

Walks through History
Petit Jean State Park CCC Structures
Meet at Visitor Info Center & drive down to CCC Field Chimney to start
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Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the Walks through History tour of CCC structures at Petit Jean State Park! Petit Jean State Park contains 26 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, 3 of which are historic districts consisting of multiple resources (Blue Hole Road HD, Cedar Falls Trail HD & Lake Bailey-Lake Roosevelt HD). Many of these properties are significant because of their association with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and because they are good examples of Rustic-style architecture.

Explain NR—50 years old, retains historic integrity, and significant for association with broad event in past, important person, architecture/design, or archeological value. Honorary designation only—does not mean you can't change your property.

History of Petit Jean State Park

Evidence suggests that Native Americans lived on Petit Jean Mountain as early as 1,000 years ago (dating to the Mississippian Period—AD 900 to AD 1600), and the

mountain has almost 100 documented archeological sites, including the largest collection of rock art in the state.

The Legend of Petit Jean

The Legend of Petit Jean is likely a tall tale created by some of the park's early promoters to explain the origin of the mountain's name and draw visitors to the area. According to the legend, in the 1700s a French girl named Adrienne Dumont disguised herself as a cabin boy in order to accompany her sweetheart, a man named Chavet, to the New World. She called herself Jean and boarded the ship unbeknownst to Chavet, who planned to marry her when he returned. Because she was smaller than the other sailors, they nicknamed her "Petit Jean," French for "Little John." The expedition journeyed up the Mississippi River and then up the Arkansas River and stopped at present-day Petit Jean Mountain. At some point, Petit Jean became ill and her true identity was revealed to Chavet. She eventually died from the illness and the broken-hearted Chavet buried his love on top of the mountain overlooking the Arkansas River. Many years later, a mound of dirt was discovered on Petit Jean Mountain (at Stout's Point) and is supposedly Petit Jean's grave (not likely).

However, more plausible theories regarding the naming of Petit Jean Mountain do exist. In Morris Arnold's book *Colonial Arkansas, 1686-1804: A Social and Cultural History*, Arnold argues that Petit Jean Mountain was named after a French hunter or trapper nicknamed Little John who lived nearby and was killed by the Osage in 1732. Another explanation comes from an early 19th century name for the present-day Petit Jean River--*Petit Jaune*, which is French for "Little Yellow."

Early White Settlement

The first permanent white settlers came to the mountain in the 1840s and established small farms. John Walker and his family arrived about 1845 and built a log cabin. After the Walkers moved away in the 1850s, Owen West occupied the Walker cabin. The cabin was originally located north of what is now Lake Bailey, but it was later moved and restored by the CCC in the 1930s. It is still standing at the Cedar Creek Trailhead.

In 1891 Dan Nelson built a large house or "mansion" on the eastern end of Petit Jean Mountain overlooking the Arkansas River and planted an apple orchard. In the late 1890s William Cummings Stout purchased the Nelson land and converted the house into the Hotel Petit Jean. He operated the hotel until the 1920s, thus the

name of Stout's Point (where Petit Jean Gravesite is today). The property was later sold and donated to the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) for use as a summer camp. The YMCA built several more buildings, including College Lodge, an administration building (built 1928). [College Lodge burned in the 1940s and the rock ruins remain at Stout's Point. You can still see the inverted triangle above the interior fireplace, which was the symbol of the YMCA, representing the whole man as a perfect union of mind, body, and spirit. By 1946 Bishop R. Bland Mitchell and the Episcopal Diocese of AR purchased land from the YMCA and established Camp Mitchell, which is still on Petit Jean Mountain. The Diocese leases the Stout's Point land to the state park.]

Beginning of Arkansas's State Park System

In 1906 Dr. Thomas William Hardison visited Petit Jean Mountain for the first time. He secured a job as physician for the Fort Smith Lumber Company at Fowler Mill near Adona (Perry County; south of Petit Jean Mtn.). In the spring of 1907, he accompanied officers of the Fort Smith Lumber Company on an exploratory trip through their most rugged and remote landholdings in the area. The trip turned into a week-long holiday, and when the group reached the Seven Hollows region, they questioned the feasibility and profitability of logging the rough terrain. Dr. Hardison later remembered, "The idea occurred to me that the trees might as well be left to live out their lifespan unmolested by axe and saw, and the area converted into a park." The lumber company officials agreed to leave the timber on the mountain and closed the nearby Fowler Mill in 1909.

