



OAKWOOD LAKES STATE PARK HIKING TRAILS



Oakwood Lakes State Park

Oakleaf Challenge

Type of trail: Disc golf

Trail surface: Grass

Rated: Easy, flat with rolling hills

Fee required: Park Entrance License

Length of trail in miles: .46 mile

Location of the trailhead: Center of picnic area, in the northwest part of the park

Facilities at or near the trailhead: Vault toilet

Facilities along the trail: Vault toilets, picnic shelters

Will there be interpretive information available: Trail score cards and maps next to Picnic Shelter #2.

What lodging opportunities are provided IN the park: Tent camping, electrical and non-electrical campsites, wheelchair accessible campsite, camping cabin

Does this trail connect with any other trails: No

Nearest facilities for purchasing snacks, sunscreen etc.: Wagon Wheel resort - 2 miles

Nearest motels/restaurants OUTSIDE the park: In Arlington - 13 miles; in Brookings - 20 miles

Nearest Chamber of Commerce:

Brookings Chamber of Commerce and Convention Bureau,
2308 6th St., Brookings, SD 57006, (605) 692-6125

Emergency phone numbers:

Ambulance – 911, Sheriff – 911, Fire Department – 911

Do most cell phones work on this trail: Yes

Oakwood Lakes State Park

Mortimer's Shoreline Trail

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

Trail surface: Dirt and grass

Rated: Moderate, somewhat hilly, even trail surface

Length of trail: .25 mile

Fee required: Park Entrance License

Location of the trailhead: Amphitheater behind information booth

Facilities at or near the trailhead: Drinking water, parking, picnic table, warming shelter, campground

Facilities along the trail: None

Will there be interpretive information available: Yes, at the historic cabin by trail

What lodging opportunities are provided IN the park: Tent camping, electrical and non-electrical campsites, wheelchair accessible campsites, camping cabins, horse camp

Does this trail connect with any other trails:

Yes, connects with Oakwood Prairie Trail at south end of campground.

Nearest facilities for purchasing snacks, sun screen etc.:

Resort .25 mile west of park entrance on Highway 30

Nearest motels/restaurants OUTSIDE the park: In Arlington - 13 miles; in Brookings - 20 miles

Name, address, and phone numbers of nearest Chamber of Commerce:

Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce, 2308 6th St., Brookings, SD 57006, (605) 692-6125

Emergency phone numbers:

Ambulance - 911

Sheriff - 911

Fire Department - 911

Do most cell phones work on this trail: Yes

Oakwood Lakes State Park

Mortimer's Shoreline Trail

The trailhead is located behind the information booth by the amphitheater. The trail follows the shoreline from the booth to Ol'Spot Mortimer's cabin and continues to the handicapped dock area, which connect with the boat launch trail and the campground trail.

The historic cabin along this trail was constructed in 1869 by Samuel (Ol'Spot) Mortimer. He was a shoemaker by trade from New York. But tiring of this business, he moved to the Yankton area and trapped along the Missouri River. In 1869, he moved to the "fur rich" Oakwood area and did well during the peak trapping days of 1871. But by 1874 he couldn't depend on a profitable harvest, so he sold 100 acres of timber for \$100/acre. Some of the oak trees harvested by pioneers for fuel and buildings were said to be over three feet in diameter.

Ol'Spot left the area in September of 1874 and went back to Vermillion where he married a widow with several children. But by 1877, he returned to the area and tried farming, but trapping proved to be better. The population explosion in the Oakwood vicinity was not to his liking, so in 1887 Solomon Walters of Bruce brought him out for \$1,800, and he moved from the area. Today this historic site stands as a reminder of the early settlers.

Oakwood Lakes State Park

Oakwood Lakes Prairie Trail

Type of trail: Hiking, biking, horseback riding, interpretive/viewing nature and cross-country skiing

Trail surface: Grass

Rated: Moderate, somewhat hilly, even trail surface

Length of trail in miles: 2.6 miles

Fee required: Park Entrance License

Location of the trailhead: SE of campground.

