

PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES

Lower White River Museum State Park is barrier-free and welcomes visitors during operating hours. Interpretive programs are available throughout the year on a variety of topics. School, church, and civic groups are encouraged to schedule programs by contacting the park.

SERVICES

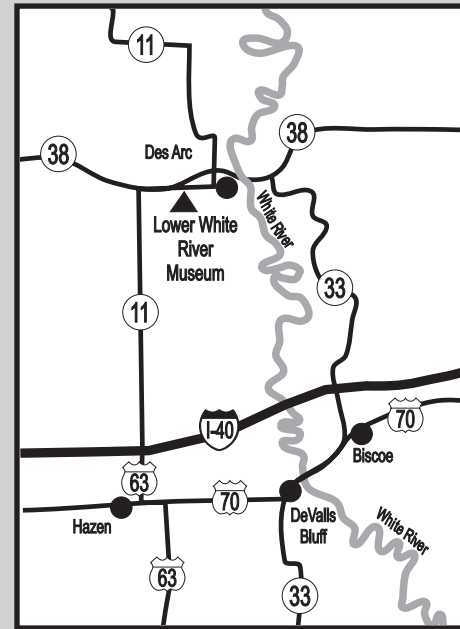
Lower White River Museum State Park is located on Main Street in Des Arc, where a variety of services are available, including restaurants, service stations, and a city park on the White River.

HOURS

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

Closed
Monday (except Monday holidays), Tuesday, 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 more information, contact:

Lower White River Museum State Park
2009 Main Street
Des Arc, AR 72040
(870) 256-3711
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



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LOWER WHITE RIVER MUSEUM STATE PARK



ARKANSAS
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & TOURISM

LOWER WHITE RIVER MUSEUM STATE PARK

Lower White River Museum State Park 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.

SETTLEMENT

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

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. Steamboats not only expanded river travel, but also expanded settlement and economic opportunities in the White River area.

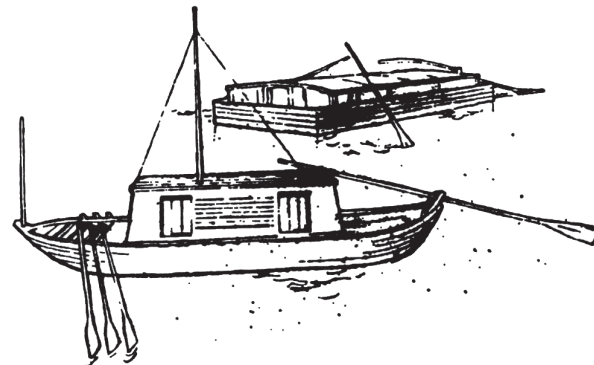
A RIVER-BASED ECONOMY

Fishing ♦ Commercial fishing was widespread on the White River by the 1800s, and was the primary source of income for many river residents. Native fish include buffalo, carp, catfish, drum, and gar. 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.

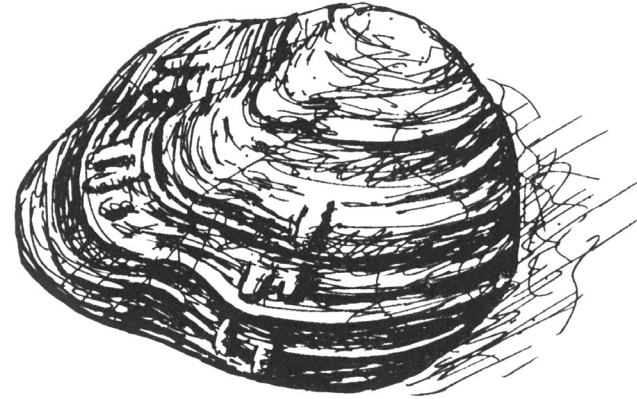
Many people who depended upon the river for their livelihoods lived in houseboats along its banks. White River folklore relates that prior to the 1930s, houseboats were anchored at every bend in the river.

Shelling ♦ Freshwater mussels have long been a source of food and income for those living on or near the White River. Native Americans 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 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, including simple hand collection in which mussels were 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 ♦ Early settlers were more dependent on cattle and game than agriculture. This changed in the 1850s when cotton became important to the economy of the area. Large cotton plantations developed in the deep, rich soils of the river floodplains. 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.

THE CIVIL WAR ON THE WHITE RIVER

The White River was strategically important for moving troops and supplies during the Civil War, giving Union forces an advantage once they gained control. Confederate resistance came mostly in the form of shore batteries, fortified points along the river capable of firing upon gunboats as they passed.

The Union Western Gunboat Flotilla, later known as the Mississippi River Squadron, converted and commissioned a variety of vessels for use on the Mississippi River and its shallow tributaries. Over one hundred vessels served in the Union Flotilla over the course of the Civil War, including light-draft tinclads, hulking timberclads, and ironclads designed specifically for riverine warfare.

The White River converged with the railroad line from Little Rock at DeValls Bluff, making it an important transfer point for Union forces. Many of the Mississippi River Squadron's vessels operated between DeValls Bluff and Memphis, Tennessee.

