



The Journey of Free-flowing Water

Big Spring puts out enough water every day (above) to fill a major football stadium. It is the largest freshwater spring in Missouri and one of the largest in the United States. This water travels underground from as far away as 50 miles.

This area of boiling waters at the foot of the high, vertical, bare bluff of dolomite rock is a dramatic sight—clear, brawling waters which seem to leap to the surface, freed from the confinement of their underground channels.

Beckman and Hinchey, *The Large Springs of Missouri*, Big Spring, 1944

Water gurgling out of the ground has fascinated people for thousands of years. Some springs in Ozark National Scenic Riverways do not just gurgle, they gush—powerful, rolling, steady bursts of water—millions of gallons every day. Here groundwater plays a premier role in the makeup of the springs and rivers of this spectacular national park. The flow of springs reveals subterranean rivers. They flow through the readily eroded subsurface limestone, called

karst, helping carve the water table ever deeper into the landscape. The park has multiple dimensions, and many seem magically hidden from view. The landscape features springs, underground caverns, and surface rivers that transcend the boundary from underground to the surface.

Nationally significant for its scenic, free-flowing Current and Jacks Fork rivers, its caverns, and for its high-volume springs, this area captured the attention of the U.S. Congress in the 1960s. In 1964 Congress authorized the 134 miles of rivers as the first national scenic riverways. With many American rivers harnessed by dams, the nation awoke to the natural, scenic, and recreational values of free-flowing rivers.

Each week the larger springs pour billions of gallons of clear, cold water into the Current and Jacks Fork rivers, the heart of Ozark National Scenic Riverways. The park exists to protect these largely spring-fed streams running through some of the Ozarks' most beautiful scenery.

As residents from St. Louis and other cities became attracted to recreation in the Ozarks, river activities took on new meanings. So did the appreciation of hiking, fishing, and family outings. Now this area is valued for how it preserves nature and offers outdoor recreation. Over 1.5 million people yearly come to enjoy the quality of life ensured by the rivers' protected status, a status shared by only a tiny percent of the nation's rivers.

Early settlers built farmsteads and mills along the riverways. In the late 1800s the watershed witnessed heavy logging and other exploitation. Tourism increased in the early 1900s as more people acquired automobiles. Improved roads and new bridges enticed urban visitors, and the Ozarks became a popular vacation destination.



Caves, Springs, and Karst

Think of this Ozark landscape as a three-dimensional watershed—water runs across the land's surface in streams and creeks, down through cracks at different levels, and beneath it in underground rivers.

Where these underground rivers burst onto the surface, we call them springs. Ozark National Scenic Riverways is home to more first-magnitude springs in one area (springs with daily flows over 65 million gallons of water) than anywhere else on Earth. These springs offer beauty and respite to people, and they supply most of the Current and Jacks Fork rivers' flow. Some 81 million gallons gush daily from Alley Spring, while Big Spring's daily flow averages 286 million gallons (photo at top).

This geological landscape, called karst, is riddled with caves and springs that are created as groundwater dissolves soluble rock like limestone or dolomite. As water flows from crack to crack, small underground chambers grow larger and longer, forming submerged caves. These caves are revealed when the springs and underground rivers run dry. The park has over 300 caves. Many like Round Spring Cave are beautifully decorated with stalactites and stalagmites.

Other karst features here include sinkholes like Devils Well (formed when the top of an underground cave collapsed) and "losing streams" like Sinking Creek (so-called because much of the surface water drains into cracks in the bedrock). Water moving from the surface through this fractured bedrock and into groundwater and into our wells is not purified. We must protect this local resource from pollution—it is our only source of drinking water.

History in the Hollows

For centuries Indians traveled these hills and hollows, moving with the seasons and following their sources of food. Spanish explorers in the 1500s and French in the late 1600s encountered tribes who lived in villages, grew crops, and traveled to hunt deer and bison. Life began to change for the Indians when vastly different cultures arrived. By the late 1800s most tribes had been moved onto reservations.

In the mid-1800s American-born settlers of mainly Scots-Irish heritage established hamlets along rivers and springs. Families practiced subsistence farming, gradually building trading networks that used the rivers for transportation. Social relationships centered around family and local communities. Commercial settlements gave rural settlers an incentive to come together. People gathered at mills, stores, one-room schools, and on the rivers to share ideas.

