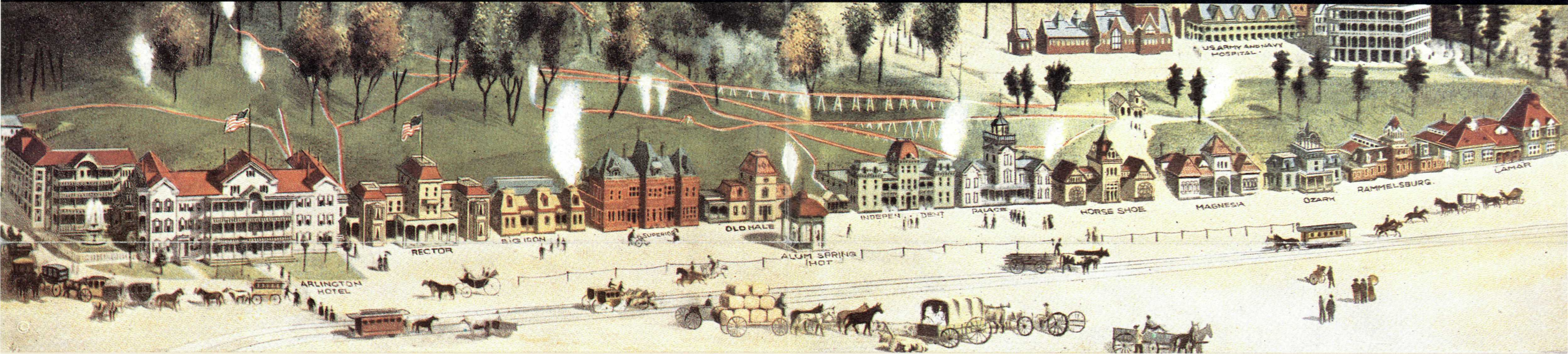


# Hot Springs

National Park  
Arkansas

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## The Budding Spa

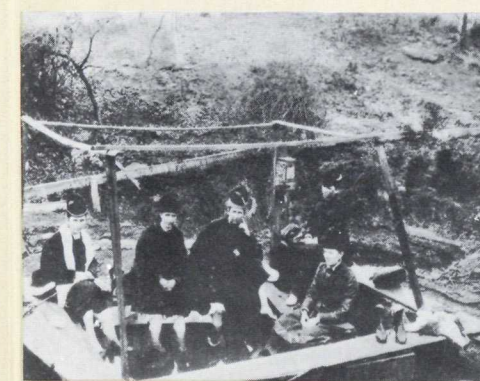
Relaxation. That's what attracts people to Hot Springs. In fact, they have been coming here since the first person stumbled across the hot springs as many as 10,000 years ago. Stone artifacts found near the springs give us firm evidence that Indians used the waters extensively. For them the area became a neutral ground where the different tribes came to hunt, trade, and bathe in peace.

Tradition has it that the first European to see the springs was the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto in 1541. The evidence is incomplete, for one chronicle of the expedition refers only to finding a place of hot and brackish water. It is certain, however, that French trappers, hunters, and traders became familiar with the area in the late-17th century.

The United States acquired the area when the Louisiana Territory was purchased from France in 1803. The next year President Thomas Jefferson dispatched an expedition led by William Dunbar and George Hunter to explore the newly acquired springs. Their report to the President was widely publicized and stirred up interest in the "Hot Springs of the Washita." In the years that followed, more and more people came here to soak in the springs. Soon the idea that they should be reserved for the Nation arose

in Congress. In 1832, the Federal Government took the unprecedented step of setting aside four sections of land as a reservation, the first in the country's history. Little effort was taken to adequately identify the boundaries, and by the mid-19th century claims and counterclaims were filed on the springs and the land surrounding them. Beginning in 1870, a system evolved over 40 years that removed lands from the four-section reservation for development of the city of Hot Springs and for satisfying suits brought before a court of claims. The government at this time also entered into a partnership with private bathhouses in which springwater from a central collection, cooling, and distribution system was furnished to them and the bathhouses assumed the task of caring for the bathers. It was a partnership that prepared Hot Springs for its development as a national spa.

