Arkansas Post

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Memorial
Arkansas

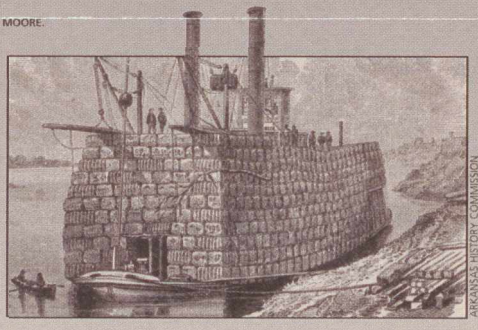


PHOTOGRAPH ABOVE: NPS/KEN LAFFAL. REPRODUCTION OF QUAPAW ROBE MADE BY ARDINA MOORE.

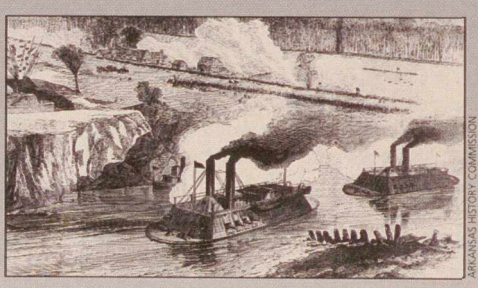
By the late 1600s European powers were racing to carve up the new world. In 1686 the French moved south from the St. Lawrence Valley to plant the first European settlement in the lower Mississippi Valley. Arkansas Post was to be a staging point for Mississippi River trade between New France and the Gulf of Mexico. Over the two centuries of the settlement's life the events surrounding it typified the conflicts and changes that transformed precarious European trading posts and garrisons into new American towns.



MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY



ARKANSAS HISTORY COMMISSION



ARKANSAS HISTORY COMMISSION

Exploration and Settlement

1682 French explorer Robert Cavelier, sieur de La Salle, grants land along the Arkansas River to Henri de Tonti. Four years later Tonti establishes a trading post there near the Quapaw Indian village of Osotouy. Quapaw and French become allies; Quapaw protect the French from other Indian tribes. In 1687 survivors of La Salle's 1684 expedition reach Arkansas Post: "Looking over to the further side [of the river] we discovered a great cross . . . and a house built after the French fashion."

1699 By this date the post is abandoned due to a glut in beaver pelts and British competition. In 1721 the post is reestablished with a French military garrison. Nearby settlers grow some crops, but most continue semi-nomadic hunting and trapping life. Flooding and Chickasaw raids in 1749 force the post to move upriver. After war with England begins the post moves downriver, nine miles from the Mississippi, to protect French river convoys.

1763 France cedes west Louisiana (most of present-day central United States) and New Orleans to Spain after French and Indian War (1756 to 1763). Spain develops fur trade along river routes *(see image above)* and an alliance with the Quapaw.

1779 Because of flooding, Spain moves the fort back near the site of the old French settlement, renaming the post Fort Carlos III.

1783 During the American Revolution (in which Spain aids the colonies) James Colbert and a band of British partisans and Chickasaw Indians attack the fort but are driven back by a Spanish and Quapaw counterattack.

Nineteenth-Century Town

1803 France, having regained Louisiana from Spain in 1800, sells the territory to the U.S.

1803–1819 Arkansas Post is part of Louisiana. The U.S. Government opens a trading post in 1805 but cannot compete with private traders. The 1810 population is about 500, mostly French, with some African-American slaves and free people of color. By 1817 hunting and trapping culture is giving way to a farming economy.

1819 Arkansas Post is named capital of the new Arkansas Territory. *Arkansas Gazette* begins publishing. Log houses join existing French dwellings with high pointed roofs. Naturalist Thomas Nuttall notes: "Blankets . . . moccasins, and overalls of the same materials, are . . . the prevailing dress." Tensions build between the French and growing numbers of American farmers, with Washington Irving noting that the more insular French thought Americans "trouble themselves with cares beyond their horizon and import sorrow thro the newspapers from every point of the compass."

1821 Little Rock becomes the capital, dampening Arkansas Post's economy. The area population falls to 114 by 1830. A visitor notes the town's "forlorn and desolate appearance."

