

## Arkansas Business' 25 Arkansas Destinations (25th Anniversary)

By Arkansas Business Staff - 3/23/2009

Narrowing down a list of must-visit Arkansas destinations is hard, in addition to being necessarily subjective. Everyone has a favorite attraction, but the following sites are places we'd take a visitor from Mars, if we had the time, he/she/it could survive in a carbon-based environment – and Warren Stephens would let us in.

### 1. The Alotian Club

Investment banker Warren Stephens built his exclusive golf paradise on 1,200 acres in western Pulaski County. The 18-hole course that cost at least \$18 million opened in 2004 and has since played host to many professional golfers and golf enthusiasts. Golf Digest magazine named Alotian the country's best new golf course of 2005 and in 2006 placed it third – behind only Augusta National and Pine Valley – among U.S. golf retreats.

### 2. Arkansas Blues & Heritage Festival

The Arkansas Blues & Heritage Festival, which began as the King Biscuit Blues Festival in 1986 as an effort to revive the languishing city of Helena, has become a tradition for many blues lovers. Plumes of smoke billow from barbecue grills while music fills the air during the three-day blues festival in October – Oct. 8-10 this year. The event has become the backbone of tourism in the east Arkansas town, bringing teeming crowds of music enthusiasts from miles – and nations – around.

### 3. Big Dam Bridge / Junction Bridge

The Junction Bridge, a renovated railroad bridge across the Arkansas River that dates back to 1884, offers a nice perch from which to enjoy the glimmering cityscapes of Little Rock and North Little Rock. Farther upstream, the Big Dam Bridge provides a scenic spot for bicycle riders, power walkers or just someone looking for a place to enjoy a view. Both bridges are connected by a 14-mile loop called the Arkansas River Trail for bike riders and extremely ambitious joggers.

### 4. Buffalo River

The winding Buffalo National River flows east through Arkansas, offering a perfect place to canoe. The 135-mile river, which has three designated wilderness areas in which one can hike, cuts its way through large limestone bluffs as it snakes through the Ozarks and into the White River.

### 5. Cache River National Wildlife Refuge

This vast tract of bottomland forest, sloughs and lakes in east-central Arkansas includes the Arkansas Big Woods, where multiple sightings in 2004 and 2005 – including a snippet of video – persuaded even some distinguished ornithologists that the ivory-billed woodpecker, long thought to be extinct, was still in flight. Exhaustive searches for the elusive bird have come up short, but the national refuge is still a birdwatcher's paradise. In 1989, the Cache River and lower White River were designated "Wetlands of International Importance" by the Ramsar Convention of the United Nations.

### 6. Crater of Diamonds State Park

When John Huddleston, a farmer who owned the land near Murfreesboro, discovered diamonds in his field in 1906, he began the Arkansas diamond rush.

To this day, the Crater of Diamonds State Park offers to all Arkansans and tourists a place to dig for the American Dream. The 37-acre plowed field is an eroded surface of an ancient volcanic pipe that brought diamonds to the surface millions of years ago and where regular plowing turns up new gems every year.

### 7. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

It's not even open, but Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art makes our cut. With assets of \$488 million and climbing, the museum, staked by Walton family money, promises to be a premier destination for art enthusiasts. The Bentonville museum will display masterpieces of American art from artists such as Romare Bearden, Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins. Crystal Bridges was scheduled to open in 2010, but 2011 may be likelier.

### 8. Devil's Den State Park

Devil's Den State Park in northwest Arkansas packs a multitude of hiking trails, bluffs, caves, crevices and other forest features ready to be explored. Seventeen fully equipped cabins are available throughout the year for anyone seeking some peace and quiet.

### 9. Dickson Street

Dickson Street – the two vocabulary words that students of the University of Arkansas will never forget. If you're looking to

have some fun in Fayetteville, Dickson Street is the place to go.

#### **10. Eureka Springs**

This Victorian-era village in the Ozark Mountains, with its shops, hotels and bed and breakfasts, has played host to many an anniversary, wedding or just a relaxing weekend away. The town, founded in 1879, was named after the water sources, which were thought to possess healing qualities. Nearby Thorncrown Chapel, one of the most-visited places in the area, is also one of the most popular wedding sites in Arkansas. The American Institute of Architects chose the 48-foot-tall chapel – designed by the legendary E. Fay Jones with more than 6,000 SF of glass – as fourth among the top designs of the 20th century.

#### **11. Greers Ferry Lake**

When the weather warms, Greers Ferry Lake in north-central Arkansas draws a slew of Arkansans and tourists to camp, swim, ski, fish and, of course, leap from 30-foot bluffs. Greers Ferry Lake – actually, two lakes connected by The Narrows and covering 40,500 acres with just over 340 miles of shoreline – was formed by the completion of the Army Corps of Engineers dam at Heber Springs in December 1962. The dam and reservoir were dedicated on Oct. 3, 1963, by President John F. Kennedy – his last major public appearance before his assassination the following month.