Railroads brought commerce with the larger world. By the late 1800s thousands

of acres of Ozark forests were sacrificed for railroads' insatiable appetite for wood for ties and trestles and fuel for steam-engines before coal became the fuel of choice. It was a boom-and-bust economy—resources ran out or markets dried up.

The Current and Jacks Fork rivers acted as highways long before roads were passable. Ferries operated until replaced by modern bridges. In the mid-1920s tourism took hold with the establishment of state parks. Outfitting and guide operations sprang up. Most used wooden jonboats, which were inexpensive to build and—with their square, flat-bottom hull design—easy to navigate on shallow rivers and sandbars.

Today Ozark regional culture remains distinct—a pragmatic approach to life that respects loyalty to clan and kin, values personal independence, and relies on local resources. Oral traditions and practical recreation reign: storytelling, hunting, fishing, trapping, picnicking, and, especially, family reunions.

Preservation and Recreation

Ozark National Scenic Riverways was the first national park area to protect a river system in its wild, undammed state. The movement for a park started as a grassroots reaction to plans to build a series of dams on the Current and Jacks Fork rivers. While local residents and conservation groups in nearby cities disagreed on how the rivers should be preserved, most agreed that the rivers should not be dammed—they should be kept wild and free flowing.

After much debate and compromise, Congress officially established the park in 1964. The State of Missouri donated the three state parks, Alley, Big Spring, and Round Spring, to the National Park Service as a gift from Missouri to the American people. Land along the rivers between the former state parks was purchased and the whole area knitted together as America's first national river park. The effort to save these

river—a remarkable success story—became the prototype for the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, which protects many of our nation's free-flowing rivers.

Since 1964 millions of people have come here to enjoy the beauty and recreational opportunities of the rivers. Canoeing and water sports are popular, as are hiking, camping, and birdwatching. Wildflowers in spring and tree colors in autumn are spectacular.

Today the national park strives to protect the rivers and the watershed to ensure enjoyment of these natural and cultural resources for you and for generations to come.

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Ozark Habitats

CAVES
Caves offer a challenging environment for wildlife. Animals must adapt to conditions of darkness, cool temperatures, and high humidity. Bats use caves for shelter and to hibernate, sleep, or raise their pups. They come and go, finding food in the outside world. Others, like grotto salamanders, live in caves full-time. Such species are often blind but their senses, like touch or smell, have become acute for cave life. These cave dwellers (full- or part-time residents) need quality groundwater to survive.

SPRINGS
Large and small springs punctuate the Ozark landscape. Essentially the mouths of underground rivers, springs attract plants and wildlife, where the reliable flow, chemistry, and temperature of the water provide a stable habitat. Watercress, duckweed, and other plants provide organic matter for animals and habitat for aquatic insects. At least 38 animal species are found only in Ozark springs and subterranean waters and nowhere else on Earth.

RIVERS
The rivers are home to scores of fish and other animals. Wading birds like great blue herons stalk the banks looking for snacks. Kingfishers dive to snatch unwary meals, perhaps a goggle-eye. Green herons patrol gravel bars looking for small creatures. Changes to the watershed (including areas outside park boundaries)—pesticides, stream disturbance, and development—threaten river ecosystems. One affected species is the Ozark hellbender, a salamander that can live for 30 years and weigh up to four pounds.

FLOODPLAIN
These free-flowing rivers flood frequently, washing nutrient-rich mud and silt onto the adjacent floodplains. Water may cover flat areas several times a year, or not at all. River cane, our only native bamboo, once grew here in vast thickets called canebrakes. Early 1800s settlers used the cane for animal fodder. When the overgrazed cane disappeared, farmers planted crops in the bare fields. Today canebrakes are being restored along riverbanks, slowing erosion and providing nesting for rare Swainson's warblers.

