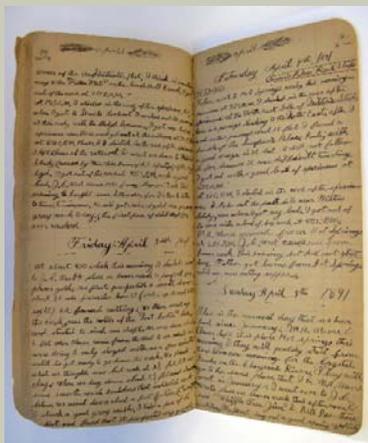


FOCUS

Diary by Alvin McDonald, 1891, Wind Cave National Park

"I climbed up a hole to the left of the room to the height of 55 feet but found nothing except a little water formation and a good deal of hard climbing. When I got back to where I left J.M. Moore he was not there, but I heard him calling to me to come to him & bring the string, for he had found a place where we would never stop going down when we once got started."

(From entry February 18, 1891)



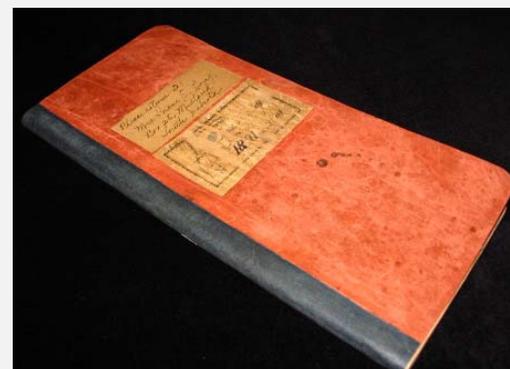
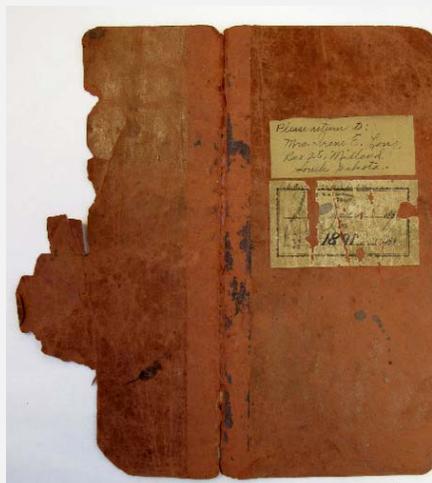
Above: Pages from Alvin's diary



Above: Ms. Cho repairing leaves

"I have not been in the cave today, on account of not feeling well, more than anything else. I started an itemized map of the Sampson's Palace Route today & got the most of the Geode Hall Branch finished in good colors....Am getting homesick after staying out of the cave so long."

(From entry February 21, 1891)



Left: The diary cover, with large losses, before treatment

Above: After treatment

"On the first day of January 1891 I saw fit to keep a record of the inside workings at Wind Cave, and, acting with the thought, I started a daily record which I called (perhaps familiarly) 'The Private Account Of A.F. McDonald, Permanent Guide of Wind Cave.'"

With this declaration, Alvin McDonald began a journal devoted to documenting his explorations of Wind Cave, one of the world's longest and most complex caves, located near Hot Springs, South Dakota. Alvin's father, J.D. McDonald, managed the Wind Cave site for the South Dakota Mining Company beginning in 1890. Mining soon proved unsuccessful, but the McDonalds realized that the cave could become a profitable tourist attraction. Partnering with "Honest John" Stabler to create the Wonderful Wind Cave Improvement Company in 1892, they enlarged the entrance and underground passageways, led tours and sold cave formations as souvenirs.

Alvin, who called himself "chief guide," explored and mapped about eight to 10 miles of the cave's passageways over several years, recording all his discoveries in his diary. He named the routes and rooms that he found and attempted to measure the distances between them; his efforts were the first systematic explorations of Wind Cave.

When Alvin's diary arrived at the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, its wood-pulp pages were extremely brittle and its cover heavily damaged from use. Book Conservator Theresa Cho repaired the leaves and removed pressure-sensitive tapes and tape residue, while Conservation Assistant Sue Bing repaired large areas of loss on the pages and cover. Michelle Dauberman, Manager of Digital Imaging, digitized the volume and created a facsimile, which will be interchanged regularly with the original for display in a climate controlled exhibit case.

Although the diary has survived, the Wonderful Wind Cave Improvement Company did not. Following Alvin's untimely death from typhoid fever in 1893, the company's creators – and several other interested parties – began a long battle over rights to the cave. The company's official end came in 1900, when the Department of the Interior determined that no one had legal claim to the cave. This decision was the first in a series that led to President Theodore Roosevelt's creation of the Wind Cave National Park in 1903.

Exploration of Wind Cave continues today, as several miles of new cave are surveyed every year. Known passages currently measure over 134.16 miles, making the cave the fourth largest in the world. The park attracts 100,000 visitors each year for tours.

