

Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park



South of Tallahassee, Wakulla Springs has long been a place of wonderment and awe for visitors since the earliest times. Archaeological finds at the springs point to humans using the area for nearly 15,000 years, and bones of numerous mastodon and other prehistoric animals have been found. Since the climate was much drier during the Pleistocene period and the water table

much lower, scientists believe the massive spring was likely a large sinkhole and the river was not flowing as it is today. Once sea level rose again, Wakulla Springs formed the Wakulla River and became one of the largest springs in the world.

From a tourist standpoint, Wakulla Springs became a popular destination for the public in the late 1800s, but the glass bottom boat tours didn't begin until around 1925 when real estate developer George T. Christie purchased the spring.

The spring was developed more heavily as an attraction when Ed Ball, Florida businessman and brother-in-law of billionaire Alfred I. DuPont, purchased the spring and 4,000 acres of the surrounding property in 1934. Ball built a Mediterranean Revival style lodge overlooking the spring in 1937 and hired Newton Perry to manage and promote the property. Perry developed several short underwater films that piqued the interest of prospective visitors and he succeeded in luring in Hollywood, too.





Johnny Weissmuller, a former Olympic swimmer and the most famous of the Tarzan actors, was featured in parts of two movies filmed at the springs—*Tarzan's Secret Treasure* and *Tarzan's New York Adventure*. Parts of *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *Airport 77* and *Joe Panther* were also filmed at the springs.

Newton Perry developed underwater air stations and breathing hoses for his promos and he was also keenly interested in routines of the visiting Tarpon Club Synchronized Swimming Team from the Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee (now Florida State University). Perry drew on this knowledge in developing Weeki Wachee Springs and its famous mermaid shows in 1947.

Edward Ball passed away in 1981 and the springs fell into the hands of the Nemours Foundation. The State of Florida purchased the springs in 1986 and established the Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park. The lodge and restaurant remained open and boat operations continued. Several tracts were added to the park including Cherokee Sink to the west. Total park acreage is now around 6,000. Glass bottom boat tours are not as common as in past decades due to water clarity and visibility, but jungle boat tours bring nature up close to thousands of people each month. Also, there's nothing like a cool summer dip to help one forget about the heat.

The Wakulla Springs Lodge has kept its historic charm with its painted cypress ceilings and period furnishings. Other lodge features include marble checker tables, a grand piano, a massive fireplace, the stuffed body of the 11-foot "Old Joe" alligator, and a vintage soda fountain that boasts one of the world's longest marble countertops. It's like



stepping into a bygone era. True to its historic roots, the lodge has only one television, in the lobby.

Be sure to check out the [historical timeline of Wakulla Springs](#) along with this [Wakulla Springs Road Trip](#) that features trails and points-of-interest inside and outside of the park. Some of Florida's oldest known artifacts have been found near the lodge, evidence that people have been using and enjoying Wakulla Springs for nearly 15,000 years.



