13]

Possibly the earliest publication on the Bell Witch is Clarksville, Tennessee's M.V. Ingram's *An Authenticated History of the Famous Bell Witch.* In 1894, Ingram, the editor of the *Progress-Democrat*, wrote down the tales that had been known and spoken of since the first appearance of the witch.[14] An article in the July 26, 1894, issue of *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans) about Ingram's book was titled "Witchcraft in the Southland" and subtitled "Surpasses Anything Found in the Annals of Salem. Story of the Famous Bell Witch and Its Tragic Persecution of an Entire Family in Tennessee. 'Old Kate Batts' Awful Spell, and Some Other Marvelous Manifestations"[15] The article said the Bell family preferred not to publish the stories until the last of the "sufferers" died and goes on to repeat the story of Kate Batts. As for the story itself, the paper called it "...the most pitiful recital – bald and severe as a Greek tragedy, yet at times dripping unctuous humor."[16]

Postcards advertising the Bell Witch Cave appear in 1908-1909. They show the cave, falls, Bell House, Bell graves, and in one instance show, "The tree the Bell Witch was riding when shot at with silver bullet, Adams, Tennessee." (See below.)[17] Printing postcards of the cave and falls is not unusual even for this site, where the natural features of the cave were not the drawing point. Early American tourism was not only for diversion; it helped form an identity and culture for the nation. The landscape and natural features became part of this culture. Niagara Falls and Mammoth Cave are two of the better-known examples of early tourist sites where the experience of the sites was considered inspirational, almost religious. Mammoth Cave is generally considered the first cave opened for touring, starting in 1816.[18] There is no known date for opening the Bell Witch Cave, but articles and post cards appear around the turn of the nineteenth century. As soon as the legend spread,

THE TREE THE BELL WITCH WAS RIDING WHEN SHOT AT WITH SILVERBULLET.ADAMS. TENN.

[13] Tennessee Genealogy and History TNGen Web Project, Tennessee Records Repository, The Goodspeed Publishing Co., Nashville TN, 1887. http://www.tngenweb.org/goodspeed/robertson/history.html. Accessed November 6, 2007

[14] "Editor Ingram Arranging to Publish A Book," *Nashville Banner*, November 3, 1893. Kirby collection.

[15] "Witchcraft in the Southland," *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), July 26, 1894. Accessed at Tennessee State Library and Archives 19th Century Newspapers http://www.tennessee.gov/tsla/resources/19th_newspapers.htm, September 28.

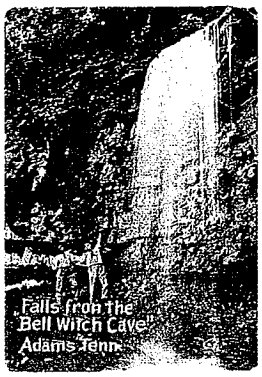
[16] Ibid.

[17] Postcards from Kirby collection.

[18] Examples of other caves in Tennessee opening for visitors include Wonder Cave in 1898, Lost Sea Cave around 1915, and Ruby Falls in 1929.

people came in hopes of seeing the witch. The Bell Witch Cave did not give the same experience as the better known sites mentioned, but it did became part of the regional culture

Whereas caves may once have been considered dark mysterious places where malevolent things happened, commercial or show caves reversed this idea and made the mysterious cave less nefarious. Strange or inexplicable stories about caves still occurred and were even promoted by cave operators, but while in a cave with a group of people and a guide, fear – if there is any – is generated by tales told by the guide. Most commercial show caves open for touring combine myth, natural history, and scenic beauty. Since each cave is different, each tour is different. Even today, when tourism has become as much a conglomerate as any other business, most commercial show caves are owned by families and are owner operated.[19] The Bell Witch Cave follows this pattern although unlike many commercial caves, it has not been in the same family for generations.



A series of articles in the May and June 1924 issues of the *Daily Leaf-Chronicle* in Clarksville mention the Bell Witch legend and Ingram's 1894 book, wherein the stories come from the Bell family. The newspaper reported that the stories in the book came from records kept by Richard Williams Bell that he called "Our Family Trouble."[20] A letter written from the state capitol in 1925 by Joel B. Fort notes that the Bell house was long gone, but the well and farm trees were still here. He wrote that the property was located on the "old road" leading from Hopkinsville, Kentucky to Springfield, Tennessee. Bell's sons Williams and John, Jr. had lived in nearby Halls Ford. According to Fort "Any one at Adams can go to the exact spot where the old Witch Bell house stood."[21]

A 1933 news article mentions that "The years have not dimmed the legend as a 'good story'"[22] The Bell Witch was further described as

> She was everything and nothing, invisible and present. She was here, there and everywhere and all at the same time if necessary. She never slept and was never idle.
>
> She was tender and cruel; saintly yet fiendish. She possessed an elemental sense of right and wrong and was a keen judge of men. She was credited furthermore with being a great blabmouth.

