Chapter 2. Site History

Introduction

1 Ozark NSR preserves the largest natural spring in Missouri and one of the largest in the world, with a daily flow of 288 million gallons. Surrounded by acres of oak hickory forest along the Current River, the rugged hillsides of the Courtois Hills frame the spring and park development. Established as Big Spring State Park in 1924 to protect the spring, conserve wildlife, and to provide public recreation, the park was further developed by the CCC/WPA in the 1930s and 1940s. The work completed by these public work programs embodies the distinctive characteristics of Naturalistic landscape design and the Rustic architectural style and typifies the character of building and landscape seen today. Subsequent episodes of construction were led by the NPS in the 1970s, following designation of the area as part of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

2 The site history chapter presents an overview of the developmental history of Big Spring Historic District. This includes the earliest documented American Indian settlement, the establishment of the state park, development of the park by the CCC and WPA, and modifications undertaken by the NPS and into the present-day.

3 The chapter begins with a historical overview which provides background and context for understanding the development of Big Spring Historic District. This is followed by a statement of significance and period of significance. The period of significance is recommended as 1924 to 1969 to encompass implementation of the park, the CCC/WPA era of construction and development that continued until 1969. The statement of significance is followed by a detailed chronology of physical development and change, divided into six periods of landscape development. Each period of landscape development begins with a summary describing how the landscape would have appeared at that time.

Historical Overview

4 Small, temporary campsites were first established near Big Spring during the Woodland Period, 7000 BCE. During this period people were part of the Hunter-Forager Tradition, and hunted white-tailed deer and small fauna and exploited forest resources including berries, seeds, and nuts. Population size was small and probably limited to familial groups. The Osage were the most prevalent American Indian group in the Current River valley by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when French and Spanish traders explored the region. In these days, Big Spring was referred to as “the spring that roars.” The Osage predominance waned and they eventually ceded all their tribal lands, over 45,000 square miles, to the United States government in 1825.

5 In the early nineteenth century, European Americans settled the region in increasing numbers, attracted by generous U.S. land grants. The rugged Courtois Hills are not conducive to large-scale farming, therefore most new settlers established small farmsteads and engaged in subsistence agriculture. The advent of the railroad made the region accessible at a larger scale, and timber harvesting brought short term prosperity to the region and resulted in the development of towns and milling centers.
By 1920, timber resources were depleted and lumber mills closed, leaving widespread unemployment and a landscape devastated by unregulated clear cutting.

In response to the environmental damage, a local effort grew to protect the spring, conserve wildlife and the forest environment, and to provide recreational opportunities along the Current River. The nationwide automobile trend and the statewide “Get Missouri Out of the Mud” campaign spurred the state to invest in roadway improvements. Improved roads allowed for better access to tourist and recreation destinations, particularly the Current River valley. Community activists led a pivotal role in establishing Big Spring as a state park. Dr. T. W. Cotton, a Van Buren businessman and local land owner, bundled and consolidated properties for state purchase. Ultimately, the state acquired 4,258 acres for Big Spring State Park – the largest state park in Missouri when established in December 1924.

While initial state park development was constrained by the state’s modest budget, roads, trails, campgrounds, wildlife pens, and recreational amenities were built. Thousands visited Big Spring State Park the first year. Soon afterwards, floods along the Current River destroyed most of the state park buildings, campgrounds and picnic areas. With the onset of the Great Depression, repair efforts were largely stalled.

As a result of the Great Depression, nearly two million American workers lost their jobs. In response, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Emergency Conservation Work Act which laid the foundation of the CCC. The CCC would employ thousands of unemployed Americans, and by 1936, over 2,000 CCC camps were established across the United States, including one at Big Spring State Park.

In June 1933, CCC Company 1710 arrived at Big Spring State Park. A master plan was developed which provided guidance for CCC projects. It identified areas for recreational playfields, parking areas, hiking trails, scenic overlooks, and river access points. It included locations for lodging, visitor orientation, concessions, and maintenance areas. The CCC, and later the Works Progress Administration (WPA), would construct over 40 buildings and 16 miles of trails between 1933 and 1943.