Dr. Hardison remained in the area and continued to practice medicine. He also pursued his dream of making Petit Jean Mountain a national park. By 1921 the Ft. Smith Lumber Co. was willing to donate over 1,000 acres in the Seven Hollows region for a national park. That same year, Hardison convinced Representative H. M. Jacoway to introduce a bill in the U.S. Congress designating the area as Petit Jean National Park. The bill was sent to the Committee on Public Lands for discussion, and Dr. Hardison met with Stephen Mather, Director of the National Park Service, to provide information and show photographs of the mountain. However, Mr. Mather thought the area was too small (compare to Yellowstone's 2.2 million acres) and although beautiful, it was probably not unique in the U.S.

But Stephen Mather suggested that Dr. Hardison take the proposal to the state legislature and seek its approval for a state park. A representative from the Ft. Smith Lumber Co. explained that he would have to seek approval from the board of directors in order to donate the land to the state, instead of the national,

government. In the meantime, Hardison convinced businessmen from Morrilton and Pine Bluff to donate 80 acres around Cedar Falls for a state park. In March 1923 the Arkansas Legislature passed Act 276 authorizing the state to accept lands donated for parks and state reservations and recognized the 80-acre tract as Petit Jean State Park, making it Arkansas's first state park. The 1,032 acre-Seven Hollows region was later donated to Petit Jean State Park by the Ft. Smith Lumber Company.

Act 172 of 1927 created the Arkansas State Parks Commission to acquire and oversee land for parks throughout the state. Ironically, the Great Depression served as a catalyst for the development of our state parks and recreation areas.

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)

When President Franklin Roosevelt (Pres. from 1933-45) took office in 1933, the country was deep in the throes of the Great Depression, with the average national income less than half of what it had been four years before, 13 million Americans (about 25% of the pop.) unemployed, and banks failing at an alarming rate. Something had to be done quickly to remedy this situation, so during his first 100 days in office, Roosevelt initiated his New Deal programs. One of his best known and most successful federal relief programs was created by the Emergency Conservation Work Act, which was presented to Congress on March 21, 1933. The program was popularly known as the Civilian Conservation Corps or the CCC. The dual purposes of the CCC were to provide outdoor employment to unemployed young men and accomplish badly needed work in the protection, improvement, and development of the country's natural resources.

Average CCC applicants had to be physically fit, unmarried young men between the ages of 17 and 25 (the age requirement was changed to 17-28 in 1935). Applicants had to have been unemployed for at least 6 months, and they had to represent families on public relief rolls and have dependents to which a proper allotment could be made. The monthly salary of a CCC enrollee was \$30, and \$25 had to be sent to a designated family member, leaving \$5 for the enrollee to spend as he chose. Enrollees were also provided with living quarters, food, clothing, medical care, and educational opportunities. Each CCC camp was comprised of 200 men. A small group of CCC camps, making up about 10% nationwide, were older enrollees selected from veterans of WWI. And another exception to the rule—construction projects often called for the hiring of “LEMs” or Local Experienced Men, who were chosen to provide expertise in their particular field (and to gain the acceptance of the local community where work was being done).

CCC Company V-1781

In July 1933 CCC Company V-1781 was organized on Petit Jean Mountain. The “V” indicated that the company employed veterans of WWI. While most CCC camps consisted of young men between the ages of 17 and 25, the veteran camp here at Petit Jean consisted of 35 to 45-year-olds. Most of them were married, had children, and were native Arkansans. The company of veterans was assigned to Petit Jean on purpose—they already had trade skills so there was literally someone who knew how to do everything. This work experience was necessary for the challenging mountain terrain.