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[19] Kevin Patrick, *Pennsylvania Caves & Other Rocky Roadside Wonders* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2004), 10.
[20] Hattie Parks Miller, "The Bell Witch" in the *Daily Leaf-Chronicle* (Clarksville), May 1, May 7, may 21, June 4, June 18, 1924. Kirby collection.
[21] Copy of letter in Kirby collection, April 29, 1925.
[22] "Bell Witch Still 'Good Story' After 100 Years," in the *Nashville Tennessean*, May 16, 1933. Kirby collection.

> She was something of a seer and prophetess; could divine the outcome of impending events and tell of happenings at long distances.
>
> But most feared and dreaded of all her varied activities were her physical manifestation – her pinchings, beatings, paddlings, pinstickings..."[23]

Dr. Charles Bailey Bell's *The Bell Witch* was printed in 1934. Dr. Bell was a Nashville educator and descendant of John Bell. The book contains memoirs of his father and grandfather. He stated that no one was ever certain the Bell Witch was actually a witch and he considered it a spirit. Throughout the book "Witch (?)" and "Spirit" are the terms used. While the family legend had it that the spirit would return in 1935, Dr. Bell was not sure what form the returning spirit would take.[24] One local paper made light of the witch's supposed return and reminded readers that whatever accidents or troubles occurred, they were the "lot of man" and not the witch's fault.[25] As far as anyone knows, the Bell Witch did not return in 1935.

In 1937, when Louis Garrison[26] lived on the farm, the *Nashville Tennessean* poked fun at the legend by reporting that bettors on an upcoming horse race in Kentucky wanted the witch to tell them on whom to bet. This is very different from early stories of the Bell Witch that attempted to evoke fear in people.

Not only was the Bell Witch written about, its legend also became a cantata. In 1948, the Nashville Choral Society was slated to perform Charles F. Bryan's cantata. The *Tennessean Magazine* described Bryan as a "young Tennessean who created the work while enjoying a Guggenheim Fellowship,"[27] A later account stated that *The Bell Witch Cantata* premiered at Carnegie Hall in 1948.[28]

Echoes of the Bell Witch in the Twentieth Century by H.C. Brehm recounted the witch's legend and experiences of Mr. and Mrs. W.M. (Bims) Eden. Eden bought the farm in 1964, removed some of the older buildings, and built a house. The historic roadbed from Clarksville to Nashville was located on the farm and used for farm traffic. Eden installed electric lights in the cave. After he installed colored lights in the cave – "to dress up the lighting effect"[29] – the lights either broke or disappeared. Eden surmised that the witch did not like the colored lights. When 104 acres of the farm the Edens owned was offered for sale in November 1992, a promotional flyer from

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[23] Ibid.
[24] "Famous Witch Due To Return in 1935, Says Dr. C. B. Bell in New Volume," in the *Nashville Banner*, November 4, 1934. Kirby collection.
[25] April 1934, no name or date for paper. Kirby collection.
[26] Garrison lived here in 1937 but did not buy the property until 1941.
[27] " The Rowdy Witch," in *Tennessean Magazine*, March 21, 1938. Kirby collection.
[28] Carolyn Shoulders, "Is Bell Witch Giving Arts Center Premiere?" in *The Tennessean*, April 24, 1980. Kirby Collection.
[29] H.C. Brehm, Echoes *of the Bell Witch in the Twentieth Century* (Nashville: H.C. Brehm, 1989), 25.

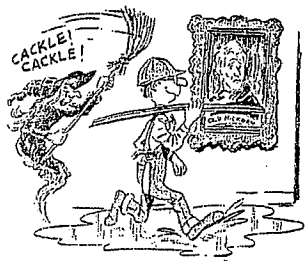
Tennessee Tourist Development noted that the cave was open on weekends from May through October. "Several thousand people attend the Annual Halloween Party in hopes of getting a glimpse of 'Kate', the famous Bell Witch of Adams, Tennessee."[30] Mrs. Eden said that Kate was "not a bad guest."[31] For those not interested in the Bell Witch, the farmland was next to the Red River, a good location for canoeing and fishing.

