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Hot Springs National Park is an unusual blend of a highly developed park in a small city surrounded by low-lying mountains abounding in plant life and wildlife. It is a park with a past, too. The picture 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. New, fireproof structures took their places. The Fordyce Bathhouse sits on the site of the Palace shown in the picture. The water boy with his

pot and cups (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. When staffing allows, rangers lead tours to the open hot springs. Spring, summer, and fall wildflowers like the wild phlox shown here adorn the park's 26 miles of hiking trails. Gently rounded mountains are clad in green—admired here by a hiker at Goat Rock Overlook. The historic Buckstaff and Quapaw bathhouses offer a chance to relax in the hot spring water.



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Water. That's what attracts people to Hot Springs. Old documents show that American Indians knew about and bathed in the hot springs during the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Their ancestors may have also known about the

hot springs. Some believe that the traces of minerals and an average temperature of 143°F/62°C give the waters whatever therapeutic properties they may have. People also drink the waters from the cold springs, which have different chemical components and properties. Besides determining the chemical composition and origins of the waters, scientists have determined that the waters emerging from these hot springs are over 4,000 years old. The park collects 700,000 gallons a day for use in the public drinking fountains and bathhouses.

The bathhouses piped the hot spring waters into tubs. Some offered specialty treatments, like this Hubbard tub used for physical therapy. Ailing visitors had little interest in soaking out in nature.



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French trappers, hunters, and traders became familiar with this region during the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1803 the United States acquired the area when it purchased the Louisiana Territory from France. 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 territorial representative Ambrose H. Sevier sent a proposal to Congress. Then in 1832 the federal government took the unprecedented step of setting aside four sections of land here. It was the first U.S. reservation created to protect a natural resource. Boundaries were not marked, and by the mid-1800s individuals had filed claims and counterclaims on the springs and surrounding land.

The Early Years The first bathhouses were crude canvas and lumber structures, little more than tents perched over individual springs or reservoirs carved out of the rock. Later, businessmen built wooden structures, 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 a mere collection of stagnant pools in dry times. In 1884 the federal government put

the creek into a channel, roofed it over, and laid a road above it. Much of it runs beneath Central Avenue today.

Seeking Health and Luxury The government took active control of the springs and reservation for the first time after all the private claims on reservation land were settled in 1877. It approved blueprints for private bathhouses ranging from simple to luxurious. The government even operated a free bathhouse and public health facility for those unable to pay for baths recommended by their physician. Gradually Hot Springs came to be called "The American Spa." Such slogans as "Uncle Sam Bathes the World" and "The Nation's Health Sanitarium" were used to promote the city. Because minorities did not have equal access to the bathhouses on Bathhouse Row, African Americans opened their own facilities nearby beginning in 1905.

By 1921 the Hot Springs Reservation had become popular with vacationers and health remedy seekers. 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. The most expensive decorated their walls, floors, and partitions in marble and tile. 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.

Water: The Main Attraction

During the Golden Age of Bathing over a million visitors a year immersed themselves in the park's hot waters. They then strolled Bathhouse Row with cups to "quaff the elixir" at decorative fountains. Today visitors fill bottles at jug fountains that dispense the

odorless, flavorless, and colorless liquid. The water is tested regularly to ensure quality. Various open springs and the Hot Water Cascade above Arlington Lawn show how the area looked 200 years ago, before anyone built a bathhouse. All that steam gave rise to

the vicinity's nickname, "Valley of Vapors." Today green boxes cover most of the 47 springs to prevent contamination. The water was first protected for all people to enjoy—not just a privileged few. That tradition of active use is very much alive.



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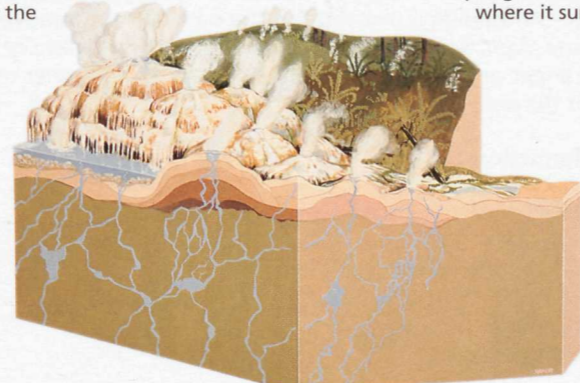
What Makes This Water Hot?

Hot Springs National Park is not in a volcanic region. The water is heated by a different process. Outcroppings of Bigfork Chert and Arkansas Novaculite absorb rainfall in an arc from the northeast around to the east. Pores and fractures in the

rock conduct the water deep into the Earth.

