

# America's State Parks

## Arkansas's Lake Ouachita State Park

Lake Ouachita State Park lies within the Ouachita Mountains in west central Arkansas. Bordering Arkansas's largest man-made lake and the Ouachita National Forest, the park offers camping, swimming, fishing, and many other outdoor opportunities, and it preserves the historic site of Three Sisters Springs.

In 1875, homesteader John McFadden claimed that three springs on his property about twelve miles north of Hot Springs (Garland County) possessed healing properties. The springs' collective name, "Three Sisters," was reputedly derived from the fact McFadden had three daughters. In 1907, W.M. Cecil and his partners bought the property. Cecil later bought out his partners and began developing McFadden's Three Sisters Springs Resort. By the mid-1930s, its facilities included cottages, a springhouse, and a bottling plant. Claiming each spring could cure a different set of diseases, Cecil distributed his bottled World's Wonder Waters across the nation. (Analyses have since shown waters from all three springs contain the same elements—such as iron, potassium, and sodium—in slightly different proportions.)

After the site underwent another ownership change in 1939, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers acquired it in 1951 in conjunction with its Lake Ouachita construction project. The actual lake was completed in 1952, but the lake was not opened to the general public until 1955, when the nearby power plant was completed—that year, the Corps of Engineers approached the state about establishing the state park as to preserve the "Three Sisters" springs, and the Corps leased to Arkansas State Parks 360 acres, including the springs, for park development. The lake itself, which stretches from Garland County to Montgomery County, is 40,000 acres, which is the largest lake entirely in the state of Arkansas. (Bull Shoals Lake is larger, but part of it lies in Missouri.)

Though the park was created on paper in 1955, it was not further established or staffed until 1965. Some of the 1930s-era buildings remain, having been renovated, but most park structures were built during the early 1970s. Park improvements in the early 1990s included a new visitors' center, restaurant, cabins, and additional campsites. Other park facilities include a marina, swimming area, hiking trails, two boat ramps, and interpretive exhibits at the springs. The park also provides eagle tours from November 1 to March 1, when the birds are wintering in the area.