One of the fun aspects of caves is having formations named to resemble something and then seeing if the tourist can see the similarity. These are called "imagination formations."[32] Cave formations are said to look like food, animals, buildings, fairy tale characters, religious images, and anything one's imagination can draw up. Considering that some of these caves became popular when nature was considered sublime or inspiring, it is not surprising that the names of formations were meant to evoke oohs and aahs in the tourist. Two examples from the Bell Witch Cave are the Eagle and Demon Face. Some photographs of the cave show an image in profile, possibly of the witch. Along the same line, most caves have a legend associated with them. It may refer to lost treasure, children playing and discovering the cave, romantic tragedies, robbery hideouts, and other fanciful ideas. Rarely has there been such a strong legend as that associated with the Bell Witch Cave.

Profile seen in cave, back room

Back room

The Eagle



The Tennessean, 4/24/80

Over the years, newspapers have printed articles and questions about whether the Bell Witch exists, especially during the Halloween season. Frequent topics are the original legend, unusual or unexplainable events that happened on the Bell farm or nearby in recent years, and problems with photographing the witch. One humorous story in *The Tennessean* questioned if the problems with building Tennessee Performing Arts Center, part of a state office building, were the fault of the witch. In 1975, the state legislature chose to name the auditorium for Charles F. Bryan, but several years later name was changed to honor Andrew Jackson.[33] A different type of article in the *Tennessean* discussed the idea that Christianity and belief in spirits such as the Bell Witch are compatible. The article went on to state that a survey (of religious attitudes) by Baylor University in Texas determined that twenty-three percent of southerners visited or lived in a haunted place. About one-third of southerners believe

[30] Undated flyer from Tennessee Tourist Development. Kirby collection.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Patrick, *Pennsylvania Caves & Other Rocky Roadside Wonders*, 73.
[33] *The Tennessean*, April 24, 1980. The paper reported that problems with the building occurred before the name change.

places could be haunted. This was higher than for other areas of the country. At the same time, with this exception, southerners had less belief in the paranormal.[34]

A more recent trend in commercial show caves is to mention "scientific" aspects of the cave. Whether it is geology or archaeology, more cave tours bring up some aspect of this type of history.[35] In 1972, the Tennessee Division of Archaeology recorded the Bell Witch Cave site. The report noted that the property had scattered campsites, was partially cultivated, and had heavy erosion. The landowner had a collection of points and scrapers he showed the surveyor. Although a few artifacts were found in the cave, most came from the slopes and bluff tops. The stream flowing through the cave floods periodically until it fills the main tunnel, making the cave undesirable for long periods of occupation. At the time of the survey, there was a small concentration of artifacts west of the owner's house and another concentration east of the house where tobacco was grown. Points from the site suggested Early Woodland or Archaic period occupancy. There were no test pits done on the site and the report noted that there were no earlier excavations.

Successful commercial show caves have interesting formations, clever marketing, and easy accessibility for the tourist. Railroads and later roads increased visitation in many caves. The "golden age of the show cave" was during the 1920s to the 1930s, when automobile travel and the Good Roads movement were allowing families to explore new and different places. It was during this era that many caves had entrances modified for tourists, paths for easy walking, and lighting installed. Not surprisingly, tourism dropped rapidly during the Depression and picked up post WWII when a new surge of road building, particularly the interstate system, occurred.[36] For example, because it was located on well-traveled US 41, Wonder Cave (NR 4/1/87) in Grundy County originally had more visitors than Ruby Falls (Lookout Mountain Caverns and Cavern Castle, NR 11/26/85). When the interstate bypassed the area in 1962, the site's visitation dropped ninety percent.[37] This same era resulted in changing perceptions that influenced show caves

> Mythically referenced, spiritual interpretations of nature once characterized by the sublime, the picturesque, and the beautiful were being supplanted by more scientific explanations. The interior tour circuits of all the show caves had long been enhanced by stories, myths, and legends, but these were now becoming out of sync with the trend towards modernization.[38]

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[34] Anita Wadhwani, "Christians can believe in Bell Witch, town says" in The *Tennessean*, October 31, 2006.
[35] Patrick, *Pennsylvania Caves & Other Rocky Roadside Wonders*, 73.
[36] Patrick, *Pennsylvania Caves & Other Rocky Roadside Wonders*, 140, 144 and Keenoy and Jones, "Caving and Clogging: Keepin' Cool in Tennessee Caves" in *Looking Beyond the Highway: Dixie Roads and Culture*. 167.
[37] Keenoy and Jones, "Caving and Clogging: Keepin' Cool in Tennessee Caves" in *Looking Beyond the Highway: Dixie Roads and Culture*, 173
[38] Patrick, *Pennsylvania Caves & Other Rocky Roadside Wonders*, 153.

