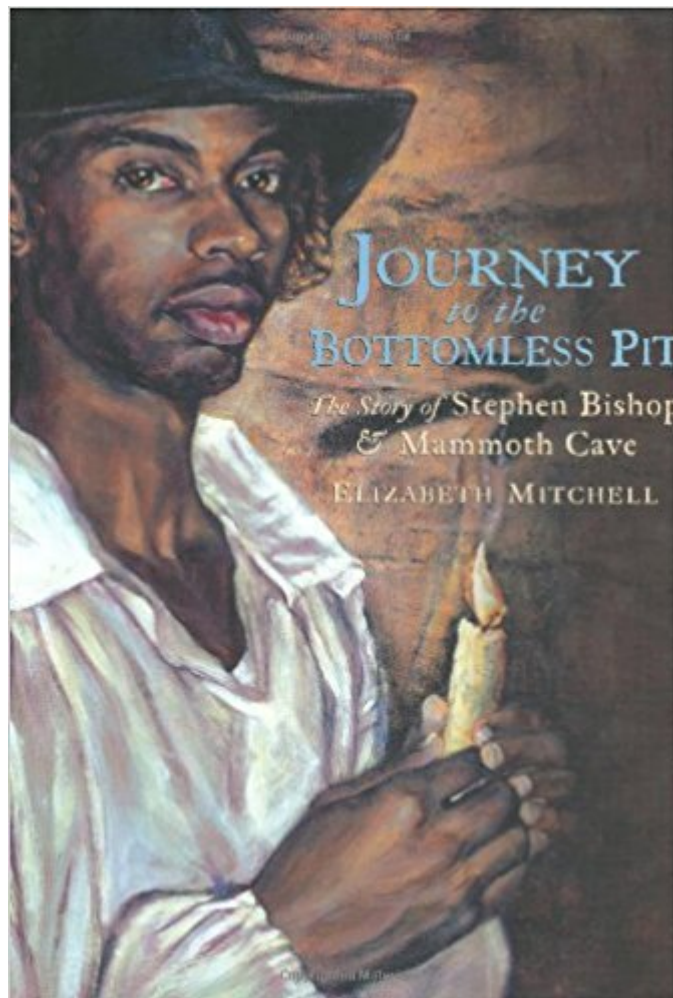




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Journey To The Bottomless Pit: The Story Of Stephen Bishop And Mammoth Cave



Synopsis

If you toured Mammoth Cave in Kentucky around the year 1838, you would have been led by candlelight through miles of dark winding tunnels, to the edge of a terrifying bottomless pit, and curiously, a church built underground. Your tour guide would have been seventeen-year-old Stephen Bishop, an African American, and a slave. Bishop had a job he found truly thrilling--exploring and recording every inch of his exciting adventures at Mammoth Cave and escorting tourists to show them his discoveries. Luckily, by being so successful in this job, Bishop was able to avoid the grueling labor most slaves endured. Full of adventure and fascinating details about cave exploration *Journey to the Bottomless Pit* is the first book for young readers ever written about Stephen Bishop. Through Stephen Bishop's story, author Betsy Mitchell takes readers on a tour unlike anything they've experienced.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 760L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 128 pages

Publisher: Viking Juvenile (October 25, 2004)

Language: English

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Product Dimensions: 6.7 x 0.6 x 9.3 inches

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Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews

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[United States > 1800s](#)

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

Grade 4-8
This is a fictionalized account of a slave who gave tours of Mammoth Cave, beginning in 1838 when he was 17. When Bishop's master bought the cave for \$5000, much of it was still unexplored and unmapped. The story describes how the young man, a curious and

dedicated guide, discovers many of its features, including an underground river and fish without eyes. Starting with the known facts of the man's life, Mitchell imagines what he might have been thinking, feeling, and saying as he leads tours. She highlights his innate thirst for knowledge, which allowed him to become an expert on the site, as well as his good-natured personality. Details about the status of and attitudes toward slaves at the time are incorporated into the narrative.

Black-and-white illustrations, with lots of atmospheric shading, highlight the action. This book would make for great reading before or after a visit to Mammoth Cave, but also has broader appeal as a human-interest story. —Laurie von Mehren, Cuyahoga County Public Library, Brecksville, OH Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Gr. 4-8. The thrilling setting is the focus of this novel about Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, which Mitchell shapes around the astonishing biography of Stephen Bishop, a slave who, in 1838 at the age of 17, became the cave's explorer and tourist guide. He crawled through tight winding passageways, discovered an underground river, scaled huge rocks, and dared to walk on a rickety ladder across the "Bottomless Pit." Mitchell weaves in the facts of slavery at the time, including Bishop's amazing achievements in learning to read and studying geology. Although the author mentions drawing on accounts of those who toured the cave with Bishop, she cites no sources. It's the story of a young man who works hard and finds his way and the amazing descriptions of the cave that will grab readers. Kids wanting to pay their own visit to the famous landmark will appreciate the final note telling them how to make reservations for a guided tour. Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I love this book. It's challenging and engaging for fourth graders. They really get a sense of the Stephen Bishop and the way he made his mark and lived an important, engaged life in spite of being trapped in slavery. I've had to order used, individual copies as my classroom set wears out. Wish it would stay in print.

