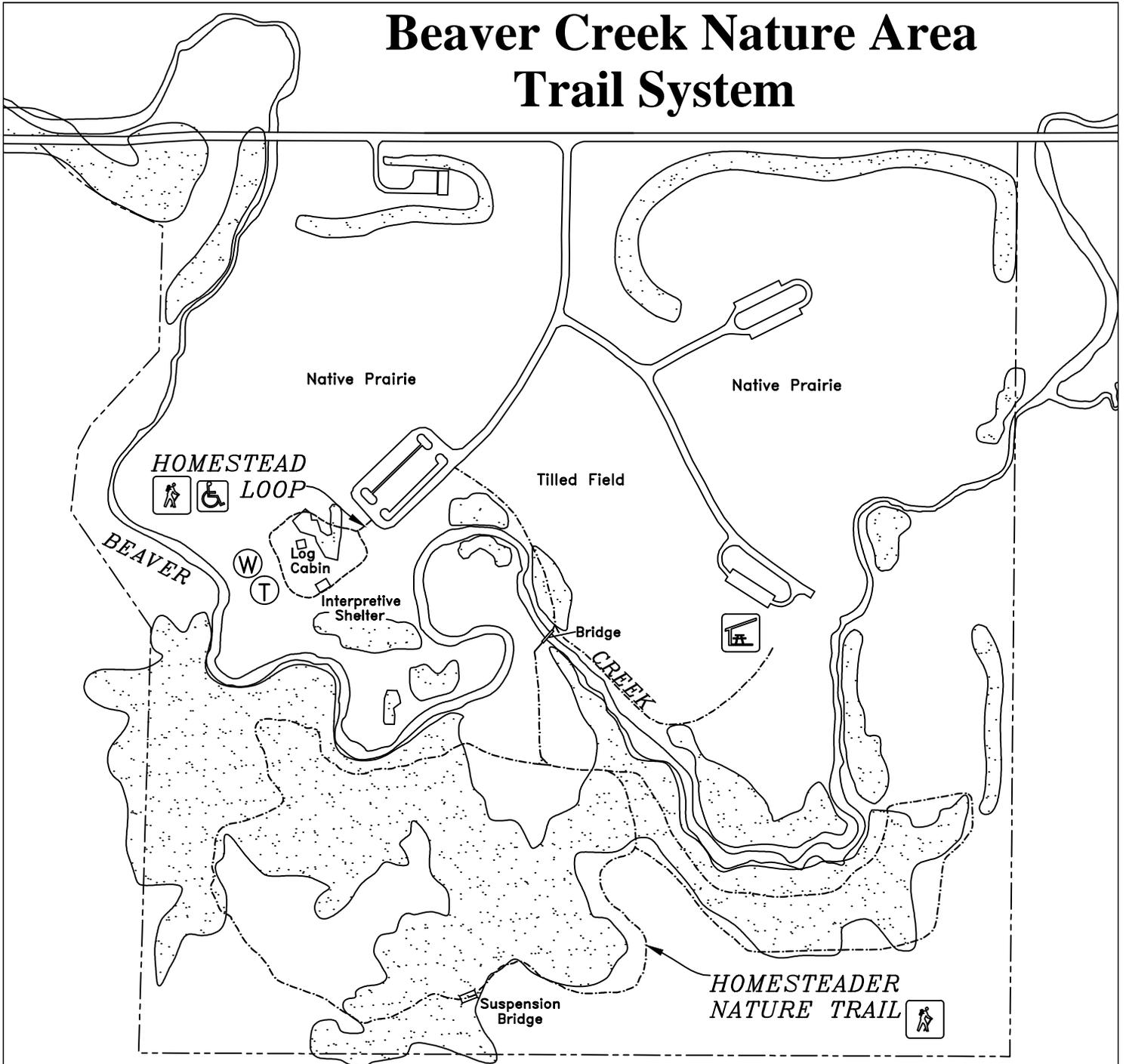
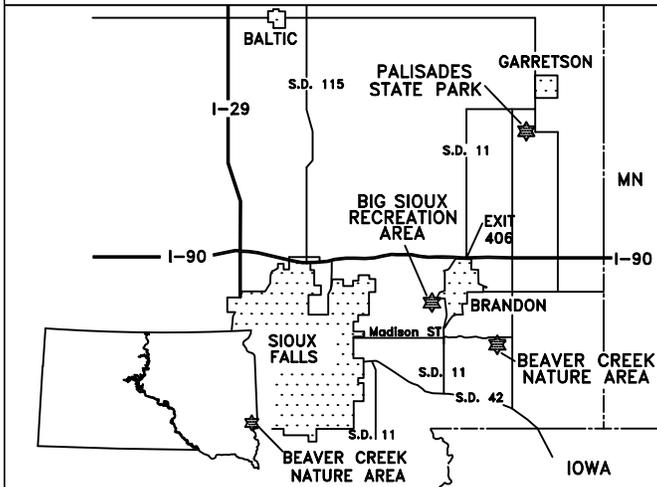