To implement the plan, Donald A. Blake was hired as architectural foreman and John Warren Teasdale as landscape architect. Blake and Teasdale’s designs blended Tudor influences with the Rustic architectural style, popular in public parks at the time. Buildings blended with the landscape, using native materials: locally quarried dolomite and oak timbers. Landscape design was Naturalistic in style, with new features subordinated to the native topography and setting. "Irregular rock, placed with smooth cleavage outside, and with a shade of cement not too pronounced, but that would blend with the color of the predominant rocks used," characterized the work at Big Spring State Park, as described by Superintendent N. Curtis Case.

Leo Anderson, an expert stone mason, directed stone cutting, dressing, and laying. Donald A. Blake eventually became park superintendent and his ongoing architectural leadership provided a continuity of architectural design, evident in the landscape of today.
The last major construction project ended in 1937 and CCC Company 1710 departed Big Spring State Park, razing their camp. Beginning in 1938, the WPA continued the legacy, building Rustic style cabins and other structures. The WPA program dissolved as World War II production jobs increased and the American economy recovered. "The departure of the WPA bookended a ten year period of extraordinary development during which the identity of the Big Spring State Park was fully realized and appreciated by the visiting public."2.13

Further development of Big Spring State Park slowed afterwards, and the state park placed a renewed emphasis on the protection and reintroduction of wildlife populations. By the end of World War II, the Missouri State Park Board (MSB) was severely underfunded. With no influx of federal cash or labor, the park’s lodges, cabins, shelters and other recreational facilities fell into disrepair.

In the 1950s, the state park expanded and infrastructure was further developed. Efforts grew to convert the state park to a national park, due to increased commercial and private attempts to develop a hydroelectric power plant on the Current River. It became clear that the riverways in Missouri needed additional protection from development.

Joseph Jaeger, the director the Missouri State Park Board, decided to spearhead the initiative to transfer ownership and protection of the Current and Jacks Fork rivers to the federal government. Missouri Governor Forrest Smith voiced his support in 1949, and in 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed legislation establishing 134 miles of free-flowing waterways as the OZAR "For the purpose of conserving and interpreting unique scenic and other natural values and objects of historic interest, including preservation of portions of the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers in Missouri as free-flowing streams, preservation of springs and caves, management of wildlife, and provisions for use and enjoyment of the outdoor recreation resources thereof by the people of the United States."2.14

In late 1969, the Missouri State Park Board transferred ownership of Big Spring State Park to the federal government, as federal rules stipulated that lands had to be donated, not sold.2.15 The NPS assumed management for the state park that covered a 5,828.04 acre area.2.16 There had been few modern intrusions or alterations to the park since the CCC / WPA work, and most of the historic features and landscape remained intact. In the 1970s, the NPS upgraded utilities, repaired roads, replaced bridges, and established a new campground north of the BSHD. In 1981 Big Spring Historic District was listed in the NRHP for its significance in architecture, landscape architecture, and conservation.
Statement and Period of Significance

Big Spring Historic District was listed in the NRHP on March 17, 1981 under Criterion C, as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. Big Spring Historic District is a significant example of Naturalistic style landscape design and the Rustic architectural style that is associated with CCC era park construction. The Naturalistic style placed emphasis on the natural landscape, and new features, including buildings, walls, roads and trails, were designed to be sympathetic and subordinate to the natural features.

Materials, type of construction, and details were determined by the natural qualities of the environment. At Big Spring Historic District this included extensive use of native oak and local dolomite as building materials, which matched in color and texture the natural environment. Architect Donald A. Blake integrated a Tudor influence into many of the Rustic buildings, which resemble the picturesque Victorian cottages made popular in the nineteenth century by Andrew Jackson Downing. Native plantings were intended to blend the buildings with the landscape. Elements of the Naturalistic style include boulder lined parking areas, Rustic steps and stone-paved paths, and the scenic orientation towards the spring and river.

