

All About Hot Springs National Park

Hot Springs National Park is different from all other National Parks. Why is that? That's because it's the oldest area in the National Park System. It wasn't even called Hot Springs National Park at first. At first it was called Hot Springs Reservation. It was declared to be an area set aside for all the people in the United States back in 1832. It was a special place because it had hot springs. There were other places in the mountains in the East, the Appalachians, that had hot springs. These were all developed into health spas. There wasn't another place in the middle of the United States that had hot springs except Arkansas. Springs, hot or cold, were important to people long ago because they were used like medicine back then. Doctors would recommend different spas for illnesses just like they write prescriptions for bottled pills today.

Many people came to Hot Springs with rheumatism (we call it arthritis today). The hot water made them feel better. They told their friends and neighbors about it and the word got around that the hot springs in Arkansas could cure lots of ailments (diseases). People started building bathhouses and soon a town was built with hotels and boarding houses for travelers to stay while "taking the waters."

That's why Hot Springs National Park surrounds the north end of the city of Hot Springs. And that's what's different about Hot Springs National Park. Most national parks are far away from cities and don't have many old buildings. Hot Springs National Park has beautiful old bathhouse buildings. Most of them aren't used as bathhouses anymore because people don't take baths like medicine anymore and they've gone out of business. The Fordyce Bathhouse isn't in business anymore but it is being used as the park Visitor Center. Visitors can tour it to find out how people used to take baths there. It's a very beautiful building with pretty fountains and stained glass ceilings. Maybe you can visit us someday and see it.

Today, Hot Springs National Park has nearly 5000 acres and is the smallest national park. It is mostly mountains — Hot Springs Mountain, where the 47 hot springs are, and West Mountain, Music Mountain, Sugarloaf Mountain, Blowout Mountain, and Indian Mountain. There are lots of hiking trails, scenic drives, picnic areas, and a campground. You can take tours led by rangers during the summer. They explain about the hot springs and the bathhouses.

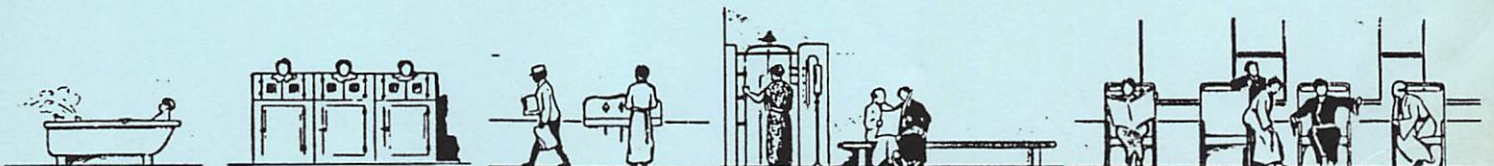
Because the park is in the city, there are mainly small animals in the park, like squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons, possums, foxes, and rabbits. There are also wild turkey and lots of songbirds like the mockingbird, cardinal, blue jay, warblers, and woodpeckers. The mountains have forests with mostly pine, oak, and hickory trees. Spring is especially beautiful with the wildflowers in bloom. You might see dogwood trees, redbud trees, spiderworts, wild roses, wild iris, or mayapples, just to name a few.

All National Parks are special places. We try to take care of them so that people can visit them in the years to come. Maybe you'll bring *your* children to visit Hot Springs National Park some day. Please help keep the park clean. Throw your trash in the trash cans. Stay on the main trails instead of making your own. With your help, Hot Springs National Park will be just as pretty for your children to see as it was for you.

Taking A Bath



Checking in and locking up valuables.



Tub bath

Vapor bath

Making hot packs

Needle shower

Cooling off