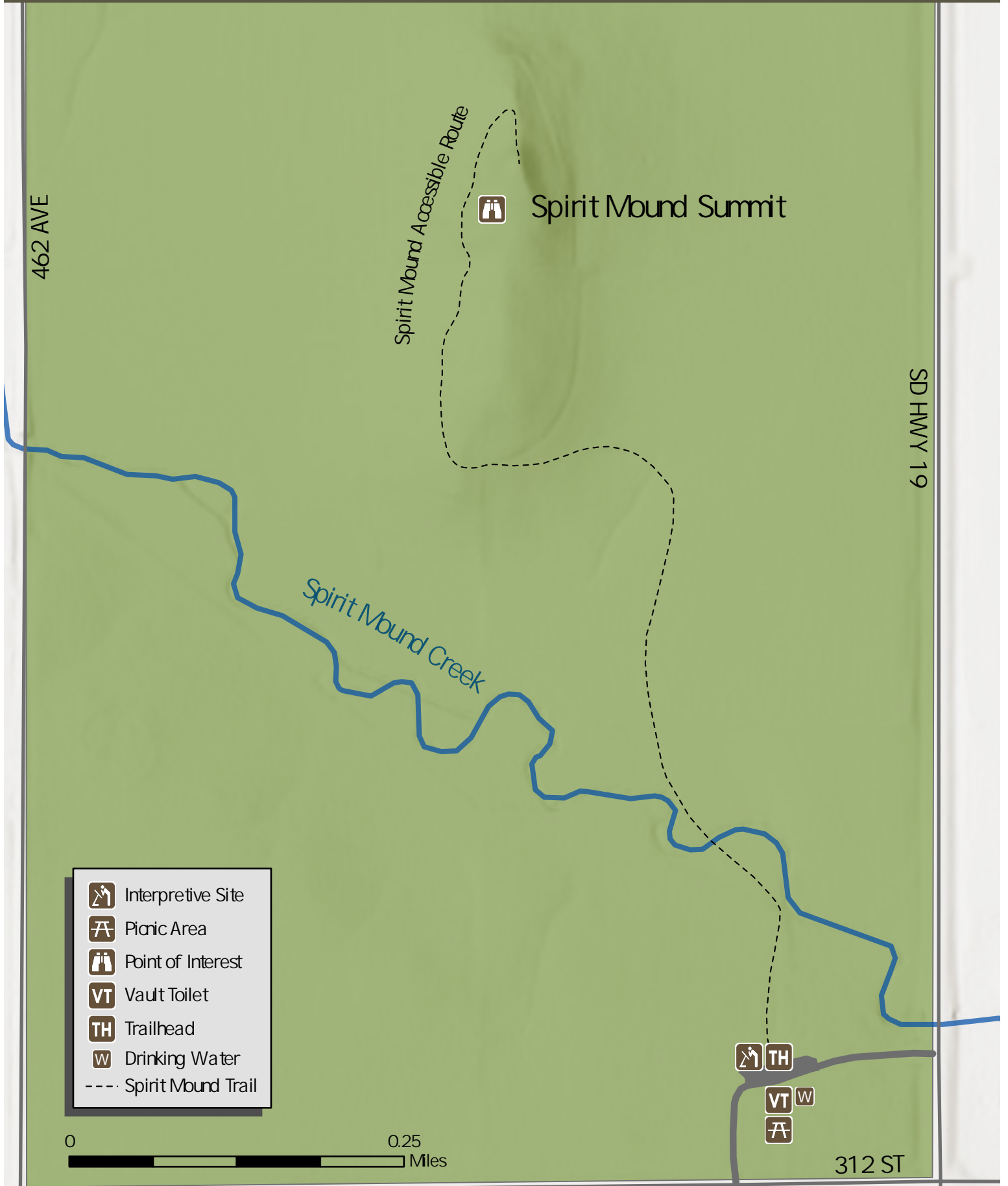




SPIRIT MOUND HISTORIC PRAIRIE



Spirit Mound Historic Prairie

Summit Trail

Type of trail: Hiking and interpretive history

Trail surface: Gravel/limestone

Rated: Moderate, somewhat hilly, even trail surface

Fee required: No fee

Length of trail in miles: .75 mile

Location of the trailhead: Parking lot southeast of mound

Facilities at or near the trailhead: Drinking water, toilet, parking and picnic tables

Facilities along the trail: None

Will there be interpretive information available: Yes

What lodging opportunities are provided IN the park: None

Does this trail connect with any other trails: No

Nearest facilities for purchasing snacks, sunscreen etc.: In Vermillion - five miles south

Nearest motels/restaurants OUTSIDE the park: In Vermillion - five miles south

Nearest Chamber of Commerce:

Vermillion Chamber of Commerce, 1-800-809-2071

Emergency phone numbers:

Ambulance – 911

Sheriff – 911

Fire Department – 911

Do most cell phones work on this trail: Yes

Spirit Mound Historic Prairie

Summit Trail

The Legend of Spirit Mound

Spirit Mound, or Paha Wakan, was known by tribes for miles around before the Lewis and Clark expedition ever came to the area. Lewis and Clark reported that the people of the Omaha, Oto, and Yankton tribes believed that the mound was occupied by little people who shot any human who came near.