The CCC projects at Big Spring State Park reflect the Naturalistic style while accommodating recreational facilities and desired use of the area as an active recreational destination, a growing trend in the 1930s. Recreational facilities, such as an improved swimming area in the river, along with scenic overlooks, picnic grounds, playfields, and miles of hiking trails all reflect the active recreation uses that brought the visitor in contact with nature. Consideration should be given into the district’s potential for national significance under Criterion A, for association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history, including the history of federal work relief programs during the Great Depression. The CCC program signified the federal government’s engagement in public works and public welfare, at a time when one out of four young Americans was out of work. The federal program of the CCC was intended to alleviate the disastrous conditions of the American economy and environment. The CCC and WPA provided employment for thousands of Americans, and the legacy of their work is showcased at Big Spring Historic District, considered one of the best examples in the state of Missouri. As a CCC project and campsite, Big Spring Historic District represents historically important federal policies and periods of public works, has a direct association with events that promoted the betterment of society, and is associated with national trends in the development of recreation.

As part of its significance, Big Spring Historic District is an important record of early conservation efforts and wildlife management. The state park, established in 1924, focused on active recreation as well as conservation of wildlife and protection of the environment, a mission which was carried out further by the CCC and WPA, and through the 1940s.
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The NRHP lists the historic district with two periods of significance – the first dates from 1925 to 1927 and the second dates from 1933 to 1937.\(^{2.20}\) As proposed by the 2016 CLI, the period of significance should span from 1924 to 1969. This would encompass the implementation of the park, the CCC era of construction, and the development of the cultural landscape that continued until 1969.\(^{2.21}\)

## Periods of Landscape Development

1. Six periods of landscape change describe the physical evolution of the Big Spring Historic District. The beginning and end of each period corresponds to and documents a point of major physical modifications or significant change in development patterns.

2. The periods of development are described through narrative text and illustrations. Three periods fall within the period of significance, noted in bold text.

3. **1924 to 1932:** State Park Development

4. **1933 to 1943:** CCC and WPA Development

5. **1944 to 1969:** Post-CCC / WPA era

6. **1970 to 1981:** NPS Development and Stewardship

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\(^{2.20}\) NRHP, 10

\(^{2.21}\) 2016 CLI, 7.
Figure 2-1. An artist’s depiction of an early settlement shows shelters called ‘wickiups’ built with willow branches and covered in bark or hide. (Chapman, *Indians and Archaeology of Missouri.*)
12000 BCE to 1540 CE: American Indian Settlement

American Indian groups inhabited the Current River area throughout the Paleo-Indian, Archaic and Woodland periods, until about the middle Mississippian period (AD 1000-1350). Early hunters People first settled the Current River basin as early as 12,000 years ago. Early hunters were few in number and traveled widely in search of game, establishing intermittent campsites.

Paleo-Indian (pre - 7000 BCE)

People first settled the Current River basin as early as 12,000 years ago. Early hunters were few in number and traveled widely in search of game, establishing intermittent campsites.

Archaic (7000 BCE to 600 BCE)

During the late Paleo-Indian and early Archaic periods, the Dalton Culture occupied the Current River basin. This time was a transition between the Pleistocene and the Ozark highlands were primarily prairie and oak savanna, whereas steep valley slopes and valley bottoms were dominated by thick deciduous and pine forest.

The settlement system typical during the Dalton period consisted of small, minimal use campsites where they spent longer periods of time, supplementing their diet by collecting edible plants, made available by warmer temperatures.

Sensitive Information hidden for Public Review Draft

2.22 Zedeño, Cultural Affiliation Study. 16.
2.25 Chapman, Indians and Archaeology of Missouri, 28.
2.26 Zedeño, Cultural Affiliation Study. 18.
Figure 2-2. Settlement during the Dalton period consisted of small, minimal use campsites where they supplemented their diet by collecting edible plants, (Chapman, Indians and Archaeology of Missouri.)
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Woodland (600 BCE to 900 CE)
Several general trends characterize the Woodland period: spread of agricultural economy, increase in sedentism, adoption of ceramic technology, ritual activity involving burial mound construction, and participation in long-distance exchange networks.²³⁵
Woodland groups had an increase in reliance on wild and domesticated plants.

