



The spa town of Hot Springs offered wellness and healing to people from all walks of life, at early rustic ‘dugouts’ like Corn Hole (above) and at later, ornate bathhouses like the Fordyce and the Quapaw (below).

12,000–10,000 Before Present Paleo-Indians quarry novaculite in the Ouachita Mountains for tools and weapons.

1803 The Louisiana Purchase makes the Ouachita region part of the United States.

1804–5 Hunter-Dunbar team explores the area and prepares report for President Jefferson.

1820 Arkansas Territory asks Congress to reserve the hot springs for public use.

1830 Asa Thompson builds the first bathhouse near today’s Fountain Street.

1832 President Andrew Jackson signs legislation to establish Hot Springs Reservation.

1836 Arkansas becomes the nation’s 25th state.

1849 The Department of the Interior (DOI) is established and the reservation placed under its control.

1877 Benjamin Kelley is named first reservation superintendent. He orders people to leave make-shift camps and directs the opening of the first free government bathhouse.

1883 Construction begins on a stone archway enclosing Hot Springs Creek.

1887 Army and Navy General Hospital opens.

1892 Work begins on the formal entrance to the reservation and to Whittington Park.

1901 To protect the thermal water and retain heat, a water collection and distribution system is installed and all springs are enclosed.

1911 DOI requires that wooden bathhouses must be replaced with safer, more sanitary masonry structures.

1914 Oertel Fitness Trail network for prescribed exercise is built on Hot Springs Mountain.

1916 National Park Service is established and the reservation placed under its control.

1921 The reservation is named a national park.

1925 The park begins managing Gulpha Gorge Campground.

1938 Congress expands the park boundary by over 4,000 acres.

1947 In this peak year, bathers took more than 1 million baths.

1962 The Fordyce becomes the first bathhouse on Bathhouse Row to close as interest declines and operating costs increase.

1974 Bathhouse Row is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

1985 The Lamar closes. The Buckstaff is the only bathhouse on the row that remains open.

1987 Bathhouse Row is named a National Historic Landmark.

1989 The Fordyce reopens as the park visitor center and museum.

2004–present The park begins a new leasing program and partners with business owners to restore and reopen the bathhouses. While two continue to offer bathhouse services, others have been adapted for new purposes.

WATER

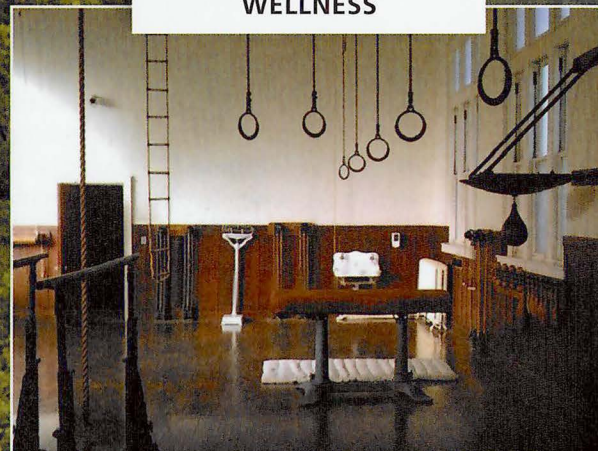
Rain and melted snow trickle into cracks in brittle rock (novaculite and chert) along the ridges of the Ouachita Mountains. Gravity pulls the water slowly downward through a network of cracks in Earth’s rock crust. The rock temperature increases with depth and the water emerges from the springs at an average temperature of 143° F (62° C). When the water reaches a major fault on the west slope of Hot Springs Mountain, pressure propels it upward. The hot spring water does not result from a volcanic process. Its roundtrip journey—from the recharge zone along the mountain ridges to the park—takes over four thousand years.



Around the same time that the pharaoh Khufu built his Great Pyramid at Giza, 4,500 years ago, the water that emerges on Hot Springs Mountain fell as rain and snow.

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WELLNESS



Fordyce gym, restored to ca. 1915 appearance.

© KORI GROSSHEIDER

A visit to the hot springs was designed to treat not just the body but the mind and spirit as well. Visitors bathed in the thermal water and received massages and other therapies. Afterward, they could relax, drink spring water from tin cups (below right), exercise in well-appointed gyms, or hike a series of fitness trails.



Wooden club for exercise, 1914.

NPS

HEALING



Bath towel.