# Beaver Creek Nature Area Trail System



PARK LOCATION MAP

PARK BOUNDARY



- |   |                |   |                       |
|---|----------------|---|-----------------------|
|  | HIKING TRAIL   |  | PICNIC AREA           |
|  | PICNIC SHELTER |  | ACCESSIBLE FACILITIES |
|  | VAULT TOILET   |  | DRINKING WATER        |
|   |                |  | TREES                 |



SCALE IN FEET



# Map Legend



Accessible Facilities



Accessible Fishing Dock



Amphitheater



Archery Trail



Bicycle Trail



Boat Ramp



Campground



Canoeing



Comfort Station



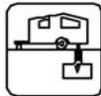
Cross-country Ski Trail



Disc Golf



Drinking Water



Dump Station

**E**

Electric Campsite



Entrance Station



Fish Cleaning Station



Fish Cleaning Table



Group Camping Area



Hiking Trail



Host Campsite  
(non-reservable)



Horse Trail/Horse Camp



Playground



Picnic Area



Picnic Shelter



Resort/Concessionaire



Ski Beach



Sledding Area



Swim Beach



Telephone



Vault Toilet



Volunteer Campsites  
(non-reservable)

# **Beaver Creek Nature Area**

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## **Homestead Loop Trail**

**Type of trail:** Hiking, interpretive/viewing nature and interpretive history

**Trail surface:** Gravel/limestone

**Rated:** Easy, appropriate for all ages

**Fee required:** No fee

**Length of trail in miles:** .10 mile

**Location of the trailhead:** Directly southwest of parking lot

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

**Facilities along the trail:** None

**Will there be interpretive information available:** Yes, interpretive shelter immediately adjacent to trail

**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 Brandon, 5.5 miles

**Nearest motels/restaurants OUTSIDE the park:** In Brandon, 5.5 miles

**Nearest Chamber of Commerce:**

Brandon Valley Area Chamber of Commerce, Box 182, Brandon, SD 57005, (605) 582-7400

**Emergency phone numbers:**

Ambulance - 911

Sheriff - 911

Fire Department - 911

**Do most cell phones work on this trail:** Yes

*In 1869, a young newlywed couple named John and Anna Samuelson, walked here from Sioux City, Iowa to homestead this fertile land. Their first home was a sod dugout on one of the nearby hillsides. In 1872, the log cabin was completed and John, Anna and their firstborn daughter moved in. The Samuelson's raised eight children in this log cabin before they moved westward. The solid oak logs give testament to their strength, as now, over one hundred years later, the cabin still stands.*

# **Beaver Creek Nature Area**

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## **Homesteader Nature Trail**

