

Spelunking with Frank Lloyd Wright

Summary:

The year is 1924, and the preeminent architect of the era, Frank Lloyd Wright, has convinced the owners of the Mammoth Caves, in Kentucky, the Croghan family to let him design a state of the art visitor center that would be a showcase to the cave system. However, not all is well at the work site. Wright's design goes deep into the cave and the working conditions are horrible. And Wright is experimenting with a new kind of cement, made from local limestone, trying to match the color of the natural caves.

Into this comes Floyd Collins, a competitor to the Croghan family. He has started his own competing set of caves, the Crystal Caves and just discovered that it connects to the Mammoth caves. A little industrial action and it may come down to a shooting war between the two owners.

Into this is thrust the IDE Team. Based on an old story told to them by a Fringewalker and an Old Man, they think that there maybe either a Commonwealth or Tehrmelern base in the cave system. But with security as tight as it is, they really don't have a good way to get in. That is, until Wright orders the delivery of a reproduction Spanish Mission Church Bell. It's to be delivered by another company, one the team could intercept and deliver, getting a chance to enter the caves.

Exploring the caves is going to be difficult, even for experienced spelunkers. Getting lost is a real possibility, and getting trapped a more likely one. To make things more difficult, if they did intercept the bell shipment, Wright finds out and sends his workmen after them, at the same time Collins springs another accident. With a real threat of being crushed alive, or beaten to within an inch of their lives, they will have to find way not to have either event happen, at least to them.

Possible events: Confronting the real shippers and getting a hold the bell.

Trying to bluff their way past Wright and his workers.

Convince Collins to let them use his caves as a way into Mammoth Caves.

A collapse of passage way blocks their escape.

They face a chimney, a vertical tunnel, and have to climb up it, no easy feat.

Is there a facility in the caves. Yes, but it's not intact and hasn't been used for a couple thousand years. What was it for? It was a Commonwealth command post during the War. But with the damage caused by the limestone makes it harder to determine what it was used for and why it was put in the mountains of Kentucky.

The lowers levels flood. Weddings taking place. Might find some keys. System could be fixed a bit, enough to turn on and ping the system. Are there other installations? yes.

Old Man Joshua

The team picks up a rumor from an ancient Old Man, Joshua, who, along with his pangolisks and broups, wander on to the platform and asked if a warm bed was available. After a good meal and a night's sleep, he offered to tell any tales he knew about the platforms in payment. When asked about any Commonwealth or Tehrmelern bases or facilities, he brightened up and said:

Oh, I know of many, but you've found the ones I knew around here. Well, all but one. If you head back the way I came, about oh, twelve platforms, you'll find a base hidden on a prime world. It's underground and well concealed. It was a Commonwealth war base, since it was naught organic in any way I could tell. I think I can point to where it was on the map.

[A map is provided and he indicates a location in Kentucky.]

Right around there. Big set of caves, but they had a secret entrance to their base that would be hard to find these days, as it was during the peak of the War when I visited there. Yes son, I'm that old. I think it was a war base, back when traveling was easier, when the Big System was running. I didn't get to see too much of it. They ran me off.

Where is it in the caves? Lemme think about that. They took me out by a different route than their main route. Got a pencil or a pen?

[A pen is provided, as is some paper. He then slowly draws a map of how he was taken out of the caves.]

They weren't very neighborly folks, called themselves the Scions of Imperial America or somesuch.

The portal, warp really, is about a 6 hours walk to their secret entrance, about a day's walk from the cave they kicked me out of. Not that I used it, I just thought of a place to go and went. I miss the old system.

If the map Joshua drew is compared to known cave systems in Kentucky, it matches best with Mammoth Caves. Based on his description of the area and the world's natives he had met, it was pre-Columbian North America. He had no idea of how many years before contact.

