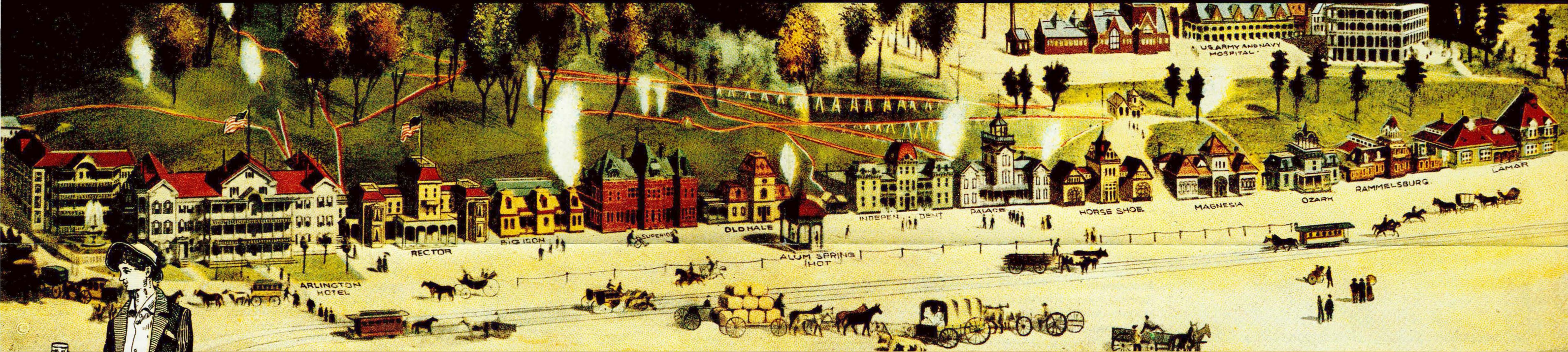


Hot Springs

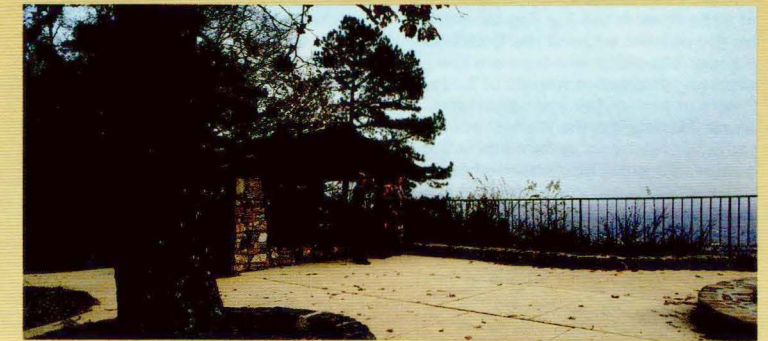
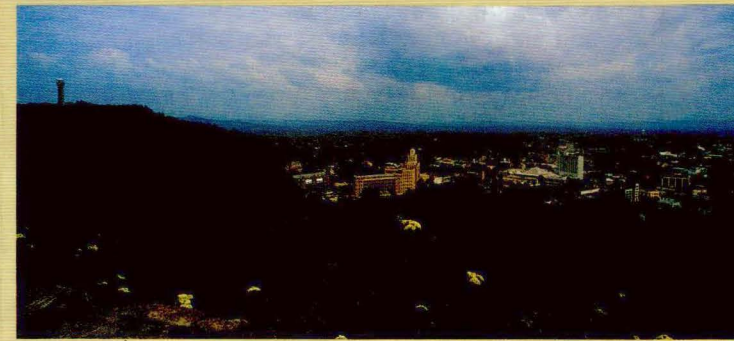
Hot Springs National Park
Arkansas

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Hot Springs National Park is the 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, though some of the names live on in present-day structures. They either burned or were pulled down to make way for new, fireproof structures. The Fordyce Bathhouse Visitor Center 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 at the turn of the century. A similar pot can be seen in one of the visitor center exhibits. From left to right the photographs reveal the variety of scenes of Hot Springs National Park today from the solitude of a forest trail to the wide vistas along the ridgetops of the mountain range. The mule-drawn car echoes the transportation of a century ago in the cover lithograph.