**Type of trail:** Hiking and interpretive/viewing nature

**Trail surface:** Dirt

**Rated:** Very difficult, extremely hilly, very uneven surface

**Fee required:** No fee

**Length of trail in miles:** 1.5 miles

**Location of the trailhead:** Located east of Homestead Loop – across the bridge

**Facilities at or near the trailhead:** Drinking water during warm seasons, toilet, parking and picnic table

**Facilities along the trail:** None

**Will there be interpretive information available:** No

**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 Brandon, 5.5 miles

**Nearest motels/restaurants OUTSIDE the park:** In Brandon, 5.5 miles

**Nearest Chamber of Commerce:**

Brandon Valley Area Chamber of Commerce, Box 182, Brandon, SD 57005, (605) 582-7400

**Emergency phone numbers:**

Ambulance - 911

Sheriff - 911

Fire Department - 911

**Do most cell phones work on this trail:** Yes, but there may be some dead spots along the trail.

# **Beaver Creek Nature Area**

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## **Homesteader Nature Trail**

**Follow the trail along the tilled field edge to the bridge.**

### **BEAVER CREEK**

This bridge crosses Beaver Creek, a typical prairie stream. The creek lazily wanders from its source in Minnesota to four miles west of here where it empties into Split Rock Creek. Along its course it provides habitat for aquatic creatures and food and water for land dwellers. Look at tracks along the muddy banks for clues to recent visitors.

### **WILDLIFE OF BEAVER CREEK**

Beaver Creek offers a varied habitat for wildlife. Animals such as squirrels, woodchucks, rabbits and many small rodents find shelter in the forested hillsides. The creek itself attracts many animals, including raccoons, mink, skunk and sometimes beaver.

The beaver build dams across the stream to create ponds. In doing so, they create their own habitat and provide new habitat for many other creatures. Their webbed tracks and chewed-off trees resembling stubby pencils are sure signs of these natural engineers.

Raccoons find the creek an excellent place to forage, often-finding frogs, crayfish and clams. They prefer their food moist (it aids swallowing) so they give meals a quick dip before eating them.

Whitetail deer graze in the prairie meadows and may be spotted in early morning or late evening. During the heat of the day, the deer find a shady place to rest and chew their cud.

Fox, although shy and elusive, share the prairie meadows and may be glimpsed flushing out rabbits, mice and other small animals. By assuming the role of predator, fox play an important part in maintaining the balance of nature.

**Cross the bridge and follow the trail to the junction. Stay on the Main Trail and note bank erosion to your right.**

### **EROSION**

While most of the year Beaver Creek is a shallow trickle, spring snowmelt or heavy summer rains can turn it into a raging torrent. Note the tree and plant roots exposed by loss of soil. Many of these trees and plants eventually will be washed into the creek. Destruction of vegetation and poor land management practices outside the nature area have aided the erosion process. The lack of ground cover to absorb runoff leads to heavy flooding, which results in a constantly changing shoreline.

**Continue along the path and take the Main Trail fork (to the right). Note the lush plant growth on both sides of you. Watch for the large grapevines on your left.**

Watch for **poison ivy** in this part of the forest. The plant has three leaves on each stem. A strong irritant oil found throughout the plant can cause skin irritation when touched.

## **GRAPEVINES**

These grapevines are among the largest in South Dakota. Notice the shaggy bark on their tree-like trunks. They are valuable as food and nesting material for many species of birds and animals. Other smaller grapevines are common throughout the nature area. The purple to blackish fruit can be used for juice, jams and jellies.

Also found trailing along the ground or clinging to shrubs and trees are Virginia creeper and moonseed. Virginia creeper is easily identified by its leaves grouped in fives and the fiery red color it turns in fall. Moonseed is distinguished by its lack of tendrils and black fruits powdered with white. These fruits are poisonous.

From here the trail leads up a set of log steps and passes by a small depression in the ground to your left. It was once the Samuelson's dugout shelter.