The Departments of Agriculture, Interior, and War were responsible for organizing and supervising CCC work projects (NPS is in the Dept. of Interior). Therefore, CCC camps had a military-type structure, and officers from all branches of service filled the top positions in the camps. A typical camp schedule consisted of waking at 6 a.m., breakfast at 7, work from 8 until noon, lunch from noon to 1 (usually in the field), work from 1 to 3, free time and class work from 3 to 6, dinner at 6, free time from 7 to 10, and lights out at 10 p.m. During their free time, men played games, wrote letters, visited with friends, etc. Dances and other public events were held often to allow the men to socialize with the community. Overall, the men worked hard but were treated well, so many of them chose to re-enlist beyond the initial 2-year commitment.

CCC Company V-1781 left Petit Jean Mountain in July 1941 to go to Yellville, where they replaced Co. 4733 and worked on what was then Buffalo River State Park. The federal government stopped appropriating funds for the CCC after the U.S. entered World War II in late 1941. While they were stationed at Petit Jean, the CCC built roads, trails, bridges, a lodge, cabins, pavilions, bathhouses, lakes, overlooks, etc. that are still in use today.

Davies Family

Samuel Green Davies, a native of Fayetteville, was a civil engineer (U of A, Class of 1907) and in 1917 moved to Morrilton to supervise the construction (actually a reconstruction) of a bridge over the AR River (had been dismantled and moved from Van Buren). He was working for a bridge engineering firm out of Kansas City, MO, called Harrington, Howard & Ash. When news of a CCC camp at Petit Jean got out, the Attorney General of AR asked Samuel G. Davies to be the Project Superintendent (or supervising engineer) for the park. Sam G. Davies’s son,

Samuel Ladd Davies, was a second-year engineering student at the U of A when he dropped out to help his father on the CCC project at Petit Jean. [This also enabled Ladd's sister, Caroline, to attend college. The family could only afford to put one child through college at a time.] Ladd Davies became a Landscape Foreman at the camp (one of 8 camp foremen chosen by the NPS) and designed the Cedar Creek Bridge (or Davies Bridge) using an old railroad engineering manual of his father's. Ladd left the CCC camp in 1935 and returned to school. He had a successful career in public health/sanitary engineering. After retirement, he moved back to Petit Jean.

In 1935 the federal government announced that the CCC would disband by 1938 because most of the parks were "complete." States were instructed to create a director and staff to supervise the parks. The AR Legislature passed Act 170 in 1937, creating a Director of State Parks, support staff for each park, and spelled out the mission for state parks. Sam Davies, Project Superintendent at Petit Jean, became the first Director of State Parks. He served in that capacity until 1943 and later worked with his son in a private water and sewage contracting business.

Richard Davies, the grandson of Sam Davies and son of Ladd Davies, is currently the Executive Director of the AR Department of Parks & Tourism.

Rustic Style

The Rustic style of architecture traces its origins back to the landscape architecture movement (integrating nature and the built environment) and the early 20th century designs of camp retreats in the Adirondack Mountains of New York (blended into their wilderness surroundings and used natural materials). From the time the NPS was created in 1916, it made a strong commitment to design park facilities in a way that they would harmonize with the existing landscape.

The NPS was responsible for choosing new park projects, choosing the CCC camp site, and evaluating the progress of the project. It was difficult for the NPS to supervise construction at all of the sites, so...the NPS developed a guide based on its regional offices' best designs. This guide was originally published in 1938 by the NPS as a 3-volume set, but it was reprinted as one bound volume in 1990 and called *Park & Recreation Structures* by Albert H. Good.

The guide addresses the most basic park structures like entrances, railings, signage, waste receptacles, restrooms, etc. as well as large-scale projects like lodges, pavilions, bathhouses, cabins, and even interior furnishings. **The book's**

overarching guidelines are to build only what is necessary, pay attention to scale, use the appropriate local materials, and overall—try to blend your construction into the natural landscape.

CCC Field Chimney

The CCC Field Chimney is the most visible structure remaining from the actual CCC camp at Petit Jean. This chimney provided an indoor and outdoor fireplace for the camp's recreation hall, where the men spent much of their free time. See the aerial photo of the camp and the location of the rec hall/chimney. The other camp structures, including a mess hall, commanding officer/superintendent/enrollee barracks, offices, bathhouses, garage, blacksmith shop, carpenter/woodworking shop, etc. were removed shortly after the CCC camp left the mountain. You can still see the rock foundations of some buildings. The CCC men used to play softball every afternoon in this field, and the park staff continues the tradition by playing softball here every Saturday at 4 p.m.

