

## PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES

The Lower White River Museum welcomes visitors during operating hours. To arrange programs please contact the museum. The museum's gift shop features books, T-shirts, toys, and many unique items. The museum is barrier-free.

## SERVICES

The museum is in the city of Des Arc where a variety of services are available including restaurants, service stations, and a city park.

## HOURS

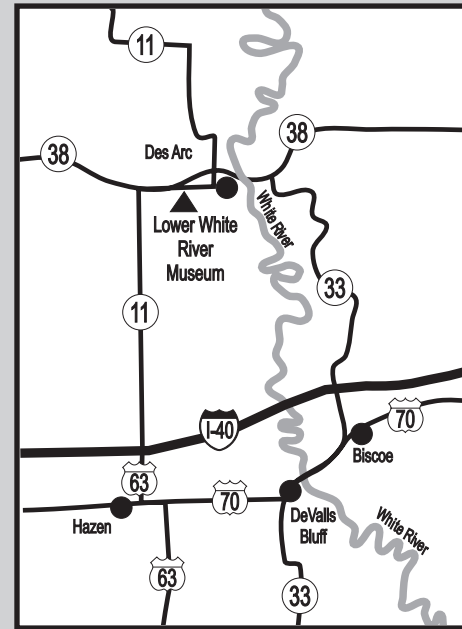
### Open

Tuesday through Saturday - 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
 Sunday - 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

### Closed

Monday (except Monday holidays),  
 New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day,  
 Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day.

Admission to the museum is free.



## LOCATION

From Interstate 40, take the Hazen exit 193 and travel north 17 miles on State Highway 11/38. Lower White River Museum is on Main Street as you enter Des Arc.

### For further information.

**Lower White River Museum State Park**  
**2009 Main Street**  
**Des Arc, AR 72040**  
**(870) 256-3711**  
**[lowerwhiterivermuseum@arkansas.com](mailto:lowerwhiterivermuseum@arkansas.com)**

For more information on other Arkansas attractions, contact:

Arkansas State Parks  
 One Capitol Mall  
 Little Rock, Arkansas 72201  
 (501) 682-1191  
[ArkansasStateParks.com](http://ArkansasStateParks.com)



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Arkansas State Parks 2015

# LOWER WHITE RIVER MUSEUM STATE PARK



ARKANSAS  
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & TOURISM

## LOWER WHITE RIVER MUSEUM

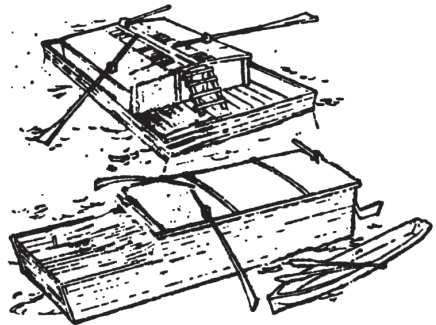
Lower White River Museum interprets and preserves the history of the lower White River from 1831-1931.

The story of the White River is a dramatic and important part of Arkansas history. As pioneers and early settlers migrated west, the lower White River served as a primary transportation route. The floodplains of the river contained abundant game, vast stands of virgin timber, and rich soil for agriculture. Opportunities in this unspoiled region were boundless.

### SETTLEMENT

The river was first used as a highway by the Indians and later European trappers and explorers. French traders called the river Eau Blanche or "White Water," their translation of the Indian name "Niska." A river was listed on a 1732 map as "Riv. Blanche." Early inhabitants traveled the river in dugout canoes.

Settlers arrived by flatboat, keelboat, and barge. These cumbersome crafts often carried several families and their possessions. Once the travelers reached their destinations the boats were dismantled and the wood sold or used to build cabins. The steamboat era not only expanded river travel but also expanded settlement and economic opportunities in the White River area.



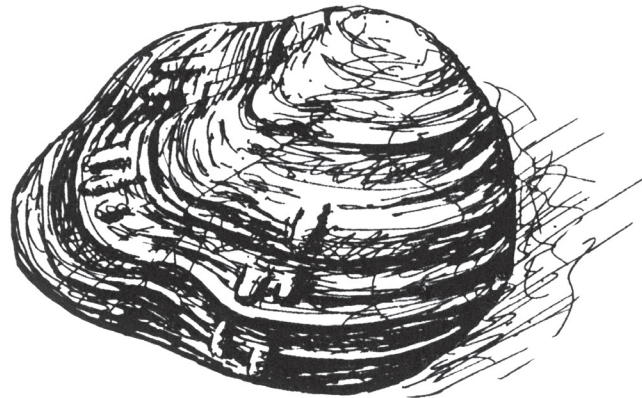
### A RIVER-BASED ECONOMY

**Fishing** ♦ Commercial fishing was widespread on the White River by the 1800s. Native fish include buffalo, carp, catfish, drum, and gar. Commercial fishing was the primary source of income for many river residents. Buffalo and catfish, caught with hoop nets and trammel nets, were at one time shipped by railroad to markets throughout the country. Changes in shipping regulations and the construction of cold water dams (which changed fish populations) caused a rapid decline in the industry.

