BREAKING OUT

Go test your park smarts

Paris Mountain officials have devised a challenge to test hikers' minds, legs

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Since 1937, area residents have used Paris Mountain State Park as a playground and swimming hole.

Chances are you've been there several times.

But how much do you really know about the 1,540-acre park? To test visitors' knowledge, and to get even more people on the trails, park officials developed a quiz to test both mind and legs.

The Wayside Wanderer program encourages visitors to seek "waysides," the signboards that denote historic facts about nature or sites in the park. Seven of the 15 waysides are clustered near the Park Center and Lake Placid.

"There's a lot of stories to tell about this park," said Cathy Taylor, the park's interpretive ranger. "But everything that happened here was because of water."

The streams that criss-cross the park were the source of Greenville's first reservoir, now known as the park's Mountain Lake, built in 1890. In 1898, Lake Placid was built as the city's second reservoir.

Taylor said she found a newspaper article at the library that extolled the virtues and benefits of the second lake.

"The article said the two lakes '"would provide more water than Greenville would ever need,'" Taylor said. "Within six years, though, they built two more lakes."

In starting a state park from scratch, the first thing developed was the swimming area at Lake Placid. The Civilian Conservation Corps. built many park structures, including the iconic Park Center, which was originally the park bathhouse.

Taylor said her favorite part of researching park history was interviewing people who were intimately familiar with it.

"I'd call a person out of the blue," she said, "and end up talking to them for an hour because they had so many stories."

Many of those stories ended up on the waysides. One wayside near the bathhouse details Lake Placid as a place where Greenville teens hung out, swimming, sunbathing, dancing to the jukebox and enjoying each others' company.

Another details a sulphur spring where the water was bottled around 1900 and sold as a medical tonic. And another tells about the firetower once located along the Firetower Spur Trail.

"This is another excuse to get out on our trails," she said about the Wayside Wanderers challenge. "Some people will be able to get to them all in one visit, but I expect it to take most people a few trips.

"I hope this will become as popular as 'Mice on Main.'"