The Setup

The team is at a forward exploration base doing follow up missions to various worlds within a day's drive. The base is on an alternate with no people, at least none that have been found, and serves as the base of operations for the teams stationed here. A resupply vehicle comes once a week and delivers messages and mail from the core of the UNIDA sphere of influence. The base commander, Ahmed Farman, decides to send a team to scout and get more information. And maybe see if they can find this base. The Team is equipped with gear and selection of period appropriate clothing for different disguises. Also about one ounce of gold dust and silver dust to pay for anything they need on that world. The world has been scouted, so basic information as to which portal they have to use is known, as is the era of that world.

He will provide them with the latest scouting report from the scouting team that had already done an preliminary reconnaissance of the node and the of the Alt Platform:

Scouting Report

Scout Team Leader: Philipp Fischer

Portal 5: We sent the windup through with no mishap. When it returned, it's sample box had bits of a newspaper in it as well as some weeds. The newspaper was the News-Democrat of Russellville, Kentucky. We think America, as the paper mentioned Prohibition events. The date on the paper was June 16, 1923.

After the film developed, we saw that the world side portal was in a warp. It was early morning, we think and no one was around when the windup went through. The film showed that the warp was in the middle of an overgrown patch of trees and weeds in the center of town. We saw several vehicles circa 1920's America parked in the street, so we decided to send one person through to verify where the warp was. Lt. Parsons volunteered to investigate. We used workman outfit #2, Levis, plaid shirt, jeans jacket. We did not have a fedora, so we opted for a stetson. (Note to supplies, we need at least three different period fedoras.)

World Report:

Lt. Evan Parsons.

Report: I crouched down and stepped through the portal so that I could stay out of sight. Bloody warp is in the middle of this town. I was over and under dressed at the same time. However, I didn't stand out too much. I threw the hat back through the warp, as I saw blokes going bareheaded. I switch to the local lingo and ambled out of the "village green" and looked about.

I could smell real coffee brewing at a diner, but with no dosh, no nice cuppa. But I walked about and found the folks here amiable and willing to talk. A lot of the talk was about this foolishness about denying a person a drink. And several folks thought that maybe I knew where to get one.

That's when I gathered the bareheaded chaps were some of the local moonshiners peddling their wares, so to speak. Quite openly too. When I approached them, they gave me what Allison calls "The stink eye", but I was able to allay their concerns. Even got a sample of something that's better used to clean the bumpers of my BMW bike than drink. I hope I won't go blind.

I spent an hour talking to people and getting the lay of the land. Russellville is the county seat for Logan County, Kentucky, US of A. Population over 3,000. Mostly farmers, with some light industry. Nothing to write home about. Nearest big city is Bowling Green to the NE.

I asked about any local jobs and was told "T'aint much hereabouts. But iffen you go to Bowing Gren, you'd find sumth'n." or words to that effect.

When I had my chance, I slipped back into the village green and went back through the warp.

Besides their basic loadout, the Team gets to pick three additional items per player character. A box of ammunition is one item. A crate of ammunition is multiple items. Be reasonable. Once they have outfitted themselves, it's off to the prime world Joshua talked about.

The Roaring Twenties!

World: Roaring Twenties Earth

Type: Prime world, time retarded

Culture: 1920's Earth, current year, 1924

Portals: 1: 30 km NW of Oombulgurii, Western Australia, Australia, Warp, locked

2: 40 km South of Hulun Buir, Inner Mongolia, China, Ring Station, Open

4: 15 km East of Praia do Cepilho, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Warp, Open

5: Russellville, Kentucky, United States of America, Warp, Open

7: Saweni Beach, Fiji, Warp, Locked

8: 2 km East of Leith, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Warp, Locked

10: 50 km South of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, Warp, Locked

11: Puerto Ángel, Oaxaca, México, Warp, Locked

GM, you can assume that this world has been scouted, and the location of the warps duly noted. Only the Open warps are known. As is the location of the warp in Russellville. It's in the town square, which is slowly being overgrown by bushes and trees. So it's possible for the team to sneak into the town with only a small chance of being seen.