1824 U.S. forces the Quapaw to relocate.

1830s With the availability of prime land, slave labor, and transportation, Arkansas Post thrives as a center of cotton production and a major river port *(see image above)*. By the 1840s the boom subsides, and in 1855 the county seat moves to another site; the town declines.

Civil War and Decline

1861 In May Arkansas joins the Confederacy.

1862 As Union forces get uncomfortably close to Little Rock, the Confederate government builds earthwork forts along the Arkansas River to defend the capital. Fort Hindman at Arkansas Post is 190 feet square, armed with 11 rifled guns and smoothbores. Some 5,000 soldiers are housed at the fort and in nearby huts. They dig rifle pits from the fort to Post Bayou. *(See map on other side of this brochure.)*

1863 With the fort a threat to Union supply lines, Gen. John McClernand brings 30,000 infantry upriver, supported by Rear Adm. David Porter's gunboat fleet. On January 10 they attack, the gunboats *(see image above)* keeping up heavy fire on the fort as the infantry pushes back the Confederate front line troops. The next day the gunboats put the fort's big guns out of commission, then loft exploding shells over the fort. The shrapnel raining down on the trenches takes its toll: late in the afternoon white flags begin going up. The Confederates—60 killed and 80 wounded, with 4,971 taken prisoner. The Federals—134 killed, 898 wounded, and 29 missing.

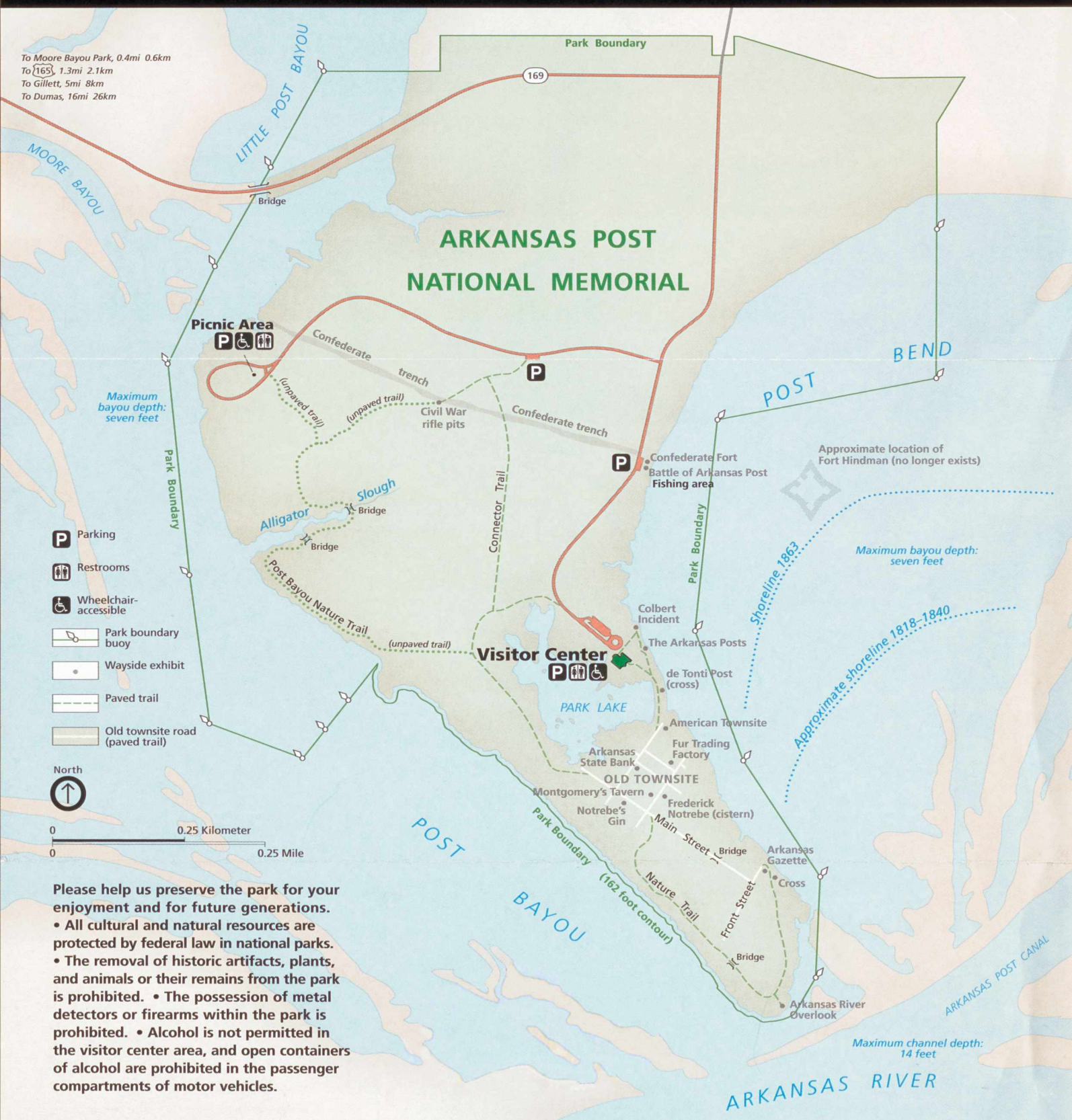
Post-Civil War The town never recovers from the shelling, and declining river traffic and railroads undermine its importance as a port. Erosion claims parts of the town, including the fort. The Arkansas changes course in 1912, leaving the post half a mile from the river.