A must read for anyone who has been able to go on the historical tour of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. Its targeted for 10-11 year olds but we all enjoyed it!!

For school reading project. Good Condition!

Sent as a gift

Very disappointing book that did not have the information I expected. I was looking for information on cave diving underwater caves.

Let's say you hear about a historical figure that strikes you as so interesting that you'd like to write a book about them. A book for children, say. When you make the decision to write such a book, two possible ways of proceeding are open to you. You can make your book a fascinating work of non-fiction that adheres strictly to the facts of the case. Or, you can take the already existing facts and use fictional dialogue to cushion the details of this person's life, thereby making it more interesting to your intended audience. Now, if you decide to go with the latter you've placed your book in a peculiar position. On the one hand, your story is about a real person who really existed. On the other hand, because you made up dialogue and situations that may never have happened in the way you've described them, your book is doomed to the fiction shelves of the library. Author Elizabeth Mitchell, when she learned the details of explorer Stephen Bishop's life, decided to go the fiction route. Personally, I feel that this was bad decision to make on her part. For while this book contains a multitude of wonderful details and facts about a fascinating man, Mitchell has couched her book in stilted dialogue and poor writing. She would have done better to stick to the facts. Stephen Bishop was born a slave in the state of Kentucky in 1821. His owner Frank Gorin, owned the Mammoth Caves and needed a tour guide to schlep tourists in the busy summer months. Enter Stephen. Fascinated with the caves, Stephen proceeded to explore beyond the usual paths. As he did so, he would find more and more beautiful areas and hidden passages. He discovered blind cave fish (never before seen), huge gypsum caverns, and miles and miles of caves stretching under the land of Kentucky. He even created maps of the areas he had found that helped others explore as well. Though he died a short time after he was freed (at the young age of thirty-six), Bishop is remembered as being the first and most important guide of the impressive Mammoth Caves today. The story is, as Elizabeth Mitchell rightly says, captivating. Cleverly, she has included Stephen's maps on the front and endpapers of the book. Mitchell also tells the reader, right off the bat, that she has reproduced his life with as much accuracy as possible and that the dialogue, "is not reproduced from any source". I commend Mitchell for her choice of subject. Stephen Bishop, rightly, deserves to be remembered for his great life and magnificent accomplishments. I personally believe, however, that an entirely factual book of this fellow would not have been out of place. Consider similar books about other people who lived in the 1800s. There is the book, "Phineas Gage", by John Fleischman. Here we have a beautiful non-fiction text with color photographs and

engravings that is the perfect way to tell the story of a 19th century life. Think how wonderful, "Journey to the Bottomless Pit" would have been, had it been done in a similar format. When you read this book, you hear about eyeless fish and beautiful stalactites. Wouldn't it be great to see beautiful color photographs of them as well? Instead, you must rely on illustrator Kelynn Alder's black and white drawings. These pictures are nice, no question, but you can't help but wish that you could see the caves for yourself in a far more lively format. You might argue that good non-fiction subjects have been given a similar fictional treatment to Stephen Bishop and that those books have been good. This is true, of course. There's just one small problem. Mitchell, for all that she is great at choosing the best details to highlight in her story, is not a good writer. Her language is stilted and cloying. Though the book is ostensibly written for kids between the ages of 9-12, the tone of voice taken here would be better for a seven-year-old reader. Stephen constantly is describes as being grateful to his master, proud that he has been chosen, and hoping that he'll do a good job. The wry sense of humor that Stephen had is mentioned here, but Mitchell's not adept enough to give us a taste of it. Worse, there are some truly unbelievable moments that are written solely to spell things out to child readers. Take this for example: "When he first heard the name 'Underground Railroad,' Stephen wondered what kind of train could run for so many miles below ground". Mitchell doesn't seem to give Stephen much credit, and his abject gratitude and innocence makes him seem a very different person from the intelligent guide described by his contemporaries. Had Mitchell been a talented enough writer to pull off the additional passages in this text, the book might have worked brilliantly. As it stands, I yearn for the beautiful glossy-paged non-fiction text this could have been. Will kids read this book? Not without some prodding. It's a fine story and a good adventure tale at times, but children will only ask for this if urged to do so. There is great potential in this material. I can only hope that a future author sees it and capitalizes on it themselves. A great story in a mediocre package.

I thoroughly enjoyed this wonderful book for people of all ages. Stephen Bishop was a great American explorer that most people have never even heard of. His adventures and discoveries deep in Mammoth cave are vividly described in a manner that will captivate the young readers of this book. This is a story of a man born into slavery who deserves the recognition he finally receives in this finely written story of his brief life. The detailed descriptions of Stephen Bishop, Mammoth cave and the turbulent pre-civil war era are enhanced by the excitement of his underground exploits and his quest for knowledge. Two thumbs up! FL Booklover

Great to read before a trip to Mammoth Cave. I have 2 boys 9 and 11 years old they both enjoyed reading this book together as a family.

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