A period compatible set of maps from the USGS is available of the city from 1952 and is accurate for the town's layout if you need to know where everything is:

http://ngmdb.usgs.gov/img4/ht_icons/Browse/KY/KY_Russellville_709659_1952_24000.jpg

http://ngmdb.usgs.gov/img4/ht_icons/Browse/KY/KY_Dennis_708529_1952_24000.jpg

Scene 1: Welcome to Russelville

Goals for the scene:

- Getting Money
- Gather information on the area. Especially Mammoth Caves.
- Find transportation to Bowling Green or Mammoth Caves.

Getting Money

Exchanging the gold and silver dust can be done at the bank. Be aware that this will be unusual, so the person doing the exchange will have to have a good story why they have gold and silver dust. This would be a Charm or Persuasion check, and success gets them \$20 for the gold and \$5 dollars for the silver. (The average farmer earns about \$50 a month, so \$25 is a large sum of money.)

Failure will get a visit from the local sheriff asking a lot of personal and prying questions as to why someone LIKE YOU would be having gold dust on their person. This would be a Difficult persuasion check to convince the sheriff the person is on the up and up. Failure results in the person being arrested and thrown into jail.

The PC will be in jail for only just the night, and then released on their own recognizance. The gold and silver will not be returned.

If they lose the gold and silver dust, they will have to find a job. Jobs are hard to find in Russellville, especially if you're not white. This will be a persuasion test to get a job for each PC looking for work.

Getting Work

Result

Critical Failure: Arrested for vagrancy, put on the next train to Bowling Green to get rid of you.

Failure: No work is found for this person.

Average Success: A menial job is found. Pays 30 cents a day.

Good Success: A decent job doing manual labor is found. Pay is 40 cents a day. This is the best job a non-white PC can find.

Great Success: PC has skills that are very useful and earns \$1 a day at this job.

A room for a week will run about \$2 in the “good” part of town. In the poor part of town, a PC can get room for around 10 cents a night, if you don’t mind the bedbugs and other vermin.

Gather information

Folks in Russellville are of a good sort and are willing to talk to folks. However, this is the 1920’s America, in the South, so non-white characters will either be ignored or talked down to. There is an African American population in this town, small, only 40 living on the outskirts of town, mostly farmers.

Asking about possible jobs nets the same response Lt. Parsons got. Most folks know about Mammoth Caves and what they are willing to share will require some form of persuasion check. This should be a graduated test, that is, the PC that asks about what’s going on in the region will get more information the better they roll on their check. If they fail the first attempt, each subsequent attempts will be at a penalty.

Information Check

Result

Critical Failure: They are confronted and accused of being Bolsheviks. If not beaten up, they are run out of town.

Failure: Some sort of work is going on around near Bowling Green. Not really certain what’s going on.

Average Success: They got some hotshot architect building something out at the Mammoth Caves. They may be hiring folks at Bowling Green I reckon.

Good Success: They got this architect, Frank Wright I hear, building something at the Mammoth Caves. The Croghan family hired him to do something special out there I hear. They got an office in Bowling Green, where they is a hiring laborers of all sorts.

Great Success: Well you is in luck mister/miss! I just quit working for that madman Frank Lloyd Wright! He is the most particular man I have ever run into! He’s real fussy as to where things are and will scream at you iffen you put a chair in the wrong place. He’s also going deep into the caves, an’ more than a couple of fellows have gotten hurt in there. I quit when I found it was gonna be my turn in the mouth of hell. If you’re serious, they have an office on Main Street in Bowling Green, 118 North Main, and they are always hiring folks with strong backs and weak minds.

Researching the newspaper archives at the News Democrat will yield several stories about the project, a new entrance to the Mammoth Caves along with a place to buy food, souvenirs, and the like. There are also stories about several deaths at the caves, some suspicious. It will take a research or investigation check to dig up anything else about the caves.

Information Check

Result

Failure: No further information is found.

Average Success: The Croghan Family has been engaged in a feud with one Floyd Collins. Collins owns another cave nearby, The Crystal Caves. He's taken them to court more than once for various things. Lost every case.