## **SAMUELSON DUGOUT**

This is the remains of the first home of John and Anna Samuelson. To provide shelter from the sweeping prairie winds, the dugout was carved into the hillside. Bricks of sod were used for the front wall and tree branches for the roof. The door was often a blanket hung over the opening. After collapsing, years of filling in by leaves and sediment has left only this shallow depression in the ground.

**Ahead are another set of log steps leading through the upland forest, which is dominated by bur oak, elms, hackberry and basswood.**

## **UPLAND FOREST**

The first tree you will encounter is the linden, or basswood. The smooth grayish bark and lop-sided, heart-shaped leaves are key aids in identification. Boiled roots from this tree were of great value for drawing infections from wounds and were widely used by early settlers.

There are also several small hackberry trees along this part of the trail. They are identified by their rough "tire-tread" bark and small dark fruits. The fruits were used as a seasoning by American Indians.

By far the dominant species of tree at Beaver Creek is the bur oak. The tree is easily identified by its deeply lobed leaves and stiff gnarled limbs. The name bur oak is derived from the bur-like cup on the acorn. This nut is a nutritious food for squirrels, deer and some species of songbirds.

Many plants thrive in the shade provided by these trees. Moss, Dutchman's-breeches, crimson columbine and violets are only a few of the plants to be seen. If they are not in bloom, look for other stages of growth such as buds or seed heads.

## **OTHER FOREST TREES**

Elm, prickly ash and red cedar make up this part of the forest. Elm is distinguished from other trees by its egg-shaped leaves that have coarsely-toothed edges. Some species of elm have leaves whose upper surfaces are rough and resemble sandpaper.

Prickly ash is the only member of the citrus family found in this vicinity. Its lemon-like odor and sharp thorns make it easy to recognize.

Red cedar is the only native evergreen in eastern South Dakota. Unlike other pines, its needles are short and scaly and its cones are blue and berry-like. The "cones" were boiled in water and the resulting brew

was used as a cough remedy by American Indians. The durable, aromatic wood is a favorite for lining closets and chests.

**Follow the trail to the open grassland.**

**PRAIRIE MEADOW**

This meadow is one of several at Beaver Creek that still has remnant species of original prairie. Many plants have disappeared due to encroachment by nonnative grasses, shrubs and trees, but some prairie flowers as well as grasses can still be seen.

Native prairie grasses are often called warm-season grasses. They grow from midspring to early fall and are characterized by deep root systems and weak horizontal stems called rhizomes.

Nonnative prairie grasses are often called cool-season grasses. They grow from early spring until late fall and are usually dormant during the hot summer months. They have shallow root systems and vigorous sod-forming rhizomes. Kentucky bluegrass and smooth brome are two of the more common species found at Beaver Creek.

**PRAIRIE GRASSES**

Beaver Creek is in the tallgrass prairie zone where big bluestem, or turkey foot as it is sometimes known, is the dominant species. Big bluestem often grows to a height of eight feet. It is so named because of its large size, bluish color and seed heads that resemble a turkey's foot. Often growing in association with big bluestem is little bluestem. It can reach a height of four feet. Its flattened leaf sheaths and shorter height help to distinguish it from big bluestem.

Indian grass is one of the most beautiful of the native species. Its golden-yellow color and brown seed heads distinguish it from the other grasses. It attains a height of eight feet and is valued as hay.

Switchgrass, also associated with tallgrass prairie, is a frequent dominant of lowlands. Its teardrop-shaped seeds and large flower heads make it easy to pick out.

**Continue through the meadow, down along the gully and over the hill to the swinging bridge.**

**A HEALING WORLD**

This gully, which was formed by runoff, is in the process of healing itself. A variety of plants are growing in the bottom, halting erosion there. Erosion along the banks will continue until their slope becomes gentle enough for grasses to reestablish themselves. As moisture conditions change, the cattails and rushes will be replaced by more drought-tolerant plants and trees. This process of plants replacing others as condition change is known as succession.