[In August 2008 the “Iron Mike” statue was dedicated in honor of the CCC.]

Possible Dionicio Rodriguez Sculptures

Two cement sculptures in the CCC field may have been designed by Mexican artist Dionicio Rodriguez in the early 1930s. Show the ruins of a woven basket flower planter and the bridge of split logs. The CCC Scrapbook describes a fish pond stocked with gold fish, and it may have been in this area.

Visionary real estate developer and businessman Justin Matthews, Sr., commissioned Rodriguez to design cement sculptures at the Old Mill, Lakewood Park, and Crestview Park in NLR between 1931 and 1933. Rodriguez also did some work near Hot Springs, and it is feasible that he came here as well. However, these could also be copies of his work, built by the CCC. Rodriguez specialized in a technique called “faux bois” or “fake wood,” where he created a form with copper rebar covered in metal lathe and applied cement by hand. He used common kitchen implements to create realistic textures of trees, plants, toadstools, cut wood, etc. Then he concocted a secret mixture of chemicals to make the coloring agents. Rodriguez was so secretive about his sculpture technique and coloring agents that he often worked from inside a tent or mixed things in the trunk of his car, quickly slamming the lid if anyone approached. After he was done with the chemical containers, he removed the labels and broke the bottles.

CCC Employee's Barracks

This barracks was built about 1936 and provided more permanent housing for camp foremen, who had previously been living in tents. After the camp closed, this building was moved from its original location and later served as a park superintendent's house and visiting workers' quarters. While the majority of the CCC camp buildings were intended to be temporary, this was one of the few "permanent" buildings from the camp. In 2005 it was restored to its original appearance/footprint and now serves as a small conference center/meeting space. It has its original stone fireplace, but a lot of work had to be done to the exterior siding and interior paneling—the park renovated the structure in 1971 and replaced almost all of the original elements. Originally, beds lined the two wings and the center room was office space. H. Stanley Amsler, a foreman and project director from 1933 to 1942 recalled the foremen setting up a table in the center room for cards. There was at least one toilet and sink in the building, but no showers (there was a separate bathhouse for foremen).

While we're walking toward Pavilion A & Davies Bridge...

Moonshine: While building the trail down to Seven Hollows, the CCC enrollees discovered some locals making moonshine whiskey. Many of the CCC men would buy moonshine with their monthly \$5 salary and created a market for the moonshiners. So they continued to make moonshine in remote areas around the park.

Segregation: The park was segregated in the early years. Blacks had to swim downstream from whites and change clothes in separate areas (maybe even outdoors).

Marion Bryant story: Ladd Davies wrote about a man named Marion Bryant, who quietly helped the mountain residents survive during the Great Depression. According to Davies,

“On behalf of the Petit Jean Mountain CCC Camp, Marion Bryant got himself an official U.S. Government contract to dispose of the mess hall's garbage. He arrived daily with his mule-drawn wagon, picked up the garbage and hauled it away. One of the park's foremen was idly watching the day's garbage pickup when he noticed the meticulous care that Marion Bryant was taking to sort through the garbage before he started off. Having observed this ritual on several occasions, the foreman one day followed Marion's wagon at a discreet distance. Marion would stop at every house

that had a tin lard bucket hanging on a nail below the mail box; Marion would fill the lard bucket from the sorted garbage and go on his way. No one was ever in sight. The foreman reported this story to the camp's chief cook, who had a great deal of leeway in all matters concerning his kitchen. No one ever said anything, but additional daily rations were ordered, brand new garbage cans appeared, 'garbage' was carefully sorted and Marion was helped in loading the wagon. From there on, nothing changed. Some folks just ate a little better. Life moved on."

Pavilion A (Bathhouse and Shelter)

Pavilion A was constructed ca. 1935 to serve as a bathhouse and shelter. A photo of the structure and floor plans are included in Albert Good's book. The ground floor, accessed from the water side, included men's and women's showers and toilets. The upper floor (at ground level) served as an open pavilion/shelter.

