



# Opening Day

a family tradition

by Tom Uhlenbrock

**F**or many Missourians, the unofficial start of spring is March 1, when they show up at Bennett Spring, Montauk or Roaring River state parks for the opening of trout season.

For generations, families have lined up, elbow to elbow, to be the first to snag a lunker trout. If the fish aren't cooperating, no problem, you're still at one of the prettiest spots in the state.

All three parks are located in deep wooded valleys where azure springs pump out millions of gallons of water each day in a sort of Ozarks Garden of Eden. The source of the clear, clean water drew the first settlers, who built mills

for grinding corn and cutting timber.

The pristine water also proved a perfect habitat for trout. Two state departments, Natural Resources and Conservation, teamed up to create the state's popular trout-fishing parks. The Department of Natural Resources runs the parks, and Conservation operates the hatcheries and stocks the trout.

Here's what you'll find at the three parks:

## **Bennett Spring State Park near Lebanon**

Bennett Spring is the fourth largest spring in the state with an average of a hundred million gallons a day. The flow bubbles up from the base of a steep bluff, and forms the Niangua River, which is a favorite for floaters in the southwest corner of the state.

Civilian Conservation Corps crews worked at the park in the 1930s and the springwater flows under a handsome triple-arched stone bridge that is part of the CCC legacy. Other vintage stone-and-timber buildings house a lodge and restaurant.

The park has a store that sells tackle and other supplies and offers 64 rental units, including cabins and a 10-room motel. The campground has 192 spaces with four shower houses. The park has a swimming pool and six trails, totaling 12.5 miles. The longest is 3.5 miles and leads through the woods to an unusual geologic formation called the Natural Tunnel.

## **Montauk State Park near Salem**

Montauk Springs is a series of small springs that combine to pump out some 43 million gallons a day, forming the headwaters of the Current River, the state's top float stream and the jewel of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

The park has a lodge with a restaurant and store and 18 motel rooms. There also are 28 cabins and 154 camp sites with two shower houses in a campground next to the gurgling river. A grist mill built on the river in 1896 is open for tours in the summer.

The Department of Conservation also stocks the Current River outside the park boundaries on down to Akers twice monthly, meaning an angler can always find a secluded spot to wet a line.

Visitors to Montauk State Park may see the park's resident bald eagles, which have nested in the tall pines there for more than a decade.

**(Top) While at Bennett Spring State Park, take time to fish the spillway, one of the signature features of the park.**

DNR photo by Andrew Richmond.

**(Right) Take your chances fishing the spring area of Roaring River State Park. The first trout hatchery was built here in 1910.**



DNR photo by Andrew Richmond

(Above) Bennett Spring State Park hosts various scenic settings to support different styles of fishing.

(Right) Montauk State Park is home to many lunkers. Yours may be lurking there, awaiting a pheasant tail nymph.



DNR photo by Scott Myers



DNR photo by Andrew Richmond

### Roaring River State Park near Cassville

As you approach the park, the rolling landscape of forest and farmland suddenly drops down into a deep canyon-like valley. A spring bubbles up from a fern-lined grotto at the base of a gray bluff, producing 20.4 million gallons each day to form the headwaters of Roaring River.

The first trout hatchery was built at the site in 1910, and was rebuilt by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. The crews constructed 33 buildings and nearly all remain.

In 1998, the park dedicated the 26-room Emory Melton Inn and Conference Center. The facility, named for a life-long resident of Barry County and former 24-year state legislator, features wood beams and circular support columns of stonework, reflecting the earlier work and style of the CCC.

Roaring River also boasts one of the more stunning sights offered at the three trout parks. During wet weather, a waterfall drops 110 feet from the top of the bluff into the deep blue pool of Roaring River Spring.

“Spectacular” is the description of Dusty Reid, superintendent of the park.

For more information, visit [mostateparks.com](http://mostateparks.com).



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