



Rainbow Springs State Park

19158 S.W. 81st Place Road
Dunnellon, Florida 34432
(352) 465-8555

Archaeological evidence indicates that people have been using Rainbow Springs for nearly 10,000 years. At one time, mastodon and mammoth fossils were found in the Rainbow River, along with relics of Native Americans who used the river for transportation and fishing. Much later, in the early 20th century, people began mining the surrounding area for phosphate. The new industry brought a boom and the towns of Juliette and Dunnellon were founded. Juliette, once located on what is now park property, no longer exists, but Dunnellon continues to be an active community, welcoming visitors to enjoy area gems such as Rainbow Springs State Park.



From the 1930s through the 1970s, Rainbow Springs was the site of a popular, privately-owned attraction. In the 1920s, the spring—then known as Blue Springs—was a favorite spot for tourists and locals. As the attraction grew, the river was dredged for glass bottom boat tours, and waterfalls were built on piles of phosphate tailings. When Blue Springs was changed to Rainbow Springs, the river name was changed from Blue Run to the Rainbow River. It proved to be a successful marketing ploy.

One of the features that separated Rainbow Springs from similar attractions was the





way that visitors could view the spring bottom. Most springs offered some form of glass bottom boat ride, enabling visitors to view the spring through the clear glass floor. But at Rainbow Springs the distinctive sub-boats had stairs that went below the waterline of the boat and visitors could look out at eye level. The boats were steered by a captain who told the story of the springs and the creatures that called the springs home.

Another feature found only at Rainbow Springs was the Leaf Ride, a monorail system used to transport visitors through the park at tree level. This feature was added to the park in the 1960s. Visitors enjoyed viewing a large aviary, three waterfalls, a rodeo, a small zoo complex and an historic garden.

The ownership of the Rainbow Springs attraction changed hands several times, and at one time was owned by S&H Green Stamps and Holiday Inn. In 1972, the U.S. Department of the Interior designated Rainbow River, Florida's fourth largest springs, as a National Natural Landmark. It is also an aquatic preserve and an Outstanding Florida Water.

The development of the interstate highway system in Florida eventually led to the demise of the Rainbow Springs attraction. The interstate bypassed the small towns that





hosted such attractions and newer, modern attractions in Orlando drew many away from the older parks. By 1974, Rainbow Springs was closed and the facilities fell into disrepair. In 1990, following a petition drive by concerned citizens on behalf of the attraction, the state of Florida purchased Rainbow Springs. It opened to the public as a state park on a full-time basis in 1995. The old submarine boats and monorail system

were deemed non-salvageable.

Today, you can enjoy the Rainbow River by canoe, kayak or innertube. Immerse yourself in natural Florida as you leisurely pass moss-draped cypress trees, river otters, wading birds and numerous other sights and sounds along the crystal clear waterway. Visitors may launch privately owned canoes or kayaks from the headsprings launch area, but should be prepared to portage their vessel 1,800 feet from the parking area to the launch due to limited vehicle access to the river within the park. For those who want the experience without the hassle, daily canoe and kayak rentals are available from the park concessionaire. Visit their website, [Nature Quest, Inc.](#), or call them at (352)465-3211. Tubing is also popular but not allowed in the headsprings area of the park. Tubers can launch at the Tube Entrance on SW 180th Avenue Road. The river can be very busy on weekends and holidays, especially during warm weather, so use caution during these times. Another popular paddling trail in the area is the [Withlacoochee River](#).

Rainbow Springs State Park also offers leisurely strolls through shady gardens laced with azaleas, oaks and magnolias. The walkways pass by three man-made waterfalls and a native plant garden. Benches located along the paths offer the visitor an



opportunity to rest while enjoying the sounds of birds and flowing water. While every season has much to offer, the February and March bloom of azaleas is a popular time to visit the park. The walkways are a mixture of brick, concrete and asphalt surfaces. While offering great views of both river and gardens, the pathways were constructed prior to American Disabilities Act guidelines and are steep and uneven in places. A native garden, which is a special attraction to butterflies and hummingbirds, lies behind the cultural gardens.



A nature trail winds back behind the gardens through natural oak hammock and sandhill communities. This trail offers both river and phosphate pit overlooks and is approximately 2.5 miles long from the Visitors' Center.

The park is known for great birding and is a featured stop on the [Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail](#). Start by picking up a trail map at the visitor center. A series of paved and brick walkways around and above the scenic headsprings can yield resident and migratory songbirds, plus waders and waterbirds like great egret, green heron, anhinga and pied-billed grebe at the river overlooks. Follow the path east beyond the waterfall area to an extensive, first-rate native plant and butterfly garden. Look for hummingbirds and 40 species of butterflies including red-spotted purple, whirlabout, sleepy orange and cassius blue.

Southeast of the garden is the trailhead, where three hiking trail loops lead to the quieter side of the park. Two miles of trails wind around old pasture (sparrows,



American kestrel) and through pine flatwoods and sandhills (red-headed woodpeckers, Eastern towhee and yellow-throated vireo) and hardwood forest (barred owl, hermit thrush and yellow-throated warbler).



