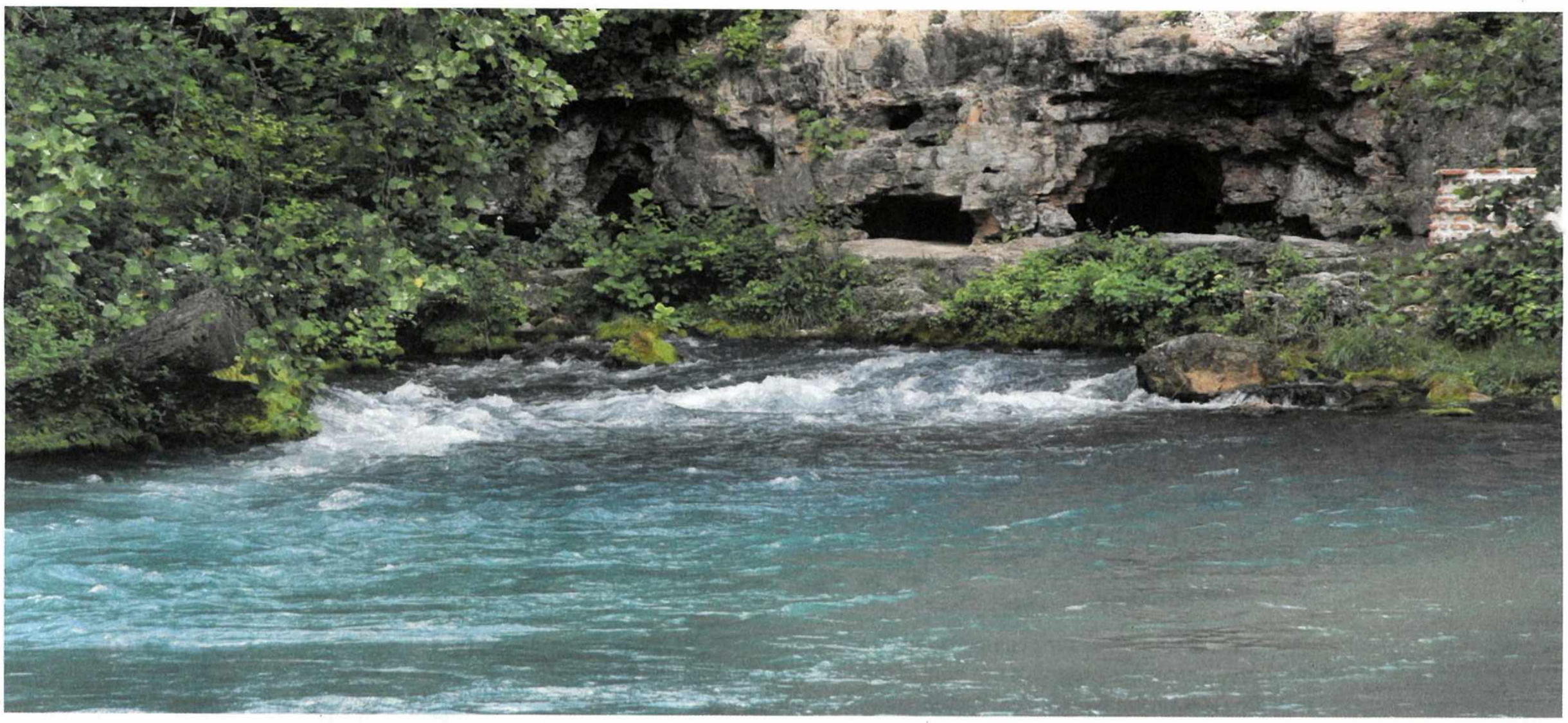
Ozark Riverways

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Ozark National Scenic Riverways

Big Spring



Introduction

Big Spring is the largest spring in Missouri and one of the largest in the world with a daily average flow of 286 million gallons. Dye tracing has determined the source of all this water to be a recharge area extending as much as 40 miles to the west. Traveling through the nooks and crannies of the karst underground, the water can take more than 130 days to reach the spring's outlet. The water boils from the base of a dolomite bluff and travels nearly 1000 feet before feeding into the Current River.

The spring remains between 55 and 58 degrees year round and has a glorious aquamarine hue thanks to minerals dissolved in the water. Watercress abounds in the cold water, providing shelter for a large number of aquatic life forms including periwinkle snails, insect larvae and a variety of fish. Burrowing crayfish leave their mounded tunnel openings along the bank. Birds, deer and mammals such as squirrel and woodchucks also visit the spring.

Early History

With its wild beauty and clear waters, Big Spring has been a gathering place for people throughout time. Archaeologists have found evidence of Native Americans dating back thousands of years. The isolated hollows and dense forests attracted early European settlers. The coming of the railroads provided easy access for large lumber companies that nearly decimated the great pine and oak forests of the region.

By the turn of the 20th century, the Current River valley was becoming popular with vacationers. The same qualities that made settling the area difficult were drawing visitors from around the country. The wildness of its countryside, the clarity of its waters and the remoteness from the outside world, made Big Spring a peaceful escape from the demands of everyday life.

Big Spring became a State Park in 1924, Missouri's first. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) arrived in the mid-1930's, helping to conserve the area's resources and provide increased visitor facilities. The stream from Big Spring to the Current River was dug by the CCC to control the flow of the spring.

Ozark National Scenic Riverways was established in 1964. Big Spring, along with Alley Spring and Round Spring State Parks, were placed under National Park Service management in 1969. With these additions, Ozark National Scenic Riverways was complete.