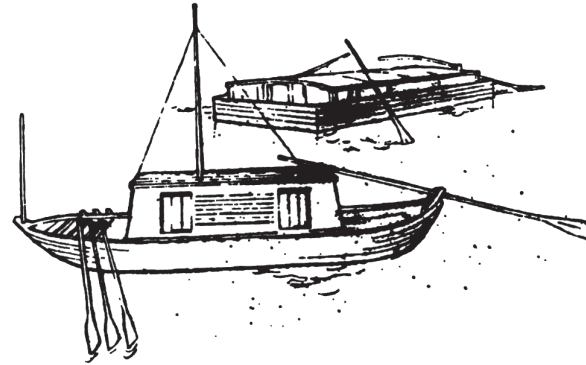
Many people who depended upon the river for their livelihoods lived in houseboats along its banks. White River folklore relates that prior to the 1930s, houseboats were anchored at every bend in the river.

**Shelling** ♦ Freshwater mussels have long been a source of food and income for those living on or near the White River. American Indians used the shells for tools and jewelry, crushed the shells as an additive to strengthen pottery, and ate the meat as a food source. Pearls and "slugs" (imperfect pearls), occasionally found in the shells, were used for jewelry and trade.

The earliest European-American shellers sought only pearls and had little use for the shells until button factories opened in Clarendon, DeValls Bluff, and Des Arc during the late nineteenth century. These factories produced round discs of shell called blanks, which were shipped north to be finished into fashionable pearl buttons. Blanks from the White River were highly favored by button makers of the U.S. east coast and Europe. The mussel shell button industry declined when plastic buttons became mass-produced in the 1930s and 1940s.



Several methods were used to gather shells. One was simple hand collection where each mussel was harvested individually. Specially equipped boats called "shelling rigs" allowed collectors to harvest many shells at once from known mussel beds. Shelling usually provided a supplementary income.



**Timber** ♦ As more people moved to and through the region, land was cleared and small-scale farming began. The vast hardwood forests were harvested and rafted downriver to mills such as those at Des Arc. The timber industry boomed as railroads spread through Arkansas after the Civil War. The need for cross ties and the ability to easily ship finished lumber by rail ensured the success of railroads and lessened the need for river transportation, signaling the decline of many river towns.

**Agriculture** ♦ Large cotton plantations developed in the deep, rich soils in the river floodplains. This, combined with a favorable climate created an ideal growing environment. Early settlers were more dependent on cattle and game than agriculture. This changed in the 1850s when cotton became important in the economy of the area. Cotton bales were transported to market by river. When railroads were extended after the Civil War, most agricultural goods were transported by rail. Rice was grown in Arkansas as early as 1897, but was not commercially important until after the turn of the century. Soybeans were introduced into the Arkansas economy during the 1920s.

### CIVIL WAR

Arkansas rivers played a strategic role in the Civil War. They served as avenues for troop and supply transport, as well as locations from which to fire on Confederate positions.

An early Union objective was to isolate Texas from other states in the Confederacy. Control of Arkansas's rivers was essential. After gaining control of northwest Arkansas in the battles of Pea Ridge and Prairie Grove in 1862, Union troops began their advance toward Little Rock, pausing to leave garrisons at Jacksonport and Batesville on the White River. A Union fleet was sent up the White River to reinforce these garrisons.

In response, the Confederates moved three boats to St. Charles. As the Union fleet approached, the Confederates elected to sink their vessels to create an obstacle rather than risk capture by the superior Union force. A large cannon and other artillery were moved ashore before the Confederate boats were scuttled.

As a Union ironclad ship advanced, the "most destructive single shot" of the Civil War was fired. A shell from the Confederate cannon entered a casement window of the Union ironclad and pierced the ship's boiler. Casualties from the resulting explosion and subsequent gunfire totalled 150. A monument commemorating the battle and listing Confederate and Union casualties is in St. Charles, a town further south on the Lower White River.