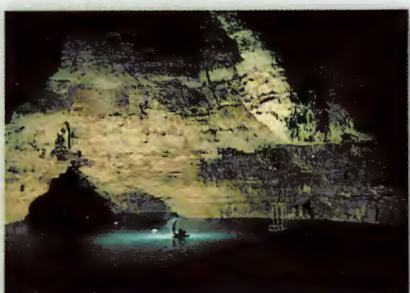
FORESTS
Ozark forests are testimony to nature's resilience. A century ago the hills were nearly stripped bare by timber companies bent on supplying lumber for the rapidly developing nation. Today large white oaks and shortleaf pine, Missouri's only native pine, cover the hillsides. Sycamore and green ash thrive along rivers. Dogwood, Missouri's state tree, decorates the understory, providing shade for ferns and wildflowers. Wildlife, from white-tailed deer to chipmunks, find shelter and food in these recovering forests.

GLADES
Dry rocky areas on hilltops are called glades. These are much like deserts, with bare rock and gravel exposed to harsh summer sun. Glades require periodic fire to keep them open and check vegetation. Plants and wildlife are desert-like too. Cracks in the rocks might harbor enough soil for a clump of grass, a prickly pear cactus, or a few cedar trees. A collared lizard may use a rock to survey his territory or to watch for a juicy scorpion or tarantula. Watch for armadillos; they run fast on those short legs.

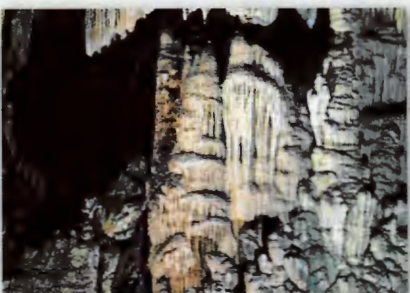




AKERS FERRY
For decades ferries transported vehicles and people across the Current River, including crossings at Powder Mill and Akers. Eventually bridges replaced ferries at busy crossings. Today Akers Ferry is the last in the Ozark NSR; it holds two cars. Year-round (except Dec. 25), weather permitting. Fee. On Rt. K, 23 miles south of Salem.



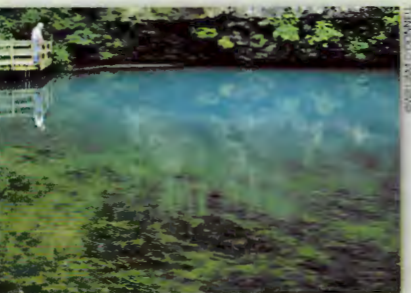
DEVILS WELL
This sinkhole formed when a cavern roof containing a lake collapsed. A spiral staircase leads to a viewing platform. The lake, 80 to 100 feet below the platform, is larger than a football field. The gravel road to Devils Well is very steep; use caution. Open daily. Free. Off Rt. KK, east of Akers.



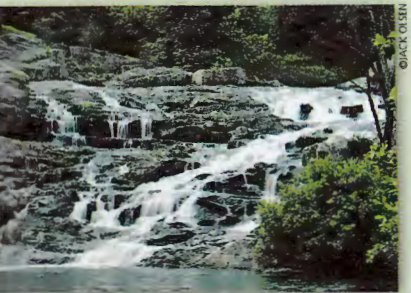
ROUND SPRING CAVE
Ranger-led lantern tours take about two hours. Wear a jacket and sturdy shoes—areas may be slippery, and the cave is 58°F year-round. You must climb stairs to get to the cave; stooping is required inside. No reservations needed, but group size is limited. Open Memorial Day through Labor Day. Fee. On Mo. Hwy 19, 20 miles north of Eminence.



ALLEY MILL
Alley Mill, with its three-story building and turquoise water, is a photographer's delight. Much of the original equipment—a turbine instead of a water wheel and rollers rather than grinding stones—is still in place. A one-room school house is nearby. Grounds open all year; mill in summer. Free. Mo. Hwy 106, 6 miles west of Eminence.



BLUE SPRING on the Current River
At 310 feet, this clear spring is Missouri's deepest. If the Statue of Liberty was placed on the bottom, the top of her torch would be underwater. The blue comes from minerals dissolved on the water's underground journey. A 1/2-mile trail starts at the parking lot. Spring and trail open year-round. Free. Off Mo. Hwy 106, 12 miles east of Eminence.



ROCKY FALLS
Rocky Falls is an example of a shut-in, an Ozark term for a river naturally confined in a narrow channel. A steep cascade pours into a pool of water. Part of the 550-mile Ozark Trail passes by the falls. Trails and park open year-round. Free. Off Rt. NN, 9 miles south-east of Eminence.