Water. That's what attracts people to Hot Springs. In fact they have been coming here since the first person stumbled across these hot springs perhaps 10,000 years ago. Stone artifacts found in the park give evidence that Indians knew about and used the hot springs. For them the area was a neutral ground where different tribes came to hunt, trade, and bathe in peace. Surely they drank the springwaters, too, for they found the waters with its minerals and gases to have 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 gushing from hot springs are more than 4,000 years old. And 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 deSoto 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 very 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 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 World War II and immediately afterward. Shortly thereafter, however, 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 a week or two. One by one the bathhouses began to close down as business declined. 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 of the park's Fordyce Bathhouse 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. 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 chose this water, among others, in which to hold moon rocks while looking for signs of life. Even during the many early years that the springs were uncovered, the absence of bacteria in the water

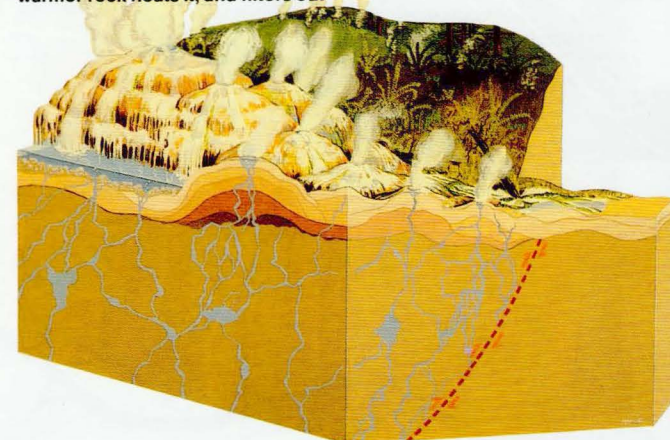
helped prevent the spread of disease. Today most of the springs have been covered to prevent contamination. Various open springs and a spring cascade on the Arlington Lawn give an idea of what the area would be like if all the springs were open with the water pouring down the hillside into the creek.



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, and filters out

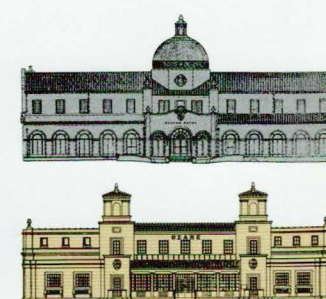
the impurities. In the process the water dissolves minerals in the rocks. Eventually the water meets the faults and joints in the Hot Springs Sandstone leading up to the lower west side of Hot Springs Mountain where it flows to the surface.



Restoration Efforts

With the decline of bathing in the 1950s, the bathhouses themselves 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 pri-

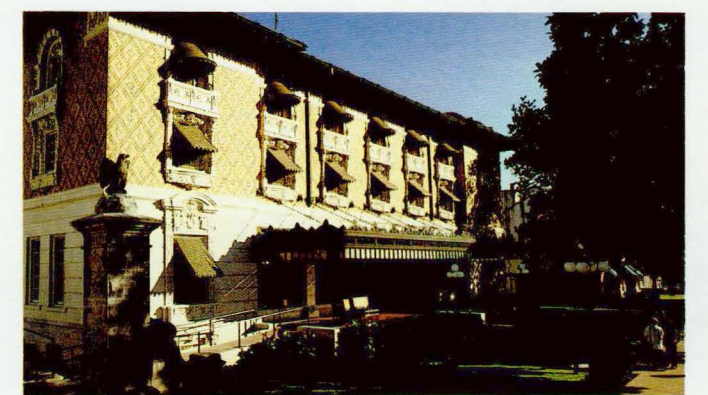
vate money and public guidance to return the exteriors of the buildings to their original grandeur and the interiors restored and adapted for a multitude of new uses under the provisions of a historic property leasing program. This is an example of the merger of the needs of the future with the preservation 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 amiss, 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, billard table, beauty parlor, and hydrotherapy equipment prevalent in those days.



Hot Springs

Hot Springs National Park Arkansas

Access



The park lies about 55 miles southwest of Little Rock in the Zig Zag Mountains on the eastern edge of the Ouachita Range. The mountain-tops 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 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 also common, and successive seasons have displays of colored leaves and abundant flowers. Redbud 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 early summer. Song birds and small animals are abundant in the forest.