Much of what influenced commercial show caves did not seem to affect the Bell Witch Cave. The cave is still located off the beaten track and does not have a major road leading to it; most publications on show caves do not mention the cave.[39] Yet it has lasted as a commercial show cave since the early 1800s. It may not have widespread advertising or marketing, but witch legend continues to draw people even if access to the site is not as easy as a cave such as Ruby Falls. There are not series of signs luring tourists to the site as travelers see for Ruby Falls in Tennessee or Meramec Cave in Missouri. Modern skepticism with myth and legend has not stopped tourists who hope to spot the Bell Witch. Another difference that the Bell Witch Cave has with other commercial caves is that it has had few improvements. There is no elevator to the cave, no hollowed out tunnel, no carved out footpaths or bridges. Several caves in Tennessee were popular as dance halls due to the cool temperatures, but not the Bell Witch Cave. There are lights and interpretive information, but the cave is still tough to walk through. There has been little change in the tour other than pointing out more science facts and archaeology. Post WWII caves often changed tours to cater to families with children, not so for the Bell Witch Cave.[40]

[39] Although there are numerous caves open for touring, only eight to ten caves show up in various commercial show caves lists.
[40] There is no directory of commercial show caves in Tennessee. While the state has many caves, there appear to be less than twenty open for tours.

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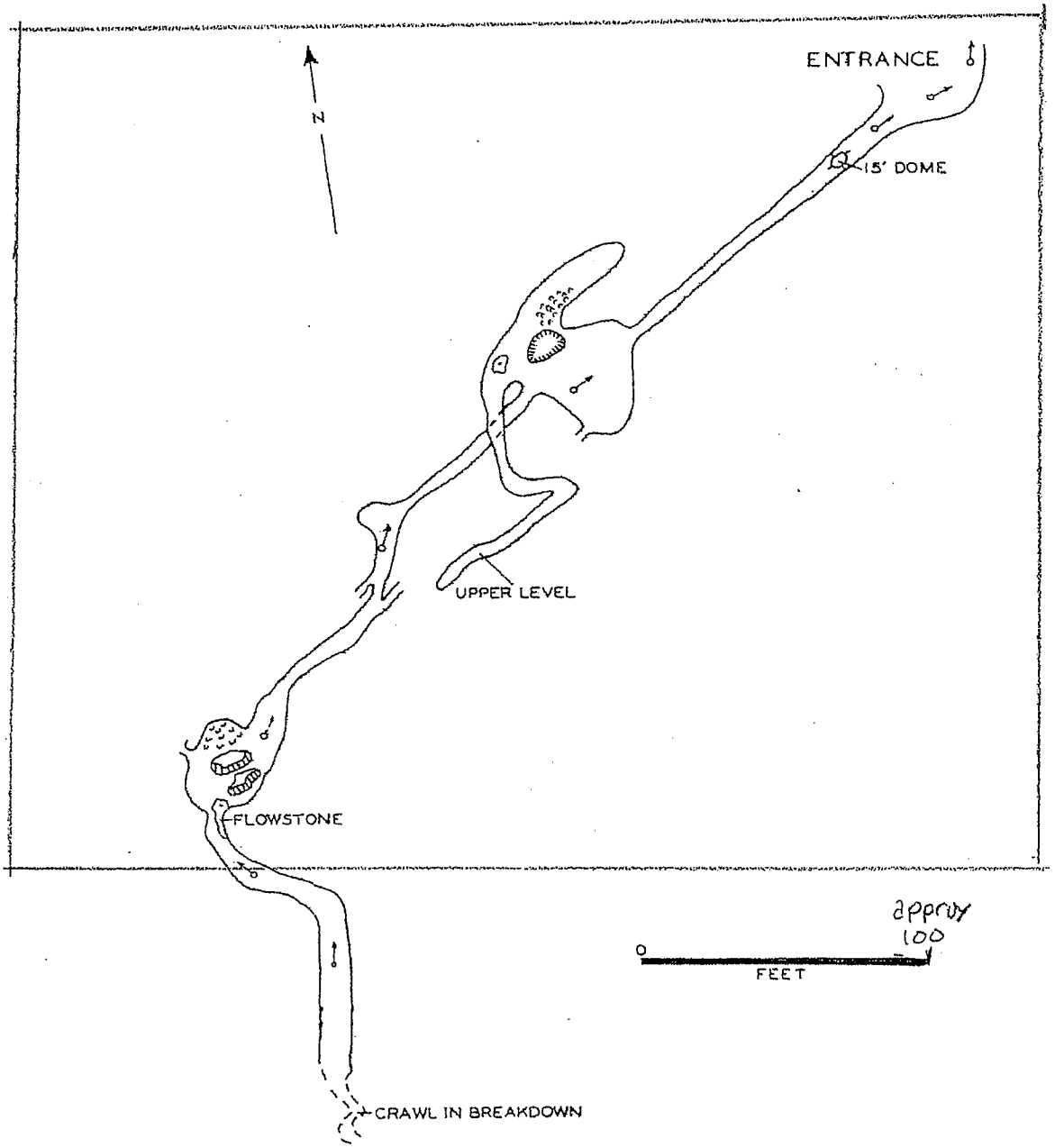
Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property includes the length of the cave that was most commonly used in tours and recreation activities as shown on the attached map. Also included is the area immediately outside the mouth of the cave.