Facilities at Big Spring

Camping: Big Spring campground offers 123 family sites and three group sites. Some sites have electrical hookups.

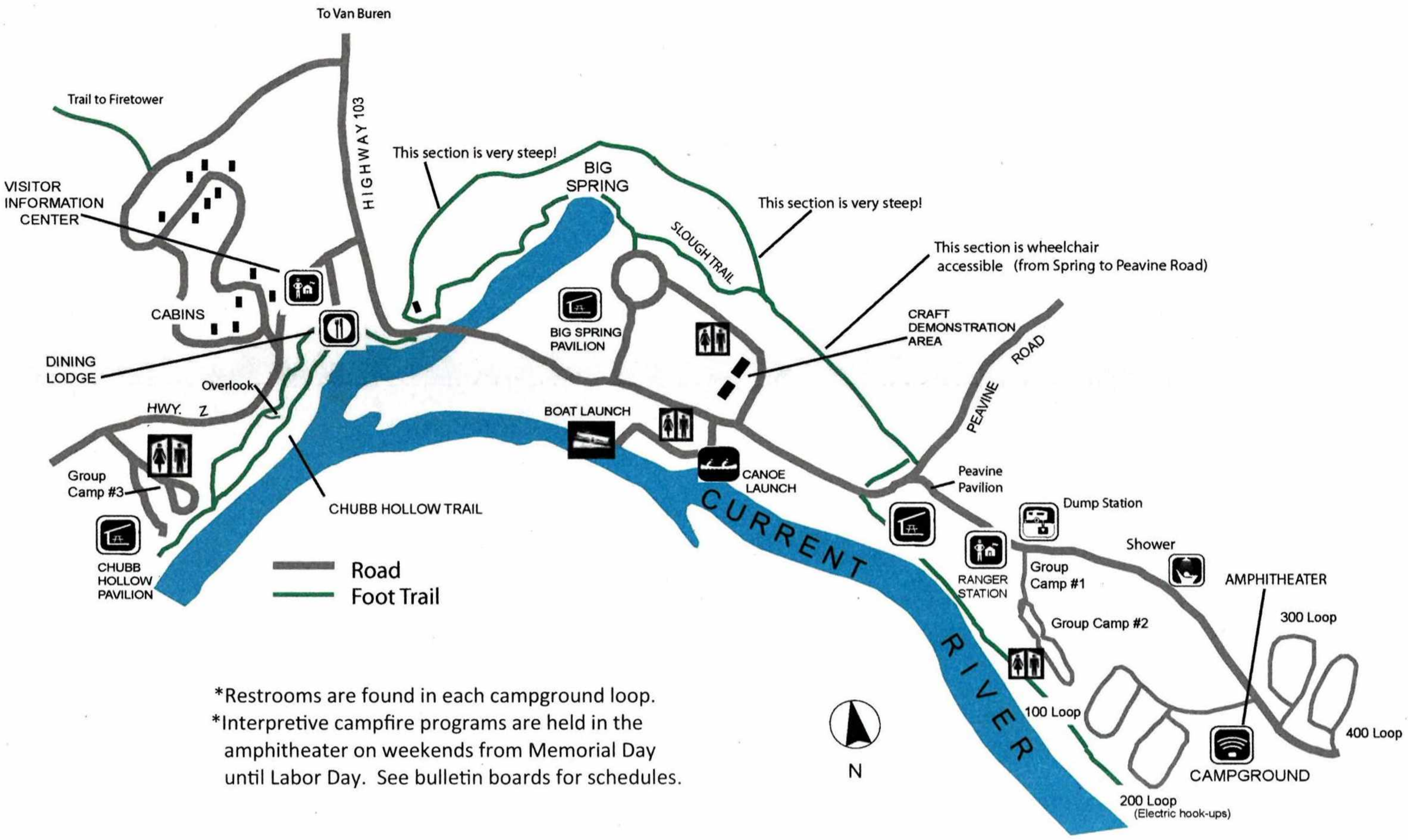
Lodging and Dining: Built by the CCC in the mid-1930's, the facilities are showing their 80 years of age. A restoration project, beginning in 2015, will revitalize the area to its former glory. During the construction and for visitor safety, lodging and dining services may be closed temporarily.

Depression Farm: The Depression Farm portrays the Ozark lifeway in the mid 1930's. The farmstead is home to several ONSR events throughout the year.

Hiking: See reverse side for trail map.

Floating: Many concessions operations serve the area. Ask for a list at any park facility or visit www.nps.gov/ozar.

Big Spring Area Map



*Restrooms are found in each campground loop.
*Interpretive campfire programs are held in the amphitheater on weekends from Memorial Day until Labor Day. See bulletin boards for schedules.

The Big Spring area has numerous natural and cultural sites for your enjoyment. The historic district is located on Highway 103 and has many buildings constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the mid 1930's. Visit the unique structures with hand carved stone blocks and beautiful woodwork amid the hills of Big Spring. The Depression Cabin, reflecting Ozark life during the Great Depression, is located across from the boat landing and is the site for events at Ozark National Scenic Riverways. For more information call 573-323-4236 ext 0 or www.nps.gov/ozar.



CAMPING AT BIG SPRING

Big Spring has both reservable and first come, first serve campsites. Family sites have a maximum occupancy of 6 people, two tents, and two vehicles. Group sites have a maximum of 45 people and are tent camping only.

To reserve family sites, group sites or the Peavine or Big Spring Pavilion call: 1-877-444-6777 or visit www.recreation.gov.

In case of Emergency contact:

Arrowhead Regional Dispatch Center
1-844-460-3604

Carter County Sheriff
911 or 573-323-4510