Woodland sites in the eastern Ozarks are located on natural terraces or on the floodplains of the Current River valley. It has been postulated that the Ozarks at this time was a place of overlapping traditions and where critical resources were utilized by more than one group, creating localized social networks.²³⁶

During the Middle Woodland period (250 BCE to 450 CE), people began gardening, settling into organized village communities, trading widely, and creating elaborate art objects.²³⁷

Mississippian Period (900 CE to 1540 CE)
The Mississippian period witnessed the development of complex and socially stratified communities, subsistence increasingly relied on maize cultivation, and settlement patterns became more sedentary.²³⁸
A thriving population resided along the Current River during the Mississippian period, with evidence of settlements at Shawnee Creek, Round Spring, Isaac Kelley, Owls Bend, and Gooseneck. Populations continued to be dispersed in small farmsteads or hamlets along the major valleys, with limited activity locales on shelters and ridges.²³⁹

By 1300 CE, ceramic evidence suggests that the American Indian population left the Ozark region. This coincides with widespread population increases in settlements along the Mississippi River valley in southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas. The reason for abandonment of the region is unknown.²⁴⁰

²³⁵ Zedeño, Cultural Affiliation Study. 22.
²³⁶ Zedeño, Cultural Affiliation Study. 25.
²³⁷ Chapman, Indians and Archaeology of Missouri, 53, 63.
²³⁸ Chapman, Indians and Archaeology of Missouri, 71.
²³⁹ Zedeño, Cultural Affiliation Study. 26.
Concrete piers remain in the Current River, adjacent to Big Spring, located outside of the BSHD, from the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad originally built to support lumber companies in the region. (2016 CLI)
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1541 to 1923: European Settlement and Development

When the French and Spanish arrived in the region, they encountered few American Indians living in the area. A trade network was established between the Europeans and American Indians, which extracted wildlife and mineral resources, but the land would have appeared as a wilderness to most Europeans. In the nineteenth century small farms were established in the region, and areas of forest were cleared for farmland, including the field north of Big Spring. The railroad had a greater impact upon the landscape, providing access for timber companies who harvested shortleaf pine for sawlogs and oak for railroad ties. Cutting was selective, and did not greatly alter the landscape.2.41 A lumber camp and two sawmills were established in Chubb Hollow.2.42

1541 to 1650

Few American Indian settlements were within the Current River basin at this time, although the area was used for hunting through 1650.2.43

1600s, late

In the late 1600s, the French were the first Europeans to permanently settle in the Ozark region. Later, this area became part of the French province of Louisiana and forts and settlements were established along the Mississippi River and interior waterways.2.44

1650

American Indian tribes displaced east of the Mississippi River began a western migration and settled in the Ozark region. Altercations erupted between various tribes and Europeans who competed for hunting and trading resources.2.47

1700 to 1800s

The Osage, Kansas, Ponca, and Mahas tribes occupied current day Missouri. The Osage tribe was the most prevalent near the Current River. Although hostile to European settlers, the Osage did develop strong trading relationships with French trappers and traders who traveled the area.2.46

1800s

American Indian tribes displaced east of the Mississippi River began a western migration and settled in the Ozark region. Altercations erupted between various tribes and Europeans who competed for hunting and trading resources.2.47

1803

The United States purchased the Louisiana territory from Spain, resulting in increased European American settlement of the Mississippi River and associated riverways.2.48

Pocahontas Randolph had a minor mandate to explore the area, and called Big Spring by its native name, “The Spring that Roars.”2.49

The area around the spring was known as Bear Camp or Bark Camp, “either from a camp for bear hunters, or on account of temporary bark-covered huts constructed there.”2.50


2.42 The date the camp and sawmills were established is unknown. E.B. Williamson. Dragonflies Collected in Missouri. Occasional Papers of the Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan. June 6, 1932, No. 240.