As the water percolates downward, increasingly warmer rock heats it at a rate of about 4°F every 300 feet. This is the average geothermal gradient worldwide, caused by

gravitational compression and by the breakdown of naturally occurring radioactive elements. In the process the water dissolves minerals out of the rock. Eventually the water meets faults and joints leading up to the lower west slope of Hot Springs Mountain, where it surfaces.



NPS/BERT HANOR

Bathhouse Row Today

By the 1960s traditional bathing was in decline and the bathhouses began to close their doors. Unused, the buildings fell into disrepair. By 1985 only the Buckstaff remained open. In the 1980s the National Park Service began exploring ways to return the bathhouses and Bathhouse Row to the splendor, if

not the function, of their heyday. This led to the Quapaw Baths reopening as a day spa with pools, and the Ozark Bathhouse to open as the Museum of Contemporary Art of Hot Springs.

In 2004 the park received the first of several appropriations to rehabilitate the vacant bathhouses

and make them leasable. They are available for lease under the Historic Property Leasing Program. This is an example of merging the needs of the future with the preservation of the past, essential to the revitalization of the Bathhouse Row National Historic Landmark District and downtown Hot Springs.



NPS

The Army/Navy Hospital, now the Hot Springs Rehabilitation Center, is located just above the south end of Bathhouse Row. Its use of the hot spring water for treatments contributed to a boost in the bathing business during and immediately after World War II. By the 1950s changes in medicine led to a rapid decline in the use of water therapies. People also began taking driving vacations rather than traveling by train to a single destination. One by one, as business declined, the bathhouses began to close. The Buckstaff has been in continuous operation since it opened in 1912 and is the only bathhouse on Bathhouse Row that provides the traditional therapeutic bathing experience.

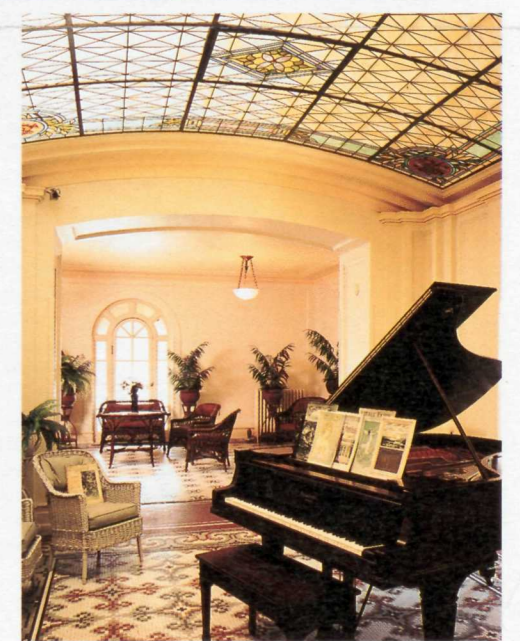
The Spa Today Despite the decline, bathing continues to be a popular pastime. Options available today still include tub bath, shower, steam cabinet, hot and cold packs, whirlpool, and massage. The Quapaw Bathhouse offers a modern-day spa with coed pools and spa services. Private businesses operate the Buckstaff and Quapaw, and their services are regulated and inspected by the National Park Service. You can get information about rates and services at the bathhouses or the Hot Springs National Park Visitor Center.

Do not pass up the opportunity to experience 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.

Fordyce Bathhouse

In 1915 reviews proclaimed the Fordyce Bathhouse the best in Hot Springs. Now you can tour the Fordyce and see its original splendor. In 1989 the Fordyce, closed since 1962, reopened as the park visitor center and a museum.

