



American Indians at Hot Springs National Park



Archeological Evidence

American Indians occupied land now included within park boundaries by about 3000 years ago. They quarried novaculite here, as raw material for stone tools. American Indians were likely present before then, but that's the earliest archeological evidence currently known. Evidence for American Indians in Arkansas goes back much further.

Similar proof of prehistoric usage doesn't apply to the hot springs themselves, which only occur on the lower west slope of Hot Springs Mountain. American Indians could certainly have been at the springs millennia back, and perhaps they even used the springs, but, if so, no archeological evidence for it has been discovered. The oldest documentation considered reliable by professional researchers dates to 1771. Jean- Bernard Bossu noted during a stay with the Quapaw: "The *Akanças* country is visited very often by western Indians who come here to take baths," for the hot waters "are highly esteemed by native physicians who claim that they are so strengthening." What was meant by "western Indians" was not defined.

Treaties and Myths

In 1818 a treaty with the Quapaw conveyed territory containing the hot springs to the United States. An 1820 treaty designated southwest Arkansas for Choctaw resettlement, but this was amended in 1825 to redirect the Choctaws to Oklahoma. In the 1830s two "Indian removal" routes - for the Choctaw and the Chickasaw - passed about 20 miles to the southeast, with supplies in one instance obtained out of Hot Springs. Individuals from other tribes arrived on the scene occasionally as U.S. policy forced eastern Indians off traditional homelands, and as native peoples began to take increasing part in non- native society. Numerous tales about Indians using the springs have been repeated over the past 200 years or so. Many of these stories are European- American in origin, from an historian's point of view, classifiable as modern folklore.

Affiliated Tribes

The federal government reserved these hot springs in 1832. Today, tribes affiliated with Hot Springs National Park are the Quapaw and the Caddo. The Quapaw still consider the park area to be culturally significant. They continued to visit after Bathhouse Row was established, enjoying baths at the domed edifice bearing their name. This bathhouse, which opened in 1922, was called the Quapaw for promotional reasons. The Caddo lived in the Hot Springs vicinity for many centuries prior to Quapaw influence here. Members of at least one confederation of Caddo (the Natchitoches) still lived in this region during the early 1800s, and would probably have visited the springs.

More Information

A detailed book on this subject- - "*Didn't All the Indians Come Here?*" *Separating Fact from Fiction at Hot Springs National Park*- - is expected to be available around late 2007, in the bookstore at the park visitor center. The park gratefully acknowledges Gary Simmons and Richard Stephens for accompanying artwork.