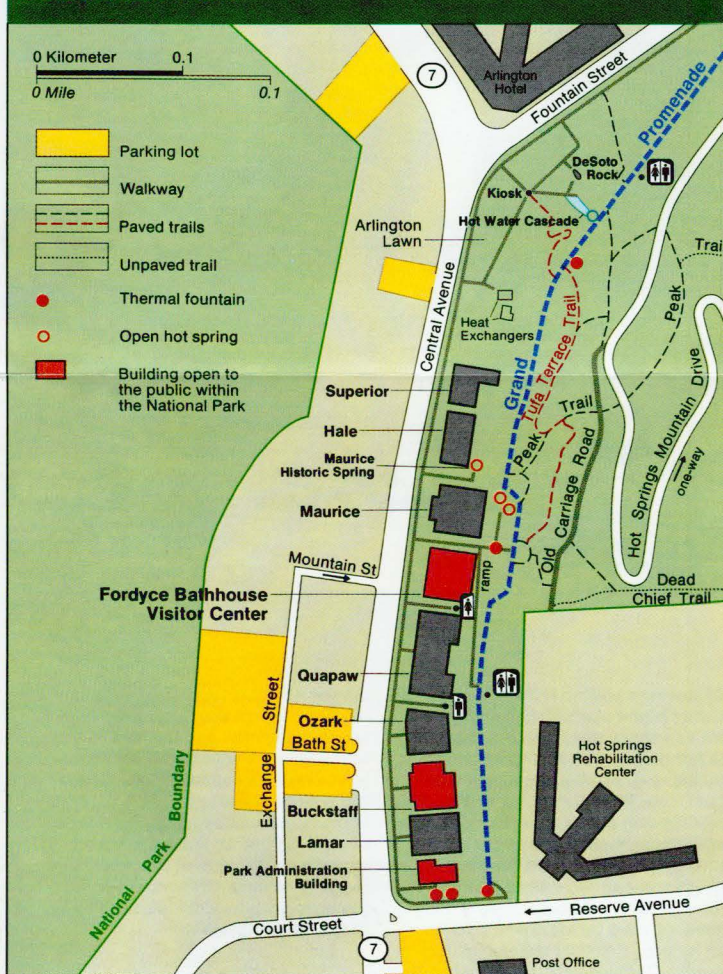
Visitor Center The restored Fordyce Bathhouse, in the middle of Bathhouse Row, in the 300 block of Central Avenue, is the park visitor center. Exhibits and films help orient the visitor to Hot Springs and tell the story of thermal water bathing. Twenty-four rooms have been restored and are furnished as they appeared during the heyday of the spa. Tours are available the year round. During the summer, an expanded schedule of interpretive activities includes walks that describe both the human and natural history of the park, mountain hikes, and programs at the Gulpha Gorge campground amphitheater. During the 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, but there is ample parking available within the city's adjacent historic district.

Accommodations The park's campground is located in Gulpha Gorge 2 miles northeast of the downtown. Tables and fireplaces are provided for both tent and trailer campers; there are no electrical 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 large hotels with accommodations for large groups. There are also smaller hotels, motels, boarding and rooming houses, and furnished cottages on nearby lakes. Write to the Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 1500, Hot Springs, AR 71902, 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. 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.

Bathhouse Row



Hotel bathhouses and the Buckstaff Bathhouse on "The Row" are open to the public, as is the Libbey Memorial Physical Medicine Center and the Hot Springs Health Spa located three blocks east of Bathhouse Row. The city of Hot Springs and the surrounding area also provide a range of activities throughout the year from thoroughbred horse racing to water sports to 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 year round and is operated by a concessioner.

How to Reach the Park By car the approaches are via U.S. 270, U.S. 70, and Ark. 7. Greyhound provides bus service to Hot Springs. A small airport provides limited access by air.

Safety Drive with care on open roads; seatbelts are required. The roads are mountainous and designed for slow sightseeing travel. The mountain trails hikes are over uneven terrain; wear appropriate footwear. All wildlife is protected in the park. Be alert for contact with stinging insects, ticks, snakes, and poison ivy.

Information All vehicles, including bicycles, are prohibited on the trails. ■ Do not litter; help keep the park clean. ■ Build fires only in fireplaces. ■ Keep your pet on a leash. ■ Commercial activity or any soliciting within the park is restricted to those holding appropriate contracts or permits with the Federal Government. ■ Removal of any plant, object, or rock is not allowed. Please leave the park as you found it. ■ Report emergencies in the park by dialing the ranger office, 624-3124, or call the city Police Department, 321-6789. Requests for information should be made to the Fordyce Bathhouse Visitor Center, 623-1433. Hot Springs National Park is a unit of the National Park System, which consists of more than 350 parks representing important examples of our country's natural and cultural inheritance. For further information write to: Superintendent, P.O. Box 1860, Hot Springs, AR 71902.

Hot Springs National Park