Facilities at or near the trailhead: Drinking water, toilet, parking, campground

Facilities along the trail: Bench

Will there be interpretive information available: No

What lodging opportunities are provided IN the park: Tent camping, electrical and non-electrical campsites, wheelchair accessible campsites, camping cabins, horse camp

Does this trail connect with any other trails: Yes, Mortimer Shoreline Trail

Nearest facilities for purchasing snacks, sunscreen etc.:
Resort .25 mile west of park entrance on Highway 30

Nearest motels/restaurants OUTSIDE the park: In Arlington - 13 miles; in Brookings - 20 miles

Name, address, and phone numbers of nearest Chamber of Commerce:
Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce, 2308 6th St., Brookings, SD 57006, (605) 692-6125

Emergency phone numbers:
Ambulance - 911
Sheriff - 911
Fire Department - 911

Do most cell phones work on this trail: Yes

Out-of-State Horses:

All out-of-state horses are required to have a valid, clean health certificate within the last 30 days, and a negative Coggins or ELISA EIA test within the last 12 months. SDCL 40-14-2. All documents must be on person.

Oakwood Lakes State Park

Oakwood Lakes Prairie Trail

The Oakwood Prairie Trail meanders through grasslands and wooded areas between the eight lakes in the Oakwood chain. The natural beauty of the area, fertile lands, and wooded areas have attracted cultures for many years. American Indians called the lake area Tetonkaha, which means, "Look here greathouse."

East of the campground trailhead are three burial mounds which were occupied by prehistoric people, probably of the Woodland culture, about the time of Christ. There are believed to be as many as ten mounds in the Oakwood area.

After leaving the campground, one travels through hedgerows that parallel the equestrian camping area. Once out in the open you can notice areas of native grass which include big blue stem, little blue stem and Indian grass.

Every few years the grass areas are burned to help slow the growth of cool season grasses such as brome, and to promote warm season grass growth. Burning also removes dead vegetation and releases nutrients to enrich the soil. Reduction of invader plants also helps encourage growth of native species and ultimately improved habitat is created for wildlife.

The second loop of the trail takes one along the wetland area, which flows into East Oakwood Lake. Wetlands are very diverse systems that are beneficial to humans and wildlife. Such systems assist in preventing downstream flooding and erosion. Wetlands absorb large amounts of sediments and nutrients from surface water. These systems also provide a variety of habitat for many species of wildlife. Waterfowl are especially notable each spring in the Oakwood area.

Once out of the sheltered area, the open area has been seeded to native grasses, including Indian grass, big and little bluestem, switch grass, side oats grama, and wheat grass.

Hopefully during your trail experience you will have taken a moment to ponder the riches of the area which have attracted cultures of past and present. Preservation of such resources must be an ongoing endeavor.

Oakwood Lakes State Park

Tetonkaha Trail

Type of trail: Hiking, interpretive/viewing nature, interpretive history and cross-country skiing

Trail surface: Dirt and grass

Rated: Moderate, somewhat hilly, even trail surface

Fee required: Park Entrance License

Location of the trailhead: 400 yards west of entrance booth

Length of trail: .75 mile

Facilities at or near the trailhead: Parking, picnic table

Facilities along the trail: Benches

Will there be interpretive information available: Yes

What lodging opportunities are provided IN the park: Tent camping, electrical and non-electrical campsites, wheelchair accessible campsites, camping cabins, horse camp

Does this trail connect with any other trails: No

Nearest facilities for purchasing snacks, sunscreen etc.:
Resort .25 mile west of park entrance on Highway 30

Nearest motels/restaurants OUTSIDE the park: In Arlington - 13 miles; in Brookings - 20 miles

Nearest Chamber of Commerce:
Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce, 2308 6th St., Brookings, SD 57006, (605) 692-6125

Emergency phone numbers:
Ambulance - 911
Sheriff - 911
Fire Department - 911

Do most cell phones work on this trail: Yes

Oakwood Lakes State Park

Tetonkaha Trail

Station 1

The Oakwood Lakes were formed more than 10,000 years ago when melting glaciers filled depressions scooped in the earth's surface by the advancing ice. The 3,000 acres of water in the eight lakes of the Oakwood chain, surrounding fertile lands and native woods, attracted prehistoric and historic American Indians. Several burial mounds in the park evidence the existence of prehistoric man, probably of the Woodland culture about the time of Christ. The American Indians called the lake area "tetonkaha", which means "look here great house".

The natural bounties also attracted the first settlers. Because of its glacial origin, the topsoil made a rich seedbed for crops. Native woods grew on land surrounding the lakes and on the peninsula separating them, providing fuel and building material. As late as 1879, settlers reported that the island, where this trail is located, had many huge cottonwood trees. These trees provided observation roosts and nesting areas for bald eagles. Indians prized eagle feathers for making ornaments and denoting skill in battle.