NPS

Hydrotherapy offered treatment for conditions such as arthritis or rheumatism and even stress or immune disorders, before modern advancements in medicine. Therapies included whirlpool baths, massages, and mercury rubs. Though the water held no magical cure, such treatments offered some relief for patients who were suffering and in desperate need of help. Treatment in “America’s First Resort” often served as patients’ last resort for healing.

Patients and therapists, Maurice Bathhouse, 1938.

NPS



Collapsible tin drinking cup, ca. 1900.

NPS

HABITAT

The spring water carries particles of calcium carbonate that, over millennia, built up porous, soft rock (tufa) around many spring openings. Delicate plants and microscopic life forms (thermophiles) live in and near the hot, mineral-rich springs.



Woodland stonecrop has fragrant white flowers.

WIKIPEDIA / MASON BROCK



Tufa outcropping, Arlington Lawn.

© OT LUONG / TERRA GALLERIA



Delicate lip ferns grow on moist tufa.

LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDLIFE CTR. / ALAN CRESSLER

By the 1900s, Hot Springs was among the most visited health and wellness resorts in the United States. Entrepreneurs promoted it as a place “where crutches are thrown away.” Since 1921 the springs and historic bathhouses have formed the heart of a national park. The park’s 5,500 forested acres surround the city’s downtown where urban meets wild. Today you can soak in the thermal waters, drink spring water from the fountains, and hike densely wooded slopes—just as millions of others have over the centuries.

When William Dunbar and George Hunter explored the nation’s new territories in 1804, they found several crude huts near a steaming spring in the Ouachita Mountains. Their guides explained that people came to the area to soak in the hot water and recover their health. As word of the springs spread, Congress declared a four-square-mile reservation in 1832 to protect the water for public use.

The promise of improved health drew Civil War veterans and others with disabling conditions to crowded camps near the open springs. They formed temporary communities of people who sought to ease their pain in the thermal waters. Early settlers

ignored federal claims to the land. They built cabins and provided amenities to lure travelers to the famed springs. In 1876, the US Supreme Court ruled against their private land claims and affirmed the nation’s interest in making the thermal water available to all.

After the court’s ruling, the federal government began regulating private bathhouses and took active control over improvements that led to better sanitation and distribution of the water. Despite their role in ensuring public access, by the 1880s federal officials followed state laws requiring racial segregation and limited the African Americans’ use of the bathhouses. African American business owners ultimately built and maintained their own elaborate ones nearby until facilities desegregated in the 1960s.

SUPERIOR

HALE

MAURICE

FORDYCE

QUAPAW

OZARK

BUCKSTAFF

Eastern dogwood, an Arkansas native.

© CHRIS EVANS / U OF ILLINOIS

The Fordyce and Quapaw on Bathhouse Row (left).

NPS / TOMMY HILL

Bathhouse Row on the town’s main artery, Central Avenue (above).

© CASEY CROCKER

To protect public safety, the federal government stopped renewing leases for fire-prone wooden bathhouses in 1911. The structures that you see here today are built of stone or brick.



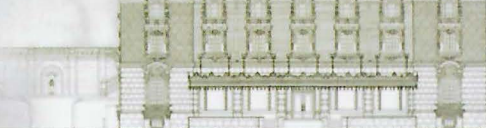
The smallest bathhouse on the row, it offered affordable hydrotherapy and massages.



The oldest surviving bathhouse on the row, the Hale has a sauna in a thermal cave carved from the mountainside.



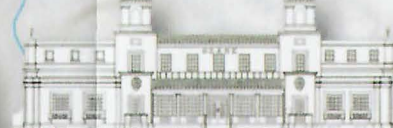
A third-floor lounge has a stone fireplace, painted mural, stained glass skylight, and an expansive view of the row.



The elegant Fordyce houses the park visitor center. Many of the rooms have been restored to their original state.



A tiled dome crowns a decorative scheme with an American Indian motif, scallop shells, and fish.



Sculpted mythical creatures hold urns of water, encouraging passersby to sample the healing waters.



This is the only bathhouse on the row to operate continuously for over a century.



The Lamar offered marble bathtubs of different lengths for greater comfort.



Built as park headquarters,
it was never a bathhouse.
A fountain greets visitors
who enter the park from
the south.

Vehicles use US 270, US 70, and AR 7.
Find parking at meters or paid lots near
the park. Two airports provide air service.
Taxis and buses offer ground transport.