BIG SPRING HISTORIC DISTRICT
Big Spring, designated Missouri's first state park in 1924, was a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) project in the 1930s. CCC crews built trails, roads, bridges, and buildings. Today it has a dining lodge, rental cabins, and picnic shelters. Trails and park open year-round. Lodging and food, seasonally. Rt. 103, south of Van Buren.

Planning Your Visit

Things To See and Do Many people come to Ozark National Scenic Riverways for its refreshing water and premier opportunities for boating, floating, and fishing. The park offers more than watersports. You can camp, hike, tour a cave and historic sites, examine springs, ride horseback, and join ranger-led activities, offered seasonally.

When To Visit The park is open year-round. Most people float the rivers from late May through Labor Day. Weekends in summer are especially crowded. If you enjoy solitude or discovering wildlife, why not try something different? Visit on a weekday or in the off-season.

Lodging, Food, Services, Camping Neighboring communities offer lodging, food, and services. For details about camping and services in the park, see the chart (below) or www.nps.gov/ozar.

Family Friendly Park! The park, communities, and partners are working together to clean up the riverways—and it is making a difference. Rowdy behavior, excessive noise, and the abuse of drugs or alcohol are not tolerated. All laws

are strictly enforced. For information about laws and policies, contact the park or visit www.nps.gov/ozar.

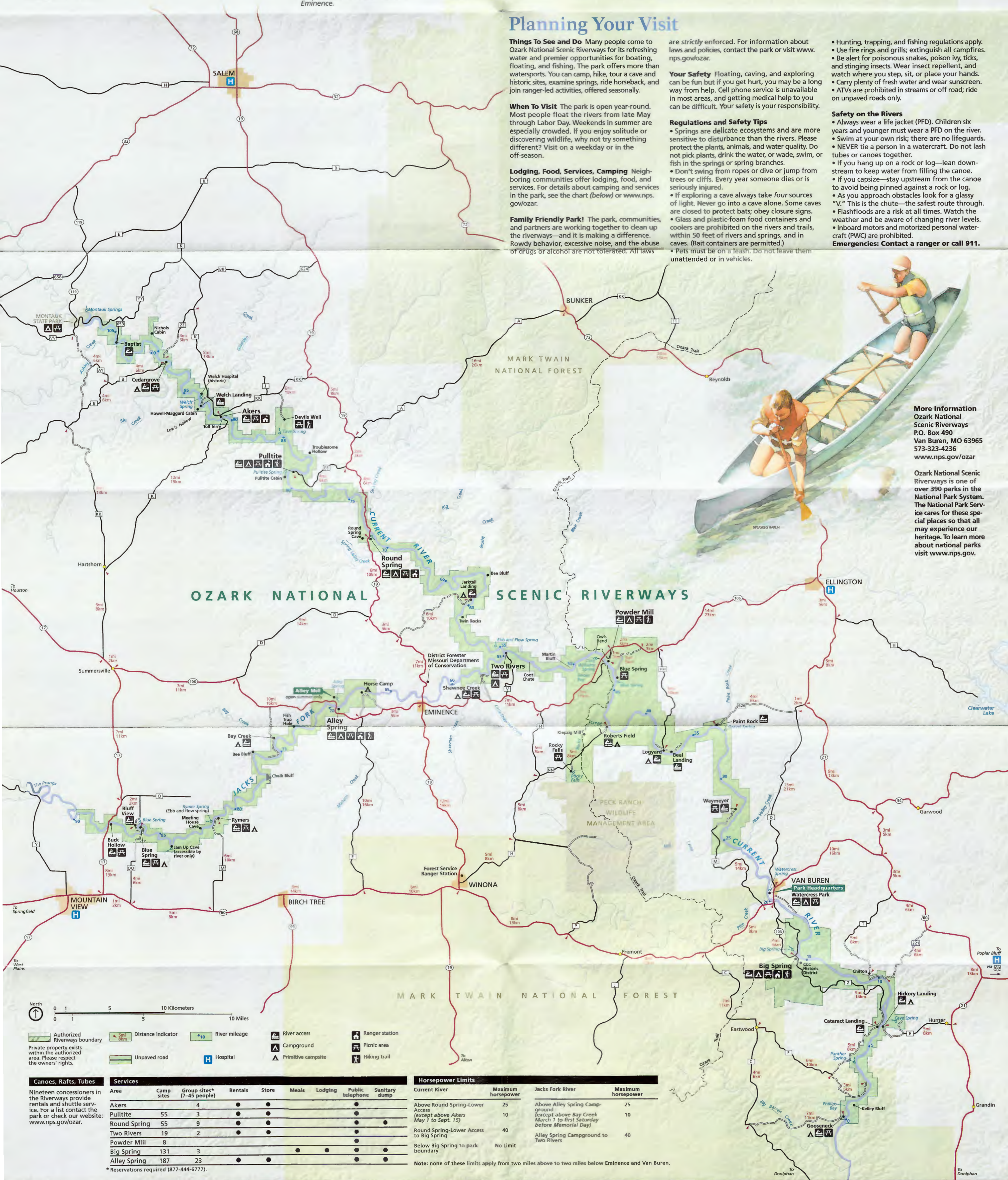
Your Safety Floating, caving, and exploring can be fun but if you get hurt, you may be a long way from help. Cell phone service is unavailable in most areas, and getting medical help to you can be difficult. Your safety is your responsibility.