By 1921, the year the Hot Springs Reservation became a national park, prosperity was filling Americans' pocketbooks so that they could afford more leisure time. Monumental bathhouses along Bathhouse Row built in the previous decade catered to crowds of health seekers. These new establishments, full of the latest equipment, were planned to satisfy and pamper the bather in the most artful of surroundings. Marble and tile decorated walls, floors, and partitions. Some rooms sported polished brass,



The earliest bathhouses (above) were crude structures of canvas and lumber, little more than tents, that perched over individual springs or reservoirs carved out of the rock. Later, timber structures, which were subject

to fire and rot, were built along the east side of Hot Springs Creek. This creek, besides draining its own watershed, collected the runoff of the springs and had a tendency to be muddy. It also flooded in rainy weather



and stagnated during the dry season. In 1877, the creek was put into a channel, roofed over, and the road above eventually paved. Today this is Central Avenue.

murals, fountains, statues, and even stained glass. Gymnasiums and beauty shops helped the cure-seekers in their efforts to feel and look better.

World War II slowed down the commercial activity, for the armed services took over the facilities for use by servicemen, but in 1946 the bathers were back in record-breaking numbers. Since that time, however, the numbers taking the waters have diminished and some bathhouses have closed.

Despite the decline, bathing continues to be a popular pastime for old and young alike. A full range of options is available today: tub and pool baths, shower, steam cabinet, hot and cold packs, whirlpool, massage, or alcohol rub. The bathhouses are owned and operated by private concessioners who provide services in accordance with regulations and inspections by the National Park Service. Information about rates, services, and a program for indigents can be obtained at the bathhouses or the park visitor center. Do not pass up the opportunity to take advantage of the experience of bathing. In a few hours you can find more relaxation and pleasure than you had anticipated. And you will join a long line of people who have bathed in the Hot Springs of Arkansas—a line that goes back 10,000 years.

## What's Special About This Water?

The most important thing about Hot Springs' thermal water is that it is naturally sterile. For this reason the National Aeronautics and Space Administration selected this water in which to hold moon rocks while looking for signs of life. During the many years the springs were uncovered the absence of bacteria in the water

helped to prevent the spread of disease. Today all but two of the springs have been capped to prevent contamination. These two can be found behind the Maurice Bathhouse. A ranger (right) tells tourists about the springwater, which contains traces of minerals that, combined with the water's temperature of 61.6°C (143°F), give it whatever therapeutic properties it may have.

The minerals that have been identified by chemical analysis are: silica 42 milligrams per liter, calcium 45, magnesium 4.8, sodium 4, potassium 1.5, bicarbonate 165, sulfate 8, chloride 1.8, fluoride .2, oxygen 3, and free carbon dioxide 10.



## Rainwater to Springwater

To the northeast of the springs, outcroppings of Bigfork Chert and Arkansas Novaculite absorb rainfall and through the pores and fractures in the rock, conduct the water deep into the Earth. There the water comes in contact with highly heated rock and begins its journey to the surface in the faults and joints of Hot Springs

Sandstone. Carbon dating of the water has determined that the journey the water makes through the rocks takes an average of 4,000 years. The combined flow of all the springs averages 3,214 cubic meters (850,000 gallons) per day. The hillside where the upper springs came to the surface before they were enclosed is located above the Promenade. Some other springs can

be found in a belt behind the bathhouses.

Hundreds of tourists once crowded the elegant bathhouses (left) and then strolled on the walkways (right) that lace the grounds. A sense of solitude remains today amidst the faded glory of the past.