**Cross the bridge and follow the trail out of the forest and back to the prairie.**

**NATIVE PRAIRIE**

As you walk along through the prairie, note the grasses and the beautiful array of wildflowers. Ahead around the bend, the trail divides pieces of virgin and cultivated soil. The land to the right and has been cropped from many years and now consists mostly of brome grass and other foreign species.

The slope to the left was too steep to plow, so it displays a wealth of native grasses and wildflowers.

Before the plow and fire suppression encouraged nonnative species, wildfire was nature's way of keeping the prairie healthy. Today a program of carefully controlled burns has become a management tool for restoring prairie.

### **PRAIRIE GARDEN**

Throughout the season there is an ever-changing display of wildflowers at Beaver Creek. Pasque, prairie roses, yarrow, sunflowers, meadow anemones and goldenrod are only a few of the many species to be enjoyed. Many were used by American Indians and early settlers as food or medicine. Salsify, yarrow and horsemint were effective antacids. Mullein, cup plant and sunflowers eased the discomforts for colds, while leadplant and pasque gave relief to the pain of arthritis and rheumatism.

Take time to explore the textures and fragrances of all these plants, but leave them for others to enjoy.

**Ahead around the bend is a dense thicket of wild plum trees.**

### **PLUM THICKET**

This dense thicket of plum trees provide a protected habitat for many species of birds. The sharp spines discourage people or predatory animals from disturbing birds that nest here. Grackles and robins especially use these trees for nesting. Many birds as well as animals eat the plums. This thicket, along with the open prairie, the woodlands, and the creek bottom, are types of habitat that support a wide variety of bird life at Beaver Creek.

**Continue down the hill and along the creek or turn right for a longer hike along the Lowland Forest.**

### **CREEK BOTTOM**

As you overlook the creek, watch for reddish, woody stemmed plants growing in dense clusters. These sandbar willows are usually the first plants to grow on sandbars. Their roots help hold the sand so other trees and plants can grow. Check for tracks of animals and birds that have come to the creek for a drink or to catch a meal.

### **BIRDS OF BEAVER CREEK**

Many types of birds make Beaver Creek their home. Hawks, song sparrows, meadowlarks and pheasants can be found in the prairie meadows where there is abundant food and shelter for nesting. Owls, thrashers, woodpeckers, chickadees and morning doves are just a few of the species that make the woodlands their home. Kingfishers and great blue herons are water birds and spend most of their time near the creek. Each bird has its own method, but both are very successful at catching fish.

Many of the birds of Beaver Creek migrate south for the winter, but a few hardy species such as nuthatches, chickadees, downy woodpeckers and sparrows brighten the winter landscape with their songs and antics.

### **LOWLAND FOREST**

The lowland, or river bottom, forest is dominated by moisture-loving species such as cottonwood, willow, ash and boxelder. All were important to American Indians people.

The cottonwood was considered sacred and selected by some American Indian tribes as the center pole for the Sun Dance ceremony. The tender inner bark fed many American Indian ponies during winter. The flattened leaf stem causes the leaf to dance in the slightest breeze, earning its the name Waga Chun, which means "talking tree." The bark of willows was boiled and the resulting tea was used to relieve headaches and reduce fever. We know today the bark contains salicytic acid, the painkiller used in aspirin.

Boxelder trees belong to the maple family. Early Plains Indians collected the sap by wedging drip sticks into the trunk and collecting the liquid in containers. The sap was processed somewhat like maple syrup is today and was used as a sweetener. Ash trees with their strong straight wood were used for pipe stems and bows and arrows. Legend tells that the American Indians fashioned canoe paddles from ash wood because of the shape of the ash seed.

American Indians used this area for the plants and animals it offered. Settlers built their home here and cultivated the land. Today the area has been set aside as a nature area for all to enjoy. The forest, creek and prairie are part of the natural systems protected for today's visitors and future generations. We hope this walk has helped further your understanding and enjoyment of these systems. The changing seasons will show different features in the park and along the trails. Plan to return often and enjoy the variety nature has to offer.