Station 2

At the base of the flagpole is a plaque dedicated to D.C. Mackintosh. Mackintosh was a long time scout leader from Brookings. He guided scouts in planting many of the evergreen trees in remote areas of this preserve.

Scout Island was named for the annual Boy Scout encampment once held here. The island is now a peninsula surrounded on the east and south by Tetonkaha Lake and on the west by Johnson Lake.

As you proceed to the southeast along the trail, just beyond the oak trees to your right, notice the rough, warty lumps on the bark of nearby hackberry trees. Their narrow, roughly edged leaves taper like lopsided spear points. The dark, purplish berries ripen in the fall and are a favorite of birds. If you'd taste one of the ripe berries, you'd understand why some people call this the sugarberry tree. Tangle of branches and twigs, called witches'-brooms, often develop as the tree grows older.

Station 3

The tall shrub near this post is buckthorn. Its dark, green leaves, marked by prominent veins, cling to the branches long after a frost. In fall, clusters of black, pea-sized berries hang from the tree. The berries are a favorite of many birds, because they cling to the tree long after other fruit have dropped. The tree-like shrub gets its name from its spine-tipped branches. Birds are responsible for its wide distribution.

As you continue walking along the trail, you may notice a plant with a square stem and arrow-shaped leaves. It's catnip, and its minty aroma holds a great attraction for cats, which enjoy rolling on, rubbing against, or eating.

Early settlers made a tea of the catnip leaves to relieve colic in infants. Catnip was also used to induce sweating to cure colds. When used medicinally, the leaves and flowering tops were collected when the plant was in flower and then dried.

Station 4

This cluster of shrubbery is gooseberries. The plant is easily recognized by the sharp, half-inch spines on its stems. Many songbirds seek the ripe berries. American Indians used the fruit, which ripen to a deep red in the fall, to flavor meat, calling the mixture *wasna*. The shrub's sharp spines form a protective canopy for small game to escape or hide from predators.

In areas along the trail, you may notice a weed called stinging nettles. They can cause welts and inflammation on your skin if you come in contact with them. Their leaves are dark green, spear-pointed, and 3 to 6 in. long with saw-toothed edges. Stinging nettles grow in barnyards, fence rows, and along roadsides.

Station 5

Walk to the edge of the small slough behind this post and note the reddish stems of the prominent shrub. This is dogwood, and it bears white, pea-sized berries. The inner bark of dogwood was used in a mixture with tobacco and called *kinnikinnick*. American Indians favored this mild smoke in their ceremonial pipes.

Another plant growing along the edge of the pond is jewelweed, or touch-me-not. Its light green, watery stems have many branches. Yellowish flowers appear in the summer, and the resulting seeds are borne in pods that burst when touched, scattering the contents. Rubbing foliage from the plant on areas affected by poison ivy reportedly affords relief.

As you return to the main trail, note the vine entwined in the boxelder tree. The flowers and fruit of this vine have a putrid odor, which gives the plant its name of carrion flower.

Station 6

The cluster of oak trees that surrounds this rest spot are representatives of the tree that gives Oakwood Lakes its name. In 1870, the first European settler at Oakwood, Samuel Mortimer, reportedly sold oak trees from his land to other settlers for building their homes. Some of the oaks were said to be three feet in diameter. Oak logs were prized for their durability. Most of the remaining oak trees in the park are second or third generation trees. The oak is easily recognized by its large, deeply indented leaves and rough bark. In the fall, acorns borne in one-half inch deep protective cups are abundant at Oakwood. Examine one of the cups with an acorn in it and note the fringed edge. Does it have a mossy appearance? Some people call bur oak "mossy cup oak". The fall acorn attracts deer, raccoons, squirrels, and other animals.

Station 7

This is the southeastern tip of Scout Island, and evidence of its exposure to wind and waves is seen in the eroded beach. Wave action has washed soil away from the roots of trees and shrubs. The eroded soil will eventually settle to the bottom of the lake making the lake shallow.

This is the same thing that happens when dirt from surrounding fields blows or washes into a lake. Through the centuries, prairie lakes will eventually become filled with silt and return to a prairie grass stage. The succession from lake to pond, to marsh to prairie is greatly speeded by human's mistreatment of the land.

