

G. Sears

Hot Springs National Park is an unusual blend of a highly developed park in a small city surrounded by low lying mountains abounding in plantlife and wildlife. It is a park with a past, too. The lithograph on the cover (above) shows Bathhouse Row as it looked in 1888. None of these bathhouses exists in this form today, although some of the names live on in present-day structures. They either burned or were torn down to make way for new, fireproof structures. The Fordyce Bathhouse sits on the site of the Palace in the above drawing. The water boy with his pot

and glasses (far left) was a familiar sight in the late 1800s. From left to right photographs reveal the diverse attractions of Hot Springs National Park today. In all seasons but winter, rangers lead tours to the open hot springs. Many flowers, including these late summer asters, bloom along the park's hiking trails. Brilliant autumn foliage can be viewed from scenic mountain drives. The historic Buckstaff Bathhouse offers a chance to relax in the hot spring water.



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**Water.** That's what attracts people to Hot Springs. They have been coming here since the first person discovered these hot springs perhaps 10,000 years ago. Old documents indicate that American Indians knew about and used the hot springs during the late 1700s and early 1800s, as their ancestors may have done. Local legend celebrates the area as a neutral ground, where different tribes came to hunt, trade, and bathe in peace. Surely they drank the springwater, too, for the water with its minerals and gases has a pleasant taste and smell. These traces of minerals, combined with a temperature of 143°F, are credited with giving the waters whatever therapeutic properties they may have. Waters from the cold springs, which have different chemical components and properties, are also used for drinking. Besides determining the chemical composition and origins of the waters, scientists have determined that the waters flowing from these hot springs are more than 4,000 years old. The waters gush at an average rate of 850,000 gallons a day!

Tradition has it that the first Europeans to see the springs were the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto and his troops in 1541. French trappers, hunters, and traders became familiar with the area in the late 17th century. In 1803 the United States acquired the area when it purchased the Louisiana Territory from France, and 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 waters. Soon the idea of "reserving" the springs for the nation took root, and a proposal was submitted to the Congress by the territorial representative, Ambrose H. Sevier. Then, in 1832, the Federal Government took the unprecedented step of setting aside four sections of land here, the first U.S. reservation made simply to protect a natural resource. Little effort was made to mark the boundaries adequately and, by the mid-1800s, claims and counterclaims were filed on the springs and the land surrounding them.

The earliest bathhouses were crude structures of canvas and lumber, little more than tents perched over individual springs or reservoirs carved out of the rock. Later, wooden structures were built, but they frequently burned, collapsed because of shoddy construction, or rotted due to continued exposure to water and steam. Hot Springs Creek, which ran right through the middle of

all this activity, drained its own watershed and collected the runoff of the springs. Generally it was an eyesore—dangerous at times of high water, and mere collections of stagnant pools at dry times. In 1884 the creek was put into a channel, roofed over, and a road laid down above it. Today this is Central Avenue.

In the 1870s the government continued to control the springs and to reserve certain areas as federal property. Private bathhouses, under the supervision of the Federal Government, were allowed to be built. These establishments ranged from the simple to the luxurious. The government even operated a U.S. Free Bathhouse and a Public Health facility. Gradually Hot Springs came to be called "The National Spa," and such slogans as "Uncle Sam Bathes the World" and "The Nation's Health Sanitarium" were used to promote the city. By 1921, the Hot Springs Reservation was such a popular destination for vacationers and seekers of health remedies that the new National Park Service's first director, Stephen Mather, convinced Congress to declare the reservation the 18th national park. Monumental bathhouses built along Bathhouse Row about that time catered to crowds of health-seekers. These new establishments, full of the latest equipment, pampered the bather in artful surroundings. Marble and tile decorated the walls, floors, and partitions. Some rooms sported polished brass, murals, fountains, statues, and even stained glass. Gymnasiums and beauty shops helped cure-seekers in their efforts to feel and look better.

The Army/Navy Hospital (now the Hot Springs Rehabilitation Center) just above the south end of Bathhouse Row contributed to a continued high level of activity during and immediately after World War II. Shortly thereafter, changes in medical technology and in the use of leisure time resulted in a rapid decline in water therapies. People also started to prefer taking to the open roads in their own cars rather than traveling by train to a specified destination and staying in a hotel for a week or two. One by one, as business declined, the bathhouses began to close. Today only one of the buildings on Bathhouse Row operates as a traditional bathhouse.