Regulations and Safety Tips
• Springs are delicate ecosystems and are more sensitive to disturbance than the rivers. Please protect the plants, animals, and water quality. Do not pick plants, drink the water, or wade, swim, or fish in the springs or spring branches.
• Don't swing from ropes or dive or jump from trees or cliffs. Every year someone dies or is seriously injured.
• If exploring a cave always take four sources of light. Never go into a cave alone. Some caves are closed to protect bats; obey closure signs.
• Glass and plastic food containers and coolers are prohibited on the rivers and trails, within 50 feet of rivers and springs, and in caves. (Bait containers are permitted.)
• Pets must be on a leash. Do not leave them unattended or in vehicles.

• Hunting, trapping, and fishing regulations apply.
• Use fire rings and grills; extinguish all campfires.
• Be alert for poisonous snakes, poison ivy, ticks, and stinging insects. Wear insect repellent, and watch where you step, sit, or place your hands.
• Carry plenty of fresh water and wear sunscreen.
• ATVs are prohibited in streams or off road; ride on unpaved roads only.

Safety on the Rivers
• Always wear a life jacket (PFD). Children six years and younger must wear a PFD on the river.
• Swim at your own risk; there are no lifeguards.
• NEVER tie a person in a watercraft. Do not lash tubes or canoes together.
• If you hang up on a rock or log—lean downstream to keep water from filling the canoe.
• If you capsize—stay upstream from the canoe to avoid being pinned against a rock or log.
• As you approach obstacles look for a glassy "V." This is the chute—the safest route through.
• Flashfloods are a risk at all times. Watch the weather and be aware of changing river levels.
• Inboard motors and motorized personal watercraft (PWC) are prohibited.

Emergencies: Contact a ranger or call 911.



More Information
Ozark National Scenic Riverways
P.O. Box 490
Van Buren, MO 63965
573-323-4236
www.nps.gov/ozar

Ozark National Scenic Riverways is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places so that all may experience our heritage. To learn more about national parks visit www.nps.gov.

Canoes, Rafts, Tubes
Nineteen concessioners in the Riverways provide rentals and shuttle service. For a list contact the park or check our website: www.nps.gov/ozar.

Area	Camp sites	Group sites* (7-45 people)	Rentals	Store	Meals	Lodging	Public telephone	Sanitary dump
Akers	4	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Pulltite	55	3	•	•	•	•	•	•
Round Spring	55	9	•	•	•	•	•	•
Two Rivers	19	2	•	•	•	•	•	•
Powder Mill	8	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Big Spring	131	3	•	•	•	•	•	•
Alley Spring	187	23	•	•	•	•	•	•

* Reservations required (877-444-6777).

Current River	Maximum horsepower	Jacks Fork River	Maximum horsepower
Above Round Spring-Lower Access (except above Bay Creek May 1 to Sept. 15)	25	Above Alley Spring Camp-ground (except above Bay Creek March 1 to first Saturday before Memorial Day)	25
Round Spring-Lower Access to Big Spring	10	Alley Spring Campground to Two Rivers	10
Below Big Spring to park boundary	40		40
	No Limit		

Note: none of these limits apply from two miles above to two miles below Eminence and Van Buren.