Beginning at point A, the boundary moves south for approximately 980', then west approximately 980', then north approximately 980', then east approximately 890' to the point of the beginning.

A



Bell Witch Cave, Robertson County. (T. C. Barr and B. C. Stewart, 1956)

From *Caves in Tennessee*

Photographs

Photographs by: Brian Beadles
Date: December 2007
Negative/digital image copy: Tennessee Historical Commission

1 of 19 Mouth of cave. Photographer facing southeast.

2 of 19 Mouth of cave. Photographer facing southeast.

3 of 19 Interior of cave facing toward cave entrance. Photographer facing northeast.

4 of 19 Interior of cave near entrance. Photographer facing southwest.

5 of 19 Interior of cave near entrance. Photographer facing southwest.

6 of 19 Interior of cave facing toward entrance. Photographer facing northeast.

7 of 19 Entrance to upper level of cave.

8 of 19 First room of cave. Photographer facing south.

9 of 19 First room of cave. Photographer facing west.

10 of 19 First room of cave. Photographer facing northwest.

11 of 19 First room of cave. Photographer facing southwest.

12 of 19 Stone box grave located in first room. Photographer facing south.

13 of 19 Passage between rooms. Photographer facing southwest.

14 of 19 Passage between rooms. Photographer facing southwest.

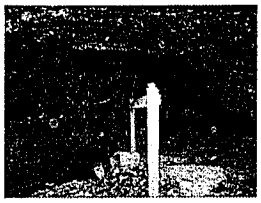
15 of 19 Interior of cave. Photographer facing southwest.

16 of 19 Passage between rooms. Photographer facing southwest.

17 of 19 Rock formation in second room. Photographer facing southwest.

18 of 19 Entrance to second room. Photographer facing southwest.

