

# The Man Behind the Map

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## Abstract

In 1992 I (Chuck DeCroix) was trained to lead the Wild Cave tour offered to the public at Mammoth Cave. I was especially impressed with areas such as Becky's Alley, Lida's Pass, and Gerta's Grotto that were highlights of the tour and featured on Kämper's map. Very little was known about these sections of cave – i.e., when they were discovered, who they were named after, etc. The Kämper map was an important reference used for the Wild Cave tour, and the activity would typically conclude with visitors gathered around the guide highlighting the tour route on their copies of the map.

My fascination with the Kämper map inspired me to start researching the various passages featured on the Wild Cave route. I utilized cave signatures, historical references, and genealogical connections to piece the puzzle together. In the summer of 1996, I took Dr. Stan Sides' "History of Exploration" course offered through Western Kentucky University. Stan and I talked about Max Kämper and I shared my findings with him and the class over the course of the week. Many Sunday mornings to follow were spent at Stan and Kay's cabin talking history over coffee. Stan realized the importance of studying the Kämper map and also the need to actually find out what happened to Max after he left Mammoth Cave.

One day in the summer of 1996, Rick Olson's phone rang, and a man with a German accent introduced himself as Bernd Kliebhan. He explained that the president of the Cave Research Foundation, Phil DiBlasi, had recommended that he call Rick in the hope that he could help facilitate Bernd's research on E. A. Martel, who had visited Mammoth Cave in 1912. Rick had recently returned from the National Speleological Society convention in Salida, Colorado and had seen Bernd's outstanding film on Martel, "Journey into Darkness," which had won first place in the motion picture category. Rick sought and received permission to assist Bernd in his historical research at the park. In a way this was surprising, because history is a fair piece from ecology (Rick's area of responsibility at the park), but it is a tribute to the park's leadership that they could be this flexible when the situation called for it.

A few days later, on September 3, 1996, Bernd called from his hotel in Cave City and Rick drove down to meet him. After some discussion about what Bernd wanted to see and do while in the area, Rick asked Bernd if he had ever heard of Max Kämper. He replied that he was not familiar with this name. Rick explained that Max had made a map of Mammoth Cave back in 1908, but that we knew nothing about him except a rumor that he had been killed in World War I. Bernd was, of course, intrigued that a fellow countryman was so highly revered at Mammoth Cave. Rick said there was someone else at the park that Bernd needed to meet, and I had the great pleasure of meeting him and spending time with him in the cave. There was precious little information on Martel at Mammoth Cave and, thankfully, Stan Sides had already compiled what there was. So, in addition to showing Bernd places like Martel Avenue, Rick and I spent the next three days going to places in the cave that provided clues to Max Kämper's story. As we talked about Martel and Bernd's research, we consistently mentioned the great challenge of trying to track down Max Kämper and his possible descendents. Rick was especially good at emphasizing how important this project was, and after several friendly suggestions, a jovially exasperated Bernd assured us that he would do his best to find Max Kämper. Bernd returned to Germany with a new mission, and the rest of the story is history!