#### **12. Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum & Educational Center**

The Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum & Educational Center in Piggott was once the family home of Pauline Pfeiffer, the second wife of novelist Ernest Hemingway. The destination in the northeast Arkansas town includes a barn that the Pfeiffer family converted into a studio in the 1930s in which Hemingway could write when he visited. Hemingway wrote portions of "A Farewell to Arms" and several short stories in the studio. The house and studio have since been renovated, preserving the 1930s look, and were added to the National Historic Register in 1982.

#### **13. Hot Springs**

As a hub of Arkansas tourism, Hot Springs offers historic hotels, quaint bed and breakfasts, cabins, campsites, relaxing spas, art galleries and many other tourist attractions. The bustling city in the Ouachita Mountains is also famous as the home of Oaklawn Park, from which the thundering rumble of thoroughbred horse racing is heard in late winter and early spring.

#### **14. Judge Parker's Courtroom/U.S. Marshals Museum**

Judge Isaac C. Parker's Courthouse in downtown Fort Smith, a designated National Historic Site, commemorates the tenure of the 19th century judge of the U.S. Court for the Western District of Arkansas, widely remembered for his sentencing 160 people to death by hanging. The U.S. Marshals Museum, which will contain 10,000 SF of historic artifacts, is scheduled to open nearby in 2011.

#### **15. Little Rock Central High School**

On Sept. 23, 1957, Little Rock Central High School captured the attention of the nation by serving as the first test of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to desegregate public schools. That day, nine black teenagers reported to their morning classes at Central High, only to be greeted by a mob of protesters. President Eisenhower went on to mobilize the National Guard to protect the nine students. A 3,000-SF visitor center opened in September 2007.

#### **16. Mountain View**

Another Ozarks destination beloved by Arkansans – and others – is Mountain View, a getaway located deep in the Ozark Mountains. It offers activities like exploring the magnificent Blanchard Springs Caverns, fly fishing, touring the local shops and braving the 14-mile Sylamore Creek Trail, five miles north of Mountain View. Mountain View is home to Ozark Folk Center State Park, and during warm months, passersby enjoy the dulcet tones of folk musicians outside the Stone County Courthouse in Mountain View.

#### **17. Mount Magazine Lodge**

Along the south bluff of the tallest mountain in Arkansas, the 2,753-foot-tall Mount Magazine, lies Mount Magazine Lodge. The 60-room resort mountain getaway offers a spectacular view of the Petit Jean River Valley and Blue Mountain Lake below. And keep your eyes peeled for black bears.

#### **18. Mystic Caverns**

The damp sandy-colored caverns beneath the county line of Newton and Boone counties have dazzled tourists since the mid-1920s. The string of naturally formed caverns offers a spectacular spelunking experience to anyone with a taste for beauty or adventure.

#### **19. Petit Jean State Park**

Petit Jean State Park – as legend has it – was named after the fiancée of a French nobleman. The young woman, dressed as a boy, sneaked aboard the expedition of the area led by her husband-to-be. Throughout the voyage, the crew called her "Little John," in French, of course. The park offers 3,471 acres ready to be explored. The park also has cabins and campsites.

## **20. Pig Trail Scenic Byway**

The Pig Trail Scenic Byway, a namesake given from years of University of Arkansas Razorback fans traveling to and from Fayetteville, winds through the Ozark National Forest. The route has since been bypassed by an interstate but still attracts drivers wearing Razorback red and headed to cheer on the home team.

## **21. Pinnacle Mountain State Park**

The 1,011-foot Pinnacle Mountain is part of the Ouachita Mountain Range. Besides Pinnacle, seven other Ouachita Mountain peaks lie within the 2,069-acre Pinnacle Mountain State Park. The mountain, in west Little Rock, offers hiking trails between one and five miles long and scenic views of central Arkansas.

## **22. Scenic Highway 7**

Scenic Highway 7, Arkansas' first state-designated scenic byway, travels through Arkansas beginning in southwest Arkansas near El Dorado. The route continues through Camden and Arkadelphia, where it enters the Ouachita Mountains, which are famous for their quartz crystals. After passing DeGray Lake, the highway flows through downtown Hot Springs. Scenic 7, as many call it, then passes Lake Nimrod on the way to Russellville. The highway then makes its way to Jasper and Harrison before branching into Highway 14 just south of Bull Shoals Lake.

## **23. Wal-Mart Headquarters**

Before 1962, Bentonville was just another of the many tiny towns in Arkansas. But Sam M. Walton's vision brought the town into view. Now the city is associated with the largest company in the world. Walton's Five & Dime, where Walton's vision began as a Ben Franklin store, now serves as a visitors' center.

## **24. White Rock Mountain**

As one of the highest points in the Ozark Mountains, White Rock attracts many tourists willing to travel the winding dirt road to reach the historic site. The park and its native stone and timber cabins were a public works project under the Roosevelt administration during the Great Depression. The cabins have since been restored and are open for business.

## **25. William J. Clinton Presidential Library & Museum**

The William J. Clinton Presidential Library & Museum, more museum than library, celebrates the 42nd president, Bill Clinton. Imagine that. The museum, conveniently situated between Interstate 30 and the Arkansas River in downtown Little Rock, contains a life-sized replica of the Oval Office and the cabinet room and myriad artifacts from Clinton's two terms in office.

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