Despite the decline, bathing continues to be a popular pastime. A full range of options is available today: tub and pool baths, shower, steam cabinet, hot and cold packs, whirlpool, and massage. The bathhouses are operated by private concessioners or special use permit-holders who provide services in accordance with regulations and inspections by the National Park Service. Information about rates and services can be obtained at the bathhouses or the Hot Springs National Park Visitor Center.

Do not pass up the opportunity to take advantage of the experience of bathing in the hot spring waters. In a couple of hours you may find more relaxation and pleasure than you had ever imagined. You will join a long line of people who have bathed in the Hot Springs of Arkansas—a line that goes back centuries.

## What's Special About This Water?

It is odorless, tasteless, and colorless—in contrast to many other natural springs. Visitors in the 19th century strolled Bathhouse Row with cups, to "quaff the elixir" at springs and fountains. Their 20th-century counterparts carry bottles to jug fountains that dispense the popular liquid. The water is tested regularly to ensure safety. Its most abundant minerals are bicarbonate, calcium, and

silica, dissolved from rocks thousands of feet below the Earth's surface. Jug fountain signs offer a more comprehensive list of mineral contents. Various open springs and a spring cascade on the Arlington Lawn give an idea of what the area would be like if all the springs were open with water pouring down the hillside into the creek.

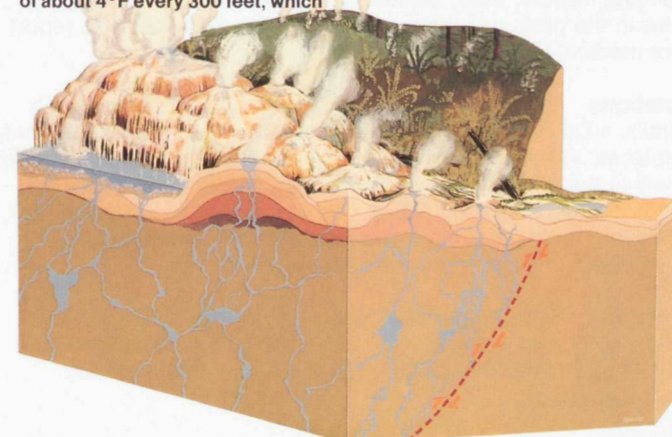


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## What Makes This Water Hot?

In an arc from the northwest around to the east, outcroppings of Bigfork Chert and Arkansas Novaculite absorb rainfall. The pores and fractures in the rock conduct the water deep into the Earth. As the water percolates downward, the increasingly warmer rock heats it at a rate of about 4°F every 300 feet, which

is the average geothermal gradient worldwide. There is no evidence that this water is heated volcanically. Eventually the water meets the faults and joints in the Hot Springs Sandstone leading up to the lower west side of Hot Springs Mountain, where it flows to the surface.



## Restoration Efforts

With the decline of bathing in the 1950s, the bathhouses began to close their doors and to fall into disrepair. On Bathhouse Row only the Buckstaff remains open at the present time. In the 1980s local citizens and the National Park Service began exploring ways to return the bathhouses and Bathhouse Row to the splendor, if not the function, of Hot Springs in its heyday. This has resulted in the fortuitous union of private and public money, with public

guidance, to return the exteriors of the buildings to their original splendor. The interiors are being restored and adapted for a multitude of new uses under the provisions of a historic property leasing program. This is an example of the merger of the needs of the future with the preservation of the past and is an essential element in the revitalization of Bathhouse Row and downtown Hot Springs.



## The Fordyce

In May 1989 the Fordyce Bathhouse reopened its doors after having undergone extensive restoration. To someone who visited this bathhouse between 1915 and 1920, little is changed, the restoration has been that thorough. All of the women's side and some of the men's side of

the building have been equipped with the furniture, steam cabinets, mechano-therapy machinery, tubs, massage tables, sitz tubs, Hubbard tub, chiropody tools, billiard table, Knabe piano, beauty parlor, and hydrotherapy equipment prevalent in those days.