2.43 2016 CLI, 23.

2.44 2016 CLI, 24.
Figure 2-4. Big Spring and its location in the Current River Valley was an ideal location for state park development, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)

Figure 2-5. Before the 1925 bridge in Van Buren was built, people ferried across the Current River to access Big Spring State Park, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)
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1825 The Osage tribe ceded 45,000 square miles in Missouri and Arkansas to the United States.2,51

1833 The town of Van Buren, four miles north of Big Spring, was founded as the seat of Ripley County along an old American Indian crossing.2,52

1854 Congress passed the Graduation Act, encouraging settlement in the Ozark region. Settlers, primarily from Tennessee, Virginia, and the Carolinas, of Scotch-Irish heritage, built small farms and homesteads in the rugged terrain of the Courtois Hills. The region was reached by river highways due to the difficulty of overland travel. The hills were not conducive to large-scale farming, so most settlers engaged in subsistence agriculture.2,53

The Scotch-Irish were “clannish,” self-sufficient, and integrated well into the rugged setting with the American Indians.2,54 Their handcrafted cabins and barns, crafts, dance and music continue to influence the region.

1859 Van Buren was established as seat of Carter County, when Ripley and Shannon Counties were combined.2,55

1870s and 1880s The region’s abundance of timber attracted East Coast lumber companies. The industry brought economic prosperity from the development of railroads, milling centers, and towns, and new settlers arrived in the region, seeking jobs in the mills.2,56

1887 Prior to 1887 the Missouri Lumber and Mining Company obtained a railroad right-of-way for property north of Big Spring branch.2,57 In 1887, the Kansas City, Fort Scott, and Memphis Railroad entered an agreement with Missouri Lumber and Mining Company to build a railroad from Toliver Pond in Carter County to Willow Spring in Howell County – often referred to as the Current River Railroad. Construction was completed in 1889, and the railroad was used primarily to transport timber and timber products.

1913 During the CCC development of Big Spring State Park, it was used to transport workers and supplies.2,58

1920s By 1920, the region’s timber resources were depleted and lumber mills closed.2,60

2016 CLI, 24.
2016 CLI, 35.
2016 CLI, 24.
Figure 2-6. Missouri State Park Board improved a foot trail to Big Spring that likely followed a social trail that pre-dated park development. (OZAR Archives)

Figure 2-7. The cave inside Big Spring, one of the largest springs in the United States, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-8. Near Big Spring, a bath house, store, gas station, two latrines, flag pole, sign, and stove served campers, 1927. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-9. By 1927, the state had built roads, trails, several buildings, and a water tank. Three other structures are shown located in Chubb Hollow, which were remains of a lumber camp and sawmill, 1927. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-10. A ‘pontoon’ style bridge crossed Big Spring branch just north of its confluence with the Current River. The store is in the background, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)

Figure 2-11. A ‘pontoon’ style bridge crossed Big Spring branch; the bath house is in the background on the Current River, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-12. Road and bridge improvements made Big Spring more accessible, and visitation of the park expanded, 1930. (OZAR Archives)

Figure 2-13. The Current River was popular for floating trips, 1931. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-14. A major flood of the Current River submerged the Big Spring campground and picnic areas, resulting in extensive damage, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)
Big Spring Historic District, Ozark National Scenic Riverways
Cultural Landscape Report and Environmental Assessment

Figure 2-15. The CCC Camp at Big Spring State Park, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)

Figure 2-16. CCC Company 1710 remained at Big Spring for more than four years, and was joined by companies 734 and 1740 for brief periods, 1935. (OZAR Archives)
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1 1924 to 1932: State Park Development
2 After the departure of the timber companies, many left the region, while others returned to subsistence agriculture and open range grazing in the uplands.2.61 The Current River valley became known for its beautiful natural scenery, and was a tourist destination. With its rugged topography and natural spring, Big Spring was an ideal location for a new state park. Initial park development included roads, trails, campgrounds, picnic areas, and recreational amenities. Development was clustered around the area of Big Spring branch and Big Spring, which was developed into a park-like setting with grass and shade trees. Adjacent park land was restored as woodlands and areas were fenced to preserve deer and turkey populations.