Davies Bridge (Cedar Creek Bridge)

When the CCC camp came to Petit Jean in July 1933, the men immediately started working to build roads, trails, and the bridge over Cedar Creek. The current Cedar Creek Bridge replaced an old iron bridge about ¼ of a mile upstream from the masonry bridge. Work on the Davies Bridge began in the summer of 1933, and it was completed in 1934. Ladd Davies designed the bridge using an old railroad engineer's handbook (that he got from his father, Sam Davies). Most of the work was done by hand. The men cleared the creek bed and constructed a wooden arch out of heavy timbers. See historic photo on panel. The rocks, cut by a stone mason in the CCC stone-cutting shop, were laid over this form. Once the keystone was in place, the wooden arch was removed. Then they backfilled the bridge with dirt and paved the road. The bridge was repaired in 1985 after a flash flood caused the backfill to leach out of a crack in the bridge, and it was repaired and cleaned in the last few years after some rocks bulged out on the downstream side.

Lake Roosevelt

After the Davies Bridge was completed over Cedar Creek in 1934, a small stone dam was constructed just upstream from the bridge to form Lake Roosevelt (ca. 1935). Lake Roosevelt was named after President Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose New Deal legislation created the CCC. This smaller lake was stocked with fish and was also used for swimming. The pipe on the dam was used to control a

mechanism for draining the lake, but it no longer functions. Swimming is no longer permitted in Lake Roosevelt.

Swimming Area & Jumping/Diving Platform

See line of cast-concrete stumps, molded to look like logs, delineating a swimming area in the lake. They are attached to the edge of an underwater platform where water was shallow for swimmers. You could also jump or dive off the platform.

Pavilion B (Bathhouse)

Pavilion B was constructed to serve as another bathhouse and had wings for men and women. It was probably built after Pavilion A (ca. 1937). Notice the original light fixture inside the building made of logs.

Ralph Newkirk Beach

The “beach” area behind Pavilion B was also built by the CCC around 1936-37 and was terraced to serve as a swimming/sun bathing area. The beach was later named after Ralph Newkirk, a mountain resident who was killed in the Battle of the Bulge during WWII.

Lake Bailey

The dam creating Lake Bailey was completed in 1938. By 1942 people were already complaining of lily pads in the lake. ☺ The stone dam featured a spillway down to a shallow pool for children. The lake was named after Carl Bailey, who, in his capacity as attorney general, served as chairman of the Arkansas State Parks Commission. Bailey later became the 31st governor of Arkansas (1937-1941) and remained friendly to state parks.

Boathouse

Built ca. 1938 as a recreation area and boat dock for Lake Bailey. It used to be the center of the park and featured a full snack bar. You used to be able to water ski on the lake. They still allow small boats and fishing. The stone patio out back was also built by the CCC.

Walk back toward vehicles...

Things we won't see on the walking tour, but are significant...

Mather Lodge: Built between 1933 and 1935 with additions made by 1941. Mather Lodge was originally called Petit Jean Lodge and was later named after Stephen T. Mather, the director of the NPS who encouraged Dr. Hardison to make Petit Jean a state park. Mather Lodge is possibly one of the finest examples of CCC Rustic-style construction in Arkansas. Its exterior was featured in Albert Good's book along with photos of the interior furnishings, which were made by the CCC. Unfortunately, it is currently undergoing a massive renovation, so it is closed to the public.

Water Tower: Rock water tower built by the CCC at the turn-off for Mather Lodge and the cabins. It is one of the most unique CCC structures in the state because of its unusual design—it resembles a castle tower.

Visitor Information Center: Built by the CCC to serve as the park store and was the only gas station on the mountain (had one pump out front).

Hardison Hall: Built 1948. Served as group housing at the park. It has been boarded up and used for park storage since 1975 due to plumbing and electrical problems.

Other AR State Parks built by the CCC:

Mt. Nebo

Devil's Den

Crowley's Ridge

Lake Catherine

Buffalo Point (then part of the Buffalo River State Park; now owned by NPS)