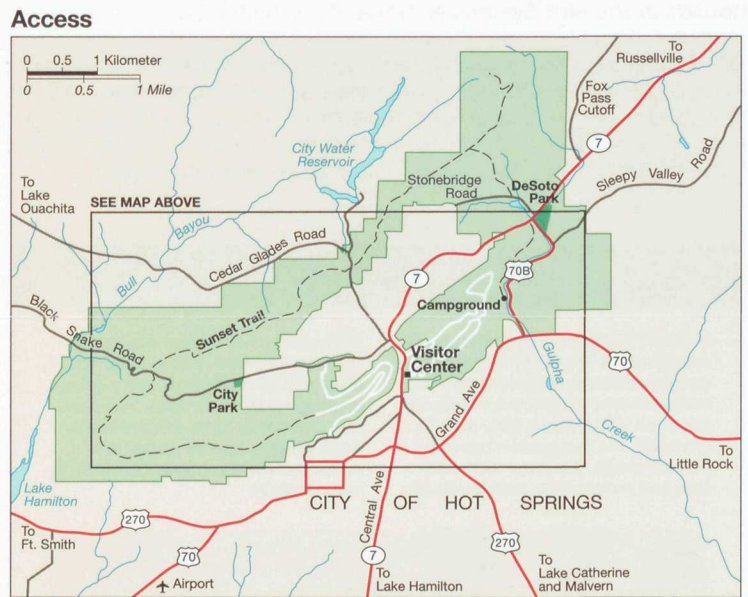
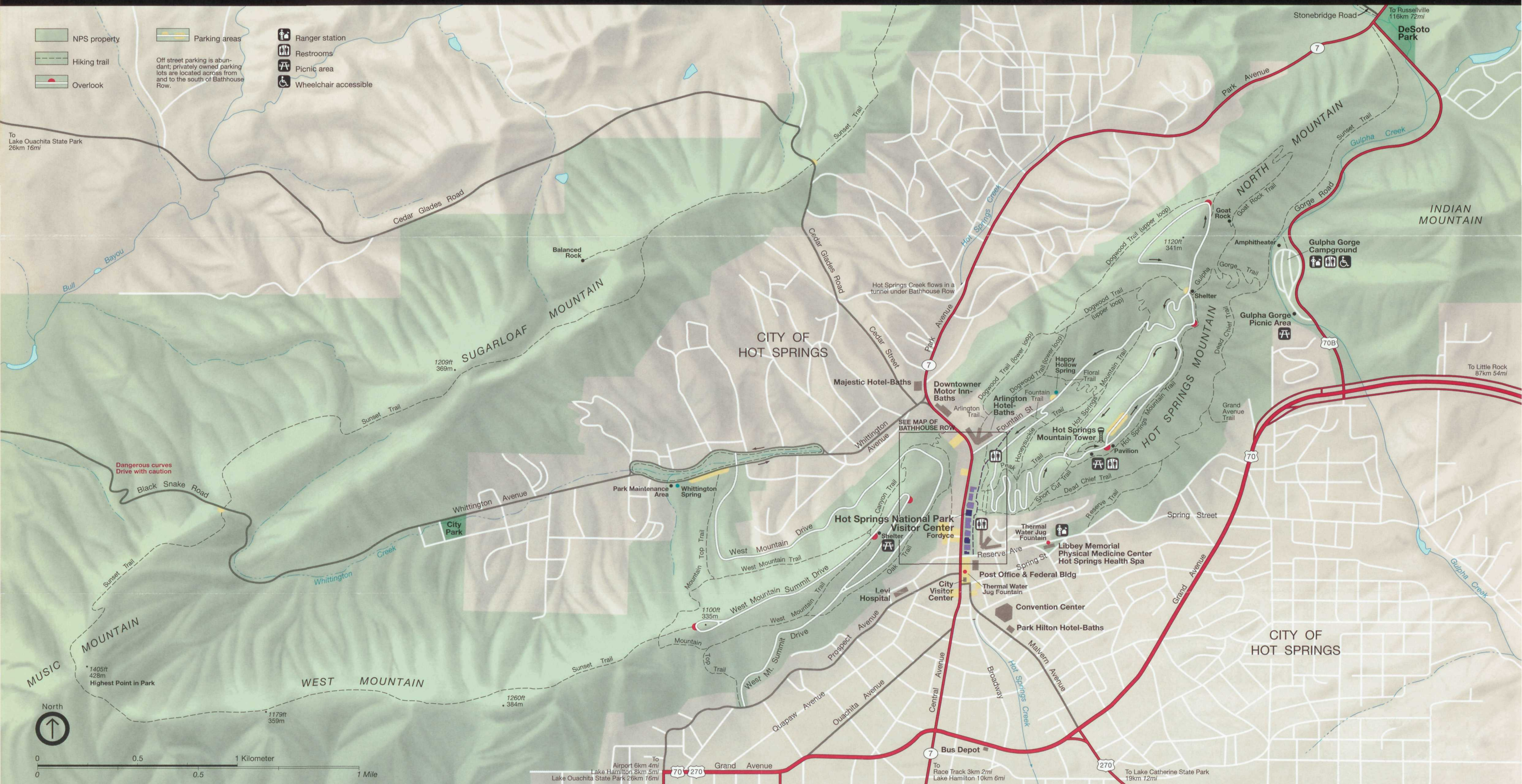


