LAKE MINERAL WELLS
STATE PARK AND TRAILWAY

LAKE MINERAL WELLS STATE PARK IS THE ONLY STATE PARK IN TEXAS PRESERVING THE WESTERN CROSS TIMBERS, A WOODED RIBBON OF LAND RUNNING NORTH TO SOUTH FROM OKLAHOMA THROUGH NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS. THE PARK FEATURES STEEP HILLS, DEEP RAVINES AND OPEN PRAIRIE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE SANDSTONE FORMATIONS AND LIMESTONE OUTCROPS OF THE WESTERN CROSS TIMBERS.

FURTHER READING

The Cast Iron Forest – A Natural & Cultural History of the North American Cross Timbers by Richard V. Francaviglia
Crazy Water, The Story of Mineral Wells and Other Texas Health Resorts by Gene Fowler
Time Was in Mineral Wells, A Crazy Story but True by A. E. Weaver

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**THE CAST IRON FOREST**

In addition to rough terrain, pioneer settlers crossing this timbered region encountered bands of Comanche and Kiowa that used the rugged area as a base for raids throughout north central Texas during the 1860s and 1870s. The impenetrable nature of the Cross Timbers allowed native Americans such as the Caddo and the Tonkawa to use the forest as a buffer as European settlers moved across Texas.

Given plentiful forage, wildlife abounded. Indians and pioneers hunted white-tailed deer and wild turkeys. Smaller animals such as raccoons, opossums, cottontail rabbits, fox squirrels and coyotes were also abundant. Even today watchful visitors may see porcupines, armadillos, bobcats and ringtail cats in the Cross Timber. Of course, visitors should never approach or attempt to feed the animals. And today watchful visitors may see porcupines, armadillos, bobcats and ringtail cats in the Cross Timbers.

The Western Cross Timbers of Texas supports a variety of plant life. In addition to the dominant black-jack and post oaks, cottonwood, red oak, pecan and cedar elm trees are found in the ravines. Settlers used this woodland timber to build and heat log homes. Areas of open upland savannah feature mesquite trees and short grasses of high grazing quality.

**CRAZY WATER**

The community of Mineral Wells sprang to life in the 1880s when James Lynch settled in the area and drilled a well. The calcium, magnesium and sulfates in the water gave it a strong flavor and odor.

When Mrs. Lynch found she was not bothered by rheumatism after drinking the water, visitors began camping at Mineral Wells seeking cures for their ailments. The “crazy water” phenomenon began when a lady suffering from mania was cured after drinking the water. Later tests revealed that lithium in the well water might have accounted for her improvement.

Mineral Wells grew as people came to “take the cure.” Large, spacious hotels such as the Crazy Water and the Baker were built to serve the tourists that flocked to the resort. Famous guests included Judy Garland, Clark Gable, Will Rogers and Tom Mix.

Mineral Wells soon needed an additional water supply to meet the growing demands of the city. An earthen dam was constructed across Rock Creek about three miles east of the city creating 646-acre Lake Mineral Wells, which also provided recreational fishing, boating and picnicking.

During the 1930s people began to enjoy the benefit of the mineral waters in their own homes by adding tap water to dehydrated Crazy Water Crystals. The Crazy Water Company promoted the crystals in radio programs featuring the theme song “Dream Train” and delivered the product across the country in distinctive Crazy Crystal boxcars.

**TALES OF A RAIL-TRAIL**

The Lake Mineral Wells State Trailway once was the Weatherford, Mineral Wells & Northwestern Railroad (WM&NW). The discovery of mineral waters in the 1880s launched new businesses catering to tourists and health seekers. In 1889 capitalists invested $500,000 to build a railroad connecting the resort town of Mineral Wells to the rail hub in Weatherford. Service began with two locomotives and 90 cars. The railroad and the communities it served grew and changed as tourism, manufacturing and the military brought prosperity to the local economy.

The Great Depression caused the mineral water resort business to decline. Business boomed again during World War II with the rapid growth of the army and the need for Camp Wolters as a training center. Over 100 cars each month delivered supplies to the troops stationed there. Troops shipping out after their training also traveled by rail.

American culture changed after World War II. With more Americans buying cars and the cross-country trucking industry competing for freight, many shortline railroads went out of business. The WM&NW changed hands many times, finally being bought by the City of Mineral Wells in 1989. It closed for good in 1992 due to a lack of traffic.

Hikers, bikers and equestrians enjoy recreation opportunities along this historic rail corridor. The Lake Mineral Wells Trailway opened in 1998, the result of a partnership between Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration and the cities of Mineral Wells and Weatherford. The 20-mile trail can be accessed from trailheads along this historic rail corridor. The Lake Mineral Wells Trailway opened in 1998, the result of a partnership between Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration and the cities of Mineral Wells and Weatherford.