Visit the park website for information about programs and tours. Request signed or guided group tours at least two weeks in advance.

ACCOMMODATIONS At Gulpha Gorge you'll find 40 campsites (your stay may not exceed 14 days per year), grills, picnic tables, and electric and water hookups, but no showers. No advance reservations; call the park for availability. Camp only at campsites. You can also find lodging in the city and at nearby lakes; call Hot Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau, 1-800-SPA-CITY.

Cracks in the outcroppings of novaculite and chert along the ridges trap rainwater and channel it downward. It eventually emerges as hot spring water. Changes in land use in the recharge zone outside the park (*right*) could redirect the water and interrupt the cycle.

This map shows the area around the Hot Springs National Park Visitor Center and Museum. Key features include:

- Legend:**
 - P: Parking lot
 - White rectangle: Walkway
 - Horizontal lines: Paved trail
 - Dotted line: Unpaved trail
 - Red dot: Thermal fountain
 - Orange circle: Open hot spring
 - Orange rectangle: Building open to the public
 - Brown rectangle: Building closed to the public
- Scale:** 0 to 0.1 Kilometer and 0 to 0.1 Mile.
- Streets:** West Main St, Oak Trail, Exchange Street, Court Street, Reserve Street, Central Avenue, Mountain Street, Fountain Street, Promenade, Hot Springs Mountain Drive (one-way), Oak Trail, Certeil Trail.
- Buildings:** Arlington Hotel, Hale (hotel), Maurice, Fordyce, Quapaw (active bathhouse), Ozark (cultural center), Buckstaff (active bathhouse), Lamar (bookstore), Park Administration Building, Former Army & Navy General Hospital, Federal Building.
- Landmarks:** Grand Terrace, Gazebo, Hot Water Caskade, Heat exchangers, Maurice Water Spring Area, Display Springs, Peak, Hot Springs, Mountain Drive (one-way), Certeil Trail, Stairway, Bug Fountain.
- Other:** National Park Boundary, Arlington Lawn, Tufa Rock, Promenade, Grand Terrace, Hot Springs, Mountain Drive (one-way), Certeil Trail, Stairway, Bug Fountain.

A map of the Hot Springs National Park area. The map shows a pink-shaded region labeled "Recharge Zone" and a green-shaded region labeled "Hot Springs National Park". Major roads are shown as black lines with route numbers: 227, 7, 5, 270, and 770. A scale bar at the bottom right indicates distances in Kilometers (0 to 5) and Miles (0 to 5). A callout box with a pointer identifies the Hot Springs National Park area.

SAFETY Use caution when walking or cycling on park roads • Always wear seat belts. • Vehicles longer than 30 feet are prohibited on Hot Springs Mountain Drive.

- Wear sturdy shoes, and watch for poisonous plants, stinging insects, ticks, and snakes. • Stay hydrated in hot weather.
- Store your valuables out of sight in parked vehicles. • Do not enter caves, crevices, or mineshafts. • To reach a law enforcement ranger call 888-692-1162.

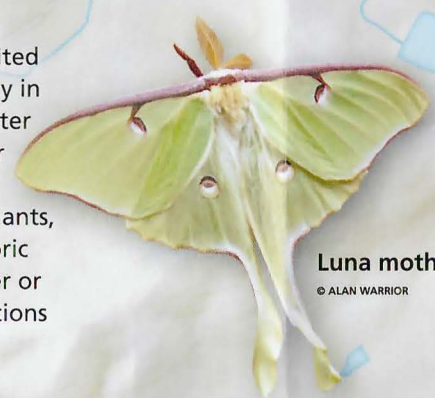
REGULATIONS Vehicles, bicycles, skateboards, scooters, and skates are prohibited on sidewalks and trails. • Build fires only in grills. • Leash your pets and clean up after them. • Obtain permits for weddings or events. • All wildlife is protected in the park. Federal law prohibits removing plants, animals, rocks, or other natural or historic features. • Report vandalism to a ranger or the visitor center. • For firearms regulations check the park website.

ACCESSIBILITY We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center in the Fordyce, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

EMERGENCIES CALL 911

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hosp_park_information@nps.gov
501-620-6715, TTY 501-624-2308
www.nps.gov/hosp

Hot Springs National Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks, visit www.nps.gov.



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