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# Hot Springs

Hot Springs National Park  
Arkansas

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



The park lies about 55 miles southwest of Little Rock, Arkansas, in the Zig Zag Mountains on the eastern edge of the Ouachita Range. The mountaintops are the erosion-resistant remnants of folded layers of novaculite and sandstone. Music Mountain is the highest point in the small mountain system and is the center of a great horseshoe-shaped ridge whose ends are Sugarloaf and West Mountains. The hot springs are located on the lower western side of Hot Springs Mountain, opposite the southern end of the horseshoe. Dense forests of oak, hickory, and short-leaf pine dominate this region. Flowering trees are common here, and successive seasons have displays of colored leaves and abundant flowers. The red-bud and dogwood bloom in the early spring, gracing the understorey of the pine and hardwood woodlands. Flowering southern magnolias lend historic Bathhouse Row a special beauty, particularly in the early summer. Song birds and small animals are abundant in the forest.

**Visitor Center** The restored Fordyce Bathhouse, in the middle of Bathhouse Row, in the 300 block of Central Avenue, is the park visitor center. Exhibits and films orient visitors to Hot Springs and tell the story of thermal water bathing. Twenty-three restored rooms are furnished as they appeared during the heyday of the spa. Tours are available for organized groups upon request. During the summer an expanded schedule of interpretive activities includes walks that describe the human and natural history of the park, and programs at Gulpha Gorge campground amphitheater. During spring and fall a reduced schedule is offered, and in October a Volksmarsch (people's walk) is the highlight of Oktoberfest.

**Parking** The park has no parking facilities on Bathhouse Row. Parking is available in the city's adjacent historic district.

**Accommodations** The park's campground, in Gulpha Gorge two miles northeast of downtown, has tables and fireplaces for tent and trailer campers. There are no electrical, shower, or water connections. Camping stays are limited to 14 days each year. No advance reservations are available; a self registration and fee collection system is in effect. The city of Hot Springs, a municipality not under National Park Service jurisdiction, surrounds part of the park. The city has many hotels with accommodations for groups. There are also smaller hotels, motels, bed and breakfast inns, boarding and rooming houses, and furnished cottages on nearby lakes. For information, call: Hot Springs Advertising and Promotion Commission, 1-800-SPA-CITY.

**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. After relaxing in various kinds of tubs or pools of thermal water, you may want to stay longer than you planned. Four of the traditional bathhouses are in nearby hotels, all within walking distance of the visitor center. The Buckstaff Bathhouse on Bathhouse Row and the hotel bathhouses are

open to the public, as is the Libbey Memorial Physical Medicine Center and the Hot Springs Health Spa located 3 blocks east of Bathhouse Row on Reserve Avenue. The city of Hot Springs and the surrounding area provide activities throughout the year, including thoroughbred horse racing, water sports, fishing, and camping. For a spectacular view of Hot Springs visit the Hot Springs Mountain Tower atop Hot Springs Mountain. The 216-foot observation tower is open all year and is operated by a concessioner.

**How to Reach the Park** By vehicle the roads are U.S. 270, U.S. 70, and Ark. 7. Greyhound buses service Hot Springs. Hot Springs Municipal Airport, three miles from Bathhouse Row, provides scheduled airline services. City bus service is available.

**Safety** The roads are mountainous and designed for slow sight-seeing travel. Drive carefully; seatbelts are required. Hot Springs Mountain Drive is closed to vehicles longer than 30 feet. The hiking trails traverse uneven terrain; wear appropriate footwear. Watch out for stinging insects, ticks, snakes, and poison ivy. To report emergencies in the park, call the ranger office, 501-624-3383. To report fires or medical emergencies, call 911.

**Regulations** Vehicles and bicycles are prohibited on sidewalks and trails. • Do not litter; help keep the park clean. • Build fires only in fireplaces. • Keep pets on a leash. • Commercial activity or soliciting within the park is restricted to those holding appropriate contracts or permits with the Federal Government. • All wildlife is protected in the park. Do not remove or disturb any plant, animal, rock, or object. Please leave the park as you found it.

**Information** Write: Superintendent, Hot Springs National Park, P.O. Box 1860, Hot Springs, AR 71902-1860. Fax: 501-624-3458. Call: TDD/501-624-2308, or 501-624-3383, ext. 640. Internet: [www.nps.gov/hosp](http://www.nps.gov/hosp).  
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