

I CHALLENGE YOU!

By Louise Bullock, Outings Co-Chair

Think you're up to the **Current River Challenge**? It entails hiking 4 miles from Round Spring Upper Landing to Echo Bluff State Park, hiking an additional 4 miles from Echo Bluff State Park to Current River State Park and then floating from Current River State Park down to Round Spring Upper Landing. You can arrange for canoe and kayak rentals from one of the local outfitters and they will drop off boats for you at Current River State Park.

You start your journey by picking up your challenge card at Round Spring Visitor Center/Ranger Station and then return to Highway 19 and go north (a right turn out of the park). Immediately after crossing the Current River you will see the trailhead for the Upper Current section of the Ozark Trail on the right (just after the pedestrian bridge) and Carr's Canoe Rental on the left. Just past Carr's, turn left into the Upper Landing parking lot and river access. After parking your vehicle walk across the highway and begin your hike on the OT as it is affectionately called. Pay close attention to your map, compass and signage along the trail; otherwise, you could end up miles to the east in the Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry, a very scenic, but very remote area, not suitable for beginning hikers.

After hiking about four miles, you will arrive at Echo Bluff State Park where you can enjoy a relaxing rocking chair break on the porch of the Betty Lea Lodge. From this vantage point, you are able to take in the view of Sinking Creek and the park's massive and colorful namesake bluff located on the opposite side of the creek. Before continuing, remember to have your challenge card stamped at the Timbuktu Campground entrance station. Along the way, you might catch a glimpse of the small herd of wild horses seen from time to time wandering throughout Shannon County.

From here, continue another 4 miles to the river at Current River State Park. En route, you will cross Highway 19 which has a moderate volume of high speed traffic. Be extremely careful! Once in the park, you will see markers for several other trails, so be sure to follow the orange markers. After getting a peek of the river valley far below, continue down to the lodge, the lower lake and the parking area. From here you will see the river. Take a few moments to appreciate the architecture of these buildings constructed during the late 1930s and early 1940s. From that time until 1996, the property was enjoyed as a retreat of the Alton Box Board Company and now is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Be sure to stamp your challenge card at the Boat House.

You are now ready for the final leg of the Current River Challenge. You will be paddling a portion of the river that is federally protected as part of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. The ONSR was established in 1964 and is the first national park designated to protect a wild river system (which also includes a portion of the Jacks Fork river). By and large, the current will steadily move you the four miles downriver to your destination, with little effort on your part other than a bit of steering here and there as you round a few bends. This allows you to take in the sights and sounds of passing springs and seeps, verdant ferns and mosses, towering bluffs, some with caves, colorful wildflowers, many species of birds and a variety of swimming, scampering and crawling critters.

During the second half of your paddle, you will pass a large gravel bar where Sinking Creek joins the Current. This is a popular spot to pull over, get out and go "rump-bumping" through the riffles. Then back in your boat, head downstream and keep your eyes peeled so you don't miss Round Spring Upper Landing on river left. This is where you will make your way to the river's edge and secure your boat up from the shore. The parking lot with your vehicle is just beyond. If you drive back down to the Round Spring Ranger Station, you can have your challenge card stamped. They may even have an award for you. CONGRATULATIONS! You have just completed **THE CURRENT RIVER CHALLENGE!**

Note: You do not need to complete all three legs of the Challenge on the same day and you can do the legs in any order. In fact, the website [nps.gov/ozar/current-river-challenge.htm](https://www.nps.gov/ozar/current-river-challenge.htm) specifically encourages "participants to not try to complete the challenge all in one outing". It indicates approximate time for each hiking leg at two hours and for the paddling leg, one hour. For further information, contact the Round Spring Ranger Station at 573-323-8093 or Missouri State Parks at 573-751-1224.