Found at Arkansas Post: brass button of European origin; key from Montgomery's Tavern, c. 1820

NPS/KEN LAFFAL

Exploring Arkansas Post



Please help us preserve the park for your enjoyment and for future generations.
• All cultural and natural resources are protected by federal law in national parks.
• The removal of historic artifacts, plants, and animals or their remains from the park is prohibited. • The possession of metal detectors or firearms within the park is prohibited. • Alcohol is not permitted in the visitor center area, and open containers of alcohol are prohibited in the passenger compartments of motor vehicles.



This water cistern was a focus of town life in 19th-century Arkansas Post.



Lotus, also known as yancopin, abound in the park's quiet waters. Watch for blooms in late summer.



Post Bayou, part of the wildlife sanctuary, harbors a rich variety of animal and plant species.

About Your Visit

Arkansas Post became a state park in 1929. In 1960 Congress designated it a national memorial. Today the park includes some of the 19th-century town and the approximate site of two of the 18th-century trading and military posts.

Getting Here
The park is on Ark. 169, nine miles south of Gillett via U.S. 165 and about 17 miles northeast of Dumas via U.S. 165.

Seeing the Park
Start at the visitor center for information, exhibits, a film, and bookstore. The visitor center is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. The grounds are open daily until dark. Exhibits along the trails explain historic areas.

Accessibility
Walkways, buildings, and most trails are wheelchair-accessible.

Water Activities
Swimming is prohibited due to shallow water and soft lake and river bottoms. Fishing is permitted; a state license is required and regulations apply. The launching, beaching, or landing of any vessel is prohibited, except in an emergency.

For Your Safety
• Pets must be on a leash or physically restrained at all times.
• Stay on the trails, especially in spring and summer when ticks, chiggers, and poison ivy are abundant.
• Watch for mosquitos and biting flies in spring and summer; use a repellent and wear protective clothing. • Alligators and snakes live here, including three species of poisonous snakes: water moccasin (cottonmouth), copperhead, and pigmy rattlesnake. Stay on trails and watch where you put your hands and feet.
Emergencies call 911

More Information
Arkansas Post
National Memorial
1741 Old Post Road
Gillett, AR 72055
870-548-2207
www.nps.gov/arpo

The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.
Visit www.nps.gov.

Discovering Nature

Arkansas Post is located in the Mississippi Delta region of Arkansas. Over the 300 years of the Post's history, the area has been greatly changed by natural forces and human intervention. Flooding, erosion, and a natural change in the river's course have altered the site of the old posts and town, as have attempts to improve navigation and control the river with levees, dams, and a canal.

Today the park protects a variety of native plants like cypress, pecan, and lotus. An Osage orange near the visitor center, dating to the fort's historic era, has been awarded Champion Tree status as the largest Osage orange in Arkansas. As you explore listen for songbirds. Watch for deer, turkey, alligator, and our resident pair of bald eagles. In the fall and winter you will see flocks of ducks and geese. Enjoy this place of natural beauty.



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS: NPS/KEN LAFFAL

☆GPO:2009—349-224/80211 Reprint 2006
Printed on recycled paper.