## Traditions Endure for Today's Visitor

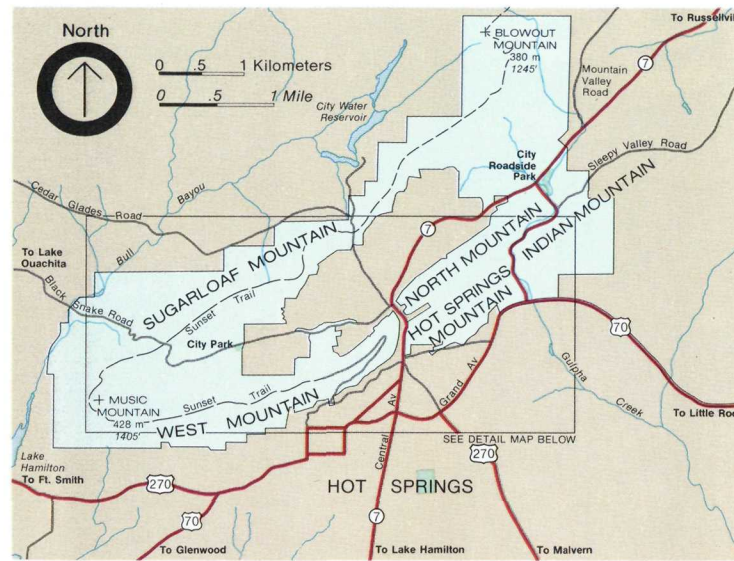
The park is situated in the Zig Zag Mountains southwest of Little Rock. The tops are the erosion-resistant remnants of strongly folded layers of novaculite and sandstone. Music Mountain is the highest point in this small mountain system and is the center of a great horseshoe-shaped ridge that ends at Sugarloaf and West Mountains. The mountains are covered with dense oak-hickory forests and short-leaf pines. Flowering trees are common, and every season has displays of colored leaves and abundant flowers. Noteworthy are redbud and dogwood in the spring, and southern magnolia in summer.

**Services** At the park headquarters and visitor center, on the corner of Central and Reserve Avenues, you can see exhibits featuring the geology of the springs and the local area, the natural and human history of the region, and the development of the bathing establishments. A 12-minute slide program is shown regularly in the auditorium. Interpretive program schedules are available at various points in the park and provide information about campfire talks at the Gulpha Gorge Campground, conducted hikes, cultural demonstrations, bathhouse tours, and other programs that may be available.

**Accommodations** The park's campground is located in Gulpha Gorge 3.2 kilometers (2 miles) northeast of downtown Hot Springs. Tables and fireplaces are provided for both tent and trailer campers; there are no electrical or water connections. From April 1 to October 31 stays are limited to 14 days with an annual limit of 30 days.

The city of Hot Springs, a separate municipality not under National Park Service jurisdiction, surrounds part of the park. The city has many large hotels with accommodations for large groups. There are also smaller hotels, motels, boarding and rooming houses, and furnished or unfurnished cottages on Lake Hamilton. Write to the Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 1500, Hot Springs, AR 71901, for more detailed information.

**Things to Do** Hot Springs has a favorable climate all year. The winters are mild and, except for infrequent intervals, outdoor recreation can be enjoyed year round. You may wish to hike or ride horseback on the attractive wooded trails or fish in nearby Lakes Catherine, Hamilton, or Ouachita. Boating and sporting supplies are available at the lakes. Scenic drives wind throughout



the park to points where you can see great expanses of woodland and distant mountains. Other overlooks give panoramic views of the city. Goat Rock, accessible by trail only, juts from the east face of Hot Springs Mountain; it's a great place for viewing Indian Mountain.

**How to Reach the Park** By car the approaches are via U.S. 270, 70, and Ark. 7. Continental Trailways provides bus service to Hot Springs. Rio Airways has flights into Hot Springs, Memorial Airport.

**Regulations** Drive with care on park roads; they are mountainous and designed for slow travel. Bicycles and motorcycles are prohibited on the trails. Please help keep the park clean. Build fires only in fireplaces. Keep your pet on a leash. Commercial activity within the park is restricted to those holding contracts or permits with the Federal Government. Removal of any plant, object, or rock is not permitted. Leave the park as you found it.

The park is administered by the National Park Service. For further information write to the superintendent. His address is P.O. Box 1860, Hot Springs, AR 71901.