Good Success: The previous result and Collins was recently implicated in a cave-in at Mammoth Caves. A worker claims to have seen him. Authorities are investigating.

Great Success: The previous two results and Collins was cleared of charges after he was able to prove he was at a dinner the same time the cave-in occurred.

Getting Transportation

Getting to either Bowling Green or the Mammoth Caves can be done. PCs can walk to Bowling Green, it's only 27 miles away. But, due to the terrain, it can take anywhere from 8 hours to 11 hours to get there. A successful navigation, survival, or orienteering check will get the PCs to Bowling green in 8 hours. Tired, but there. A failed check means they took the long way there and it takes 11 hours to get to Bowling Green, arriving in the early evening. A critical failure means they got lost and they don't know where they are. However, farmhouses are plenty, and successful Charisma/persuasion check will get them sorted out, but they won't get to Bowling Green until 2AM the next day.

There is also a train that runs through Russellville and goes to Bowling Green. Runs 6 times a day, and a ticket costs 10 cents. Trip takes around 30 minutes.

Hitchhiking is also an option. But if there is more than two people at a time trying to get a ride this will increase the difficulty of having someone stop. Once an hour, make either a Charm or Persuasion check and see if someone stops and offers them a ride. Increase the difficulty by one step for each additional person trying to get a ride over 2. At the very worst, the PCs will have to go separately in groups of 2 or 3. They will be dropped in different locations in Bowling Green and will have to find each other.

Scene 2: Bowling Green

Goals for the scene:

- Determine what their course of action will be to get to Mammoth Caves:
 - Get hired as workers on the Project.
 - Get hired as drivers to deliver the replica Mission Bell.
 - Intercept the delivery of the Mission Bell and deliver it themselves.
 - Contact Floyd Collins and enlist his help to gain access to Mammoth Caves.
 - Something completely different. (I.E. Plan Z. Don't railroad your players, let them figure out what to do.)
- Arrange for a place to stay.
- Make more money if necessary.
- Locate workers from Wright's project in town and pump for information.
- Option: Contact Frank Lloyd Wright directly.
- Option: Sneak out to Mammoth Cave and break in.
- Option: Break into Crystal Cave and sneak in.

Frank Lloyd Wright is Hiring!

On 118 North Main Street in Bowling Green, is the Thurstin Building. This where Frank Lloyd Wright has set up shop as both as a design studio and a recruiting office. The first floor houses accounts, hiring managers, and other staff. The second floor is Wright's studio, where he and his crew of architects are constantly revising and updating the plans for the Visitor Center at Mammoth Caves. Wright has outfitted one of the rooms with a cot where he sleeps some nights. Otherwise, he lives at a house he rented with his wife Olga, his daughter baby

daughter Iovanna, and his step daughter Svetlana. He's only in the office on Wednesdays and Fridays, otherwise he's out at the jobsite micro-managing everything.

They are always hiring general laborers. If you can swing a pick or haul cement, you can get a good job that pays 60 cents a day! If you have any applicable skills or even leadership abilities, you might be able to swing a job as an office clerk or as a foreman which pays a dollar or more a day. If you're a man.

If you're a woman, they already have their quota of cooks and cleaners, though a good interview can get you a job at the site as part of the kitchen staff.

If the characters apply as general laborers, they just have to show they can do the work. It's a simple physical test, pass it and you're hired! For anything else, it's a difficult test, as Wright wants people who know their stuff. The character will have a pass a difficult test using the skill they claim to possess. Pass it, and they are hired. A normal failure, they will be offered a job as a general laborer. A disastrous failure gets them kicked out of the office and told not to come back.

Once hired, the next day they will be trucked out to the worker's camp at the Mammoth Caves. Any women hired to work at the caves will be put up in a boarding house in Park City and driven to work every morning.

Trying to get information about what is going on will find that Wright's employees are fairly tight lipped and unwilling to divulge any information. At least at the office. At the local speakeasy, if you're buying, they are willing to share information.