In the meadow to the north you might recognize the smooth stems and leaves of common milkweed plants. Its clusters of pinkish flowers develop into seedpods, resembling a bird's body, packed with

downy seeds. American Indians ate the young seedpods. The whitish milk that oozes from a broken stem or leaf has been used for chewing gum, a cure for warts and treatment of ringworm.

Station 8

This grayish stemmed shrub is false indigo. Each leaf is divided into numerous small leaflets. The plant is of great value in reducing soil erosion, because it grows along lakeshores and streambeds where its roots bend the soil. In mid-summer, purple flowers are clustered on spikes at the end of its stems.

As you proceed west along the shoreline, you will notice cattails. The young inner stalks of cattails are edible and quite sweet. Cattail roots are whitish bulbs and may be eaten like potatoes or dried and pounded into flour. Pioneers and American Indians used the fuzz of mature cattails as tinder to start fires. The fluff was stuffed into boots and moccasins to prevent frostbite, and some American Indian women used it as an absorbent for their babies' diapers.

Station 9

Pause at this station to enjoy the solitude of Oakwood Lakes. In spring and fall, the lakes are a haven for many species of migratory birds. Mergansers, white pelicans, teal, gulls, heron, and other species make bird watching a pleasant pastime.

The clusters of large trees in this area are mostly willows. Native willows grow along watercourses and lakeshores. American Indians boiled the willow bark to produce a tea to relieve headache and reduce fever. Willow buds provide a nutritious food source for some birds in winter.

Station 10

The crooked branches of boxelder trees make them a favorite for nesting birds. Its clusters of paired winged seeds, appearing like the letter "V" can identify a boxelder tree. The tree is sometimes called ash leaf maple because its leaves are divided into leaflets, resembling ash leaves.

Some Plains Indians slashed large branches of the tree and inserted a wedged "drip stick" to catch the sweet maple juices that flow from the wound. A similar method is used to collect the maple syrup you enjoy on pancakes. Boxelder is reported to produce more sweet juice than other maples, but it is not as high quality.

To the northwest there grows a plum thicket. The American plum is a small tree or large shrub that will grow in clumps. The leaves are simple, sharply double serrate with prominent veins. The fruits are used to make jellies, jams, preserves, and pies. Plum thickets form a good game cover for deer, foxes, raccoons, squirrels, and many birds.

Station 11

The trees behind this post are green ash. Each leaf has 5 to 9 leaflets growing on 8 to 12 inch stems. During late summer, fall, and winter, clusters of seed remain on female ash trees. Note the seed's shape. Some persons claim American Indians used ash wood for canoe paddles because of the shape of the seeds. Pioneers used ash to make wagon axle handles. Called shelf-brackets or conks, they often indicate disease within the tree.

As you proceed to the next station, notice the evergreen, or conifer, trees on the right of the trail. They are ponderosa pine, and are easily recognized from other pines because their 3 to 6 inch long needle-like

leaves are borne in clusters of two or three. The pines are harvested for lumber and pulp in the Black Hills where they are native. In the eastern part of the state, they make an effective windbreak when used in shelterbelt plantings. The resin that oozes from a wound in a ponderosa pine was used by pioneers and American Indians to ease the pain of burns and open sores and to encourage growth of new skin.

Station 12

This tree was about 80 years old when it was blown down during a windstorm. The cavities and wounds on it indicate the tree may have been weakened by disease. Far from being "dead", it is now in the process of decay and teems with life from mushrooms and lichens to insects and animals. Most logs decay quicker from the bottom to the top, because moisture in the soil encourages the growth of bacteria and fungi that cause decay. Squirrels may store acorns in the tree for winter use, and ants hibernate in rotting wood, insulated from freezing temperatures.

There are a number of large cottonwood trees along the west shore of the island. These shallow-rooted giants are exceptionally fast growing and require lots of water. It is one of the most common trees growing along the watercourses and lakeshores on the prairies. It was a sacred tree for some American Indians; the center pole used in the Sun Dance was a sapling cottonwood. The nutritious bark of the young cottonwoods was often used to feed American Indian ponies during the winter. The young cotton pods were among the first green things to appear in the spring, and some tribes readily ate them. The female cottonwood tree strews cotton over wide areas when the pods ripen and the wind blows.

Station 13

From the vantage point at this stop, you can observe the tongues of land that were described by the explorers Joseph N. Nicollet and John Fremont when they camped at Oakwood Lakes in 1838. Nicollet wrote, "Wood is less scarce here. It is on all the tongues of land which separate the lakes from one another."

The point due west across Johnson