By the 1790s, when European traders came up the Missouri as far as the Vermillion River, reports of this mound must have been well known, although no written record earlier than the journals of Lewis and Clark has been found. On August 24, 1804, the day before they reached the mouth of the Vermillion, Clark wrote:

Capt Lewis and my Self Concluded to visit a High Hill Situated in an emence Plain three Leagues N. 20° W. from the mouth of White Stone river, this hill appear to be of a Conic form and by all the different Nations in this quater is Supposed to be a place of Deavels or that they are in human form with remarkable large heads and about 18 inches high; that they are very watchfull and ar armed with Sharp arrows with which they can kill at a great distance; they are said to kill all persons who are so hardy as to attemp to approach the hill; they state that tradition informs them that many indians have suffered by these little people and among others that three Maha men fell a sacrefice to their murceyless fury not meany years since – so much do the Mahas Souix Ottoes and other neibhbouring nations believe this fable that no consideration is sufficient to induce them to approach this hill.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition

President Thomas Jefferson selected his personal secretary, Captain Meriwether Lewis, to lead an expedition to the Pacific Ocean. Congress appropriated \$2,500 for the exploration.

Beginning in 1804, Lewis and his friend Captain William Clark led a “Corps of Discovery” up the Missouri River, over the Rocky Mountains, and to the Pacific Ocean and back, returning to St. Louis in 1806. They made detailed maps, took scrupulous notes on the wildlife, plants, and landmarks they saw, and in journals filled with vivid prose (though with casual spelling) recorded and interpreted their experiences along the way.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition, which opened the way for settlement of the western half of the nation, is a momentous event in United States history. Two hundred years later, Americans are turning their attention to those sites that played a significant role in the exploration. The hill now known as Spirit Mound is one of the most significant Lewis and Clark sites in South Dakota. Historians recognize the mound as one of few remaining sites where we know with certainty that Lewis and Clark actually stood.

Where the Two Captains Stood

On August 25, 1804, while the rest of the expedition proceeded up the river, Captains Lewis and Clark took eleven men and Lewis’ dog Seaman to explore the mound. They left two of the men to guard their pirogue while they walked the nine miles to what is now called Spirit Mound. Their journals describe the day in vivid, enthusiastic detail.

It was a hard trip, and Seaman, suffering from the heat, had to be sent back to the Vermillion River. Despite the rumors of danger, the men approached the hill and climbed to the summit, which they determined to be about 70 feet above the surrounding plain and to be of natural origin, not man-made. They also noted the abundance of insects near the top, which attracted great flocks of swallows (“*so gentle that they did not quit the place until we had arrivd. within a few feet of them*”), and the Captains speculated that it was the birds that gave the mound its air of mystery.

The men were deeply impressed by the view from Spirit Mound. Clark wrote:

from the top of this Mound we beheld a most butifull landscape; Numerous herds of buffalow were Seen feeding in various directions, the Plain to North N. W & N E extends without interruption as far as Can be Seen--...no woods except on the Missouri Points if all the timber which is on the Stone Creek [Vermillion River] was on 100 a[c]res it would not be thickly timbered, the Soil of those Plains are delightfull.

This was the first time that the Captains had been miles away from the river valley and viewed from a high point the tall-grass prairie that they had been sent to explore. It was also the first time that they had seen buffalo herds. Besides the buffalo and elk (“*upwards of 800 in number*”), they found burrows of either badgers or “*Prarie Wolves*” (coyotes), and saw meadowlarks, swallows, blackbirds, wrens, an American bittern, and the first bat they had seen on the expedition.

They also marveled at the abundance of wild fruit:

here we got Great quantities of the best largest grapes I ever tasted, Some Blue Currents still on the bushes, and two kinds of Plumbs, one the Common wild Plumb the other a large Yellow lumb...about double the Size of the Common and Deliscously flavoured—

Suffering from heat and thirst, when they left the mound they detoured to the northeast three miles to the closest point of the Vermillion River. After resting there for about an hour and a half they followed the valley back to the Missouri and resumed their voyage the next day.

Journal entries are reprinted from the University of Nebraska Press edition of the *Journals of Lewis and Clark Expedition* by permission of the University of Nebraska Press.

Spirit Mound Today

Spirit Mound is located six miles north of Vermillion, South Dakota, along State Highway 19. Although there are other hills nearby, the mound, in its relative isolation, is striking. Geologists call this kind of formation a *roche moutonnée*, a bedrock knob that was shaped but not leveled by the last Pleistocene glacier 13,000 years ago.

Until recently, the mound was privately owned. A farmhouse, cattle feedlot, concrete trench silo, and tree shelterbelt were located on the eastern slope of the mound. Most of the site was farmed, with the remainder in pasture. Through the efforts of the Spirit Mound Trust and their work with the National Park Service and the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, the 320-acre Spirit Mound site was purchased, cleared, and seeded with prairie species. The intent is to restore it as much as possible to the conditions that Lewis and Clark saw approximately 200 years ago.

Visitor appreciation of the site is enhanced with a parking lot, restroom, interpretive signs, and a trailhead at the southeast corner of the property. A walking trail leads from there to the summit.

Spirit Mound is owned and managed by the South Dakota Division of Parks and Recreation. For more information contact:

Regional Park Supervisor
Newton Hills State Park
28771 482nd Avenue
Canton, SD 57073
(605) 987-2263
www.SDparks.info

Lewis & Clark -
Spirit Mound Trust, Inc.
P.O. Box 603
Vermillion, SD 57069
www.SpiritMoundSouthDakota.org

To view an exhibit about Spirit Mound, visit the W.H. Over Museum in Vermillion, SD or visit their website at www.usd.edu/whover.