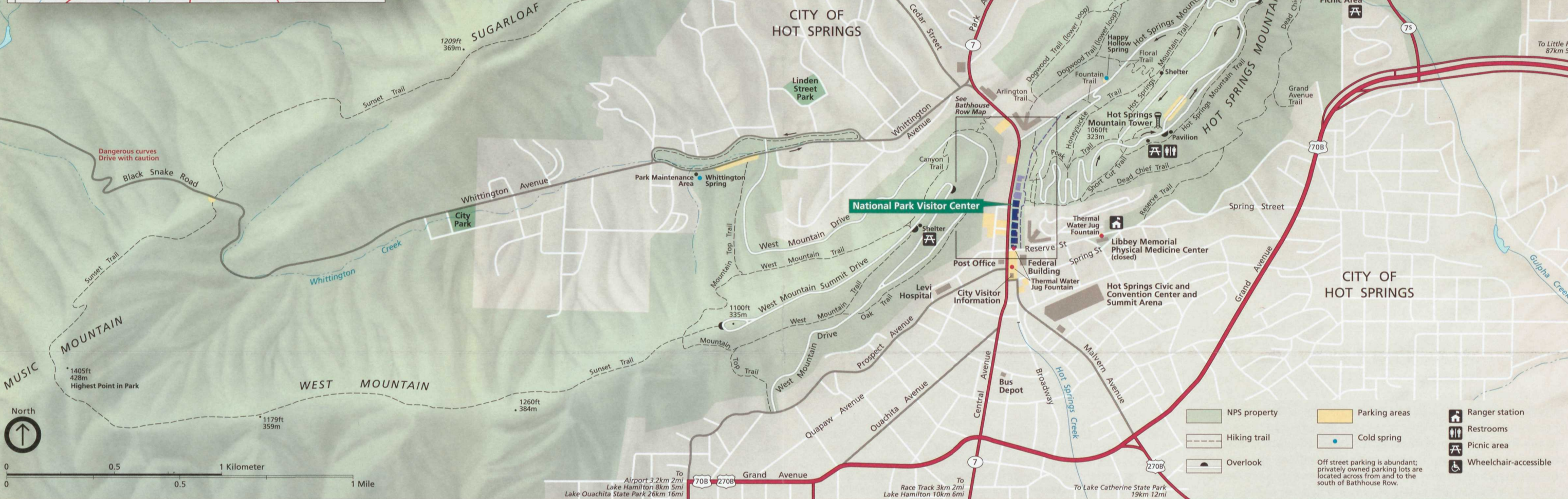
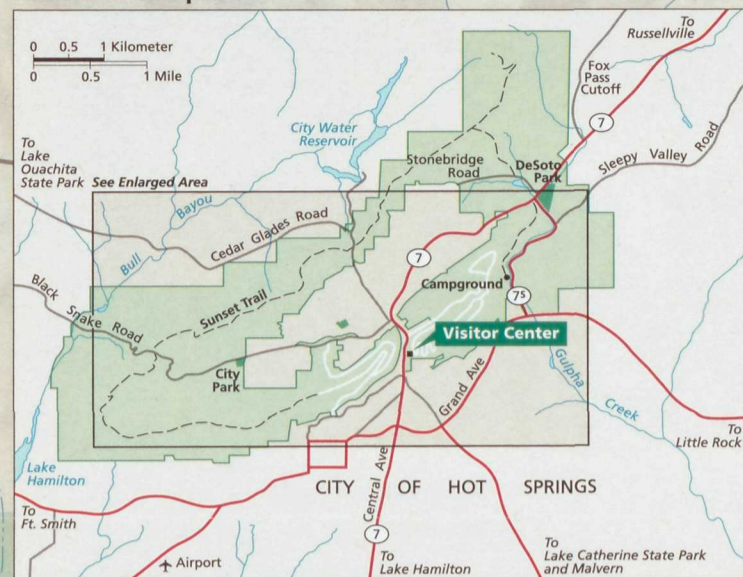
After extensive restoration the bathhouse looks as it did in its early years. All of the women's side and some of the men's side of the building are outfitted with the furniture and equipment of the time: steam cabinets, Zander mechano-therapy equipment, tubs, massage tables, sitz tubs, Hubbard tub, chiropody tools, billiard table, Knabe piano, beauty parlor, and hydrotherapy equipment.



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Visiting Hot Springs

Access to the park



Fordyce Bathhouse, now restored as the park visitor center and museum. © LAURENCE PARENT

The park is about 55 miles southwest of Little Rock, Ark., in the Zig Zag Mountains on the eastern edge of the Ouachita Mountains. The mountaintops are the erosion-resistant remnants of folded layers of quartz and sandstone. Music Mountain is the highest point in the park and 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 consecutive seasons have displays of colored leaves and abundant flowers. The redbud and dogwood bloom in the early spring, gracing the understory of the pine and hardwood forest. Song birds and small animals are abundant in the forest. Flowering southern magnolias give historic Bathhouse Row a special beauty, particularly in the early summer.

Visitor Center The restored Fordyce Bathhouse is in the middle of Bathhouse Row. You can tour 23 restored rooms furnished as they appeared during the heyday of the spa. Tours are self-guiding unless a tour guide is available. Exhibits and films orient visitors to Hot Springs National Park and tell the story of the hot springs and their use. During the summer there are ranger-led walks of the Bathhouse Row Historic District. You can hear about the hot springs and get updates on Bathhouse Row renovations. During the spring and fall the park offers a reduced schedule. Organized groups can arrange for guided tours with at least two weeks notice. American Sign Language Interpreters can also be scheduled for regular tours with two weeks notice. Service animals are welcome.