19 of 19 Second room with 'eagle' formation in background. Photographer facing south.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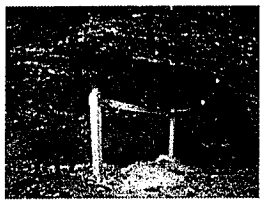
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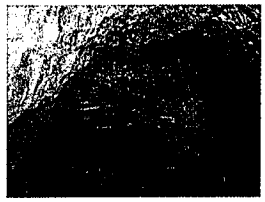
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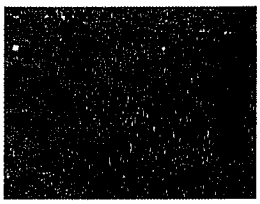
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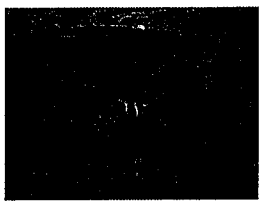
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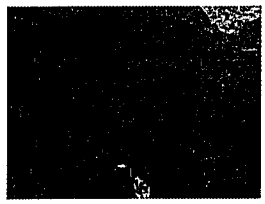
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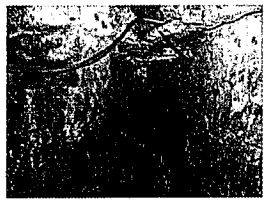
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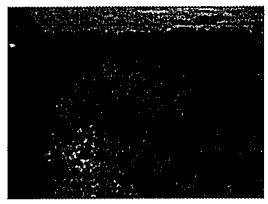
TN_RobertsonCounty_BellWitchCave13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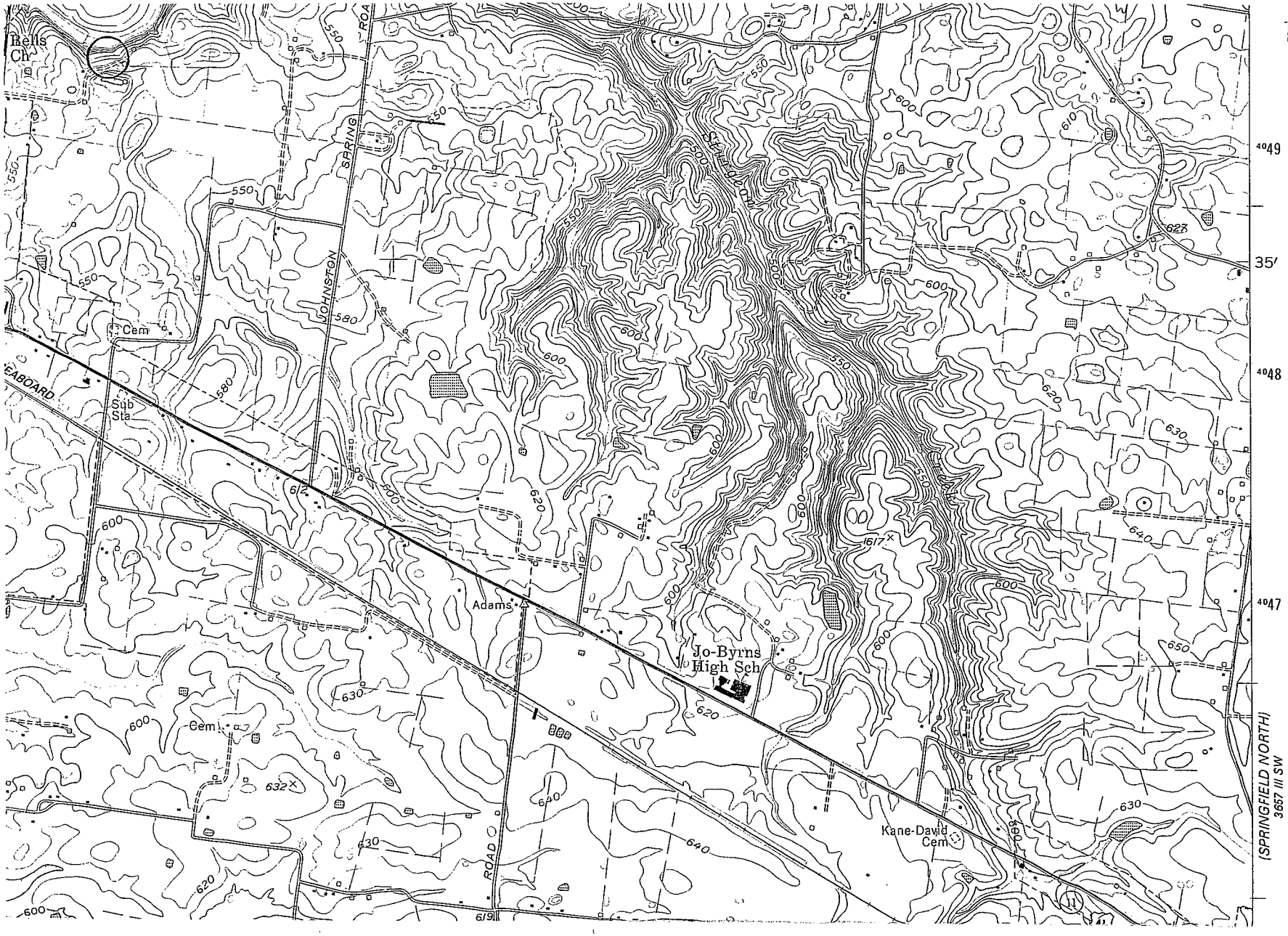
TN_RobertsonCounty_BellWitchCave19



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