Lewis and Clark Caverns: Cave Discovery Timeline

1882

The cave entrance is allegedly discovered by Charles Brooke and Mexican John from Whitehall. The men kept the location of the cave a secret.

Native American oral stories speak of a "smoking mountain", which could reveal a knowledge of the caverns hundreds of years ago.

Also, Lewis and Clark pass nearby the caverns (1805)

1892

The cave entrance is officially discovered by hunters Tom Williams and Burt Pannell.

1898

Williams attempts to explore the cave for the first time.

1902

Williams and local investor Dan Morrison begin developing the cave for tours.

1908

President Theodore Roosevelt declares the land a National Monument.

Morrison promotes and develops his tourism business, even though the caverns are on land owned by the Northern Pacific Railroad. Morrison unsuccessfully attempts to buy the land from the railroad and also loses a lawsuit to gain ownership.

1911

President Taft issues a survey and the Federal Government takes ownership of the land.

1929

George Morrison is paid $5,000 as compensation for developing the cave for tourism.

1936

A portion of the Land near the caverns is given over to state ownership to become Montana's first State Park.

1937

The caverns themselves become part of the park.

1938

Morrison Cave State Park opens for tourism.

1953

After its name switched back and forth with changes in oversight and community petitions, the park officially becomes **Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park**.

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