Parking The park does not have 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 grills for tent and RV campers. There are no showers, but electric and water hookups are being added to some sites. Call for up-to-date availability. 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 hotels, motels, bed-and-breakfast inns, boarding and rooming houses, and furnished cottages on nearby lakes. For information call: Hot Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau, 1-800-SPA-CITY.

Things to Do Hot Springs has a favorable climate all year. The winters are mild and, except for short intervals, you can enjoy outdoor recreation year-round. After relaxing in various kinds of tubs and pools of thermal water, you may want to stay longer than you planned. The Buckstaff and Quapaw bathhouses on Bathhouse Row are open to the public. The Ozark Bathhouse is scheduled to open as the Museum of Contemporary Art of Hot Springs. The city of Hot Springs and the surrounding area provide activities throughout the year, including thoroughbred horse racing, art galleries, music and film festivals, 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.

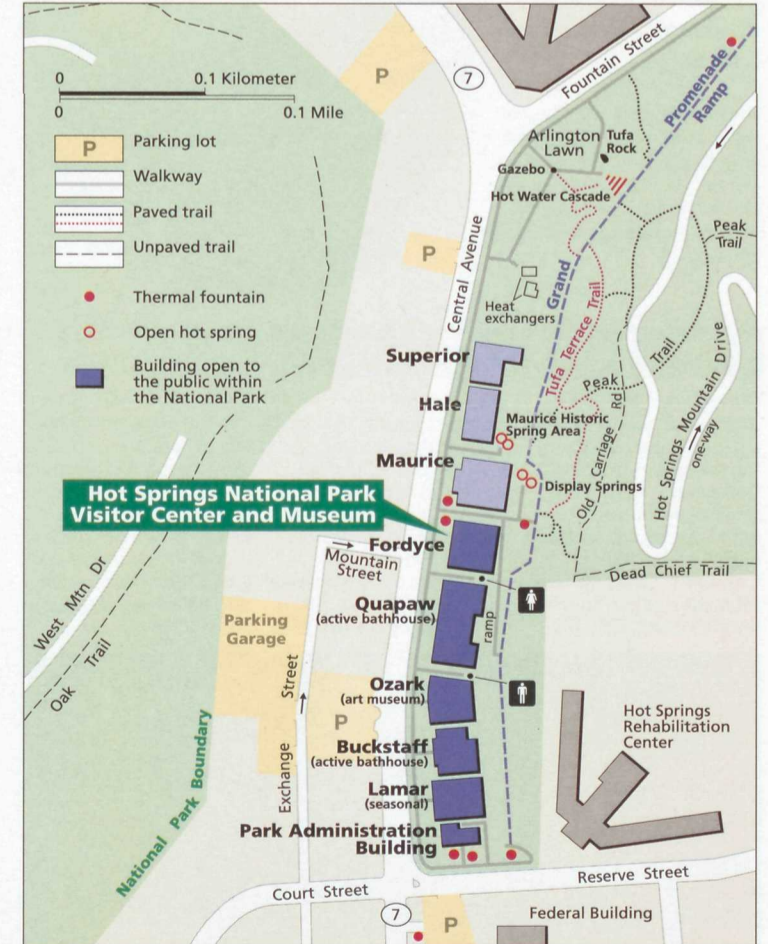
How to Reach the Park By vehicle use U.S. 270, U.S. 70, and Ark. 7. Greyhound buses service Hot Springs. Hot Springs Municipal Airport, three miles from Bathhouse Row, provides limited airline services. Little Rock National Airport provides service by larger airlines. City bus service is available.

Safety The park roads are mountainous and designed for slow sightseeing travel. Drive carefully; seat belts are required. Vehicles longer than 30 feet cannot use Hot Springs Mountain Drive. The hiking trails traverse uneven terrain; wear appropriate footwear. Watch out for stinging insects, ticks, snakes, and poison ivy. To speak with a Law Enforcement Ranger or to leave a message, call 501-620-6780. To report a medical, fire, or law enforcement emergency within the park, call 911.

Regulations Vehicles, bicycles, skateboards, and any kind of skates must stay off sidewalks and trails. • Do not litter; help keep the park clean. • Build fires only in grills. • Keep pets on a leash and pick up after them. • You must have a federal government permit from the park to conduct commercial activity, hold weddings, or solicit within the park. • All wildlife is protected in the park. Do not remove or disturb any plant, animal, rock, or object. Report vandalism or graffiti to a ranger or the visitor center. • For firearms and other regulations visit the park website.

More Information
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Bathhouse Row



Hot Springs National Park is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks visit www.nps.gov.