2 1924
While the Missouri state park program was initiated in 1919, the first state parks were not established until 1924. Three of Missouri's first eight parks, Big Spring, Alley Spring, and Round Spring, were created along the Current and Jacks Fork River.2.62

2 1925
The Missouri State Park Board established Big Spring State Park in December 1924, encompassing 4,416 acres. While initial park development was slow, park roads, property fencing, and campsites were built.2.63 Boundary fencing and cattle guards were built to minimize destructive impacts of free-grazing practices. Turkey and deer pens were built to assist in repopulation efforts.2.64

2 1927
By 1927, the state had built roads, trails, several buildings, bridges, and a water tank. A 'pontoon' style bridge floated across Big Spring branch just north of its confluence with the Current River. A pedestrian foot bridge crossed Big Spring branch on the north side, connecting the campground near the spring to a trail (present-day Rocky Ridge Trail) extended along an old wagon trail to the top of the ridge over Big Spring.2.67 One of the state park's principal functions was as a game preserve. The southern portion of the state park was managed as a game refuge, and "immediately after acquisition, the state began stocking the park with wild turkey and deer."2.68

2 1928
A major flood of the Current River submerged the campgrounds and picnic areas, resulting in extensive damage. A new graded dirt road from the railroad station at Chicopee to the property north of Big Spring branch remained under the private ownership of Dr. T. W. Cotton.

2 1929
A bridge across the Current River in Van Buren was built July 17, 1925, making Big Spring State Park more accessible to visitors traveling along the east-west highway, which later became US Highway 60.2.65 For most of the twentieth century, roads in the Current River valley were primitive wagon trails.2.66

1924 to 1932: State Park Development

1924

1925

1927

1928
Figure 2-17. The CCC occupied three different locations while building Big Spring State Park. (Mundus Bishop 2016)
park was completed after the flood made the old road impassable.\textsuperscript{2.69}

\textbf{1930s}

The state built a caretaker’s house (possibly HS-416), concession building, shelter house, zoo, and vehicle and foot bridges over Big Spring branch, replacing buildings and structures damaged by the 1928 flood. The existing pontoon bridge over Big Spring branch was replaced with a new vehicular bridge. Overhead electrical wires were extended from Van Buren to the park, and Big Spring was illuminated at night.\textsuperscript{2.70}
Figure 2-18. In June 1933, CCC Company 1710 set up a tent camp at Spring Hollow, near the entrance to Big Spring State Park, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)

Figure 2-19. The CCC built a dining hall, fire ring, water trough, retaining walls, water tower, shower house, septic tanks, gymnasium, and new barracks at their third and final camp, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-20. The CCC built an 18’x7’ septic tank at their camp, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-21. In 1933, a bridge crossed Big Spring branch and provided access to a bath house, concession building, and two toilets, 1933. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-22. Landscape Architect Robert Jones designed a new pine log bridge for Big Spring branch, 1933. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-23. Workers used a pile driver for support pilings. The bridge was engineered to support a 10-ton load and wide enough for a vehicle to cross, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-24. CCC Quarry workers, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)

Figure 2-25. The CCC chiseled rocks to have smooth cleavage outside with clean edges for irregular courses, 1936. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-26. The CCC harvested trees on-site and cut dimensional timbers for buildings, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)

Figure 2-27. Leo Anderson, an expert stone mason, oversaw CCC enrollees and directed stone cutting and dressing, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-28. The CCC stockpiled stones for building use, date unknown. (OZAR Archives)
Figure 2-29. The CCC paved an existing trail along the west side of Big Spring branch with gravel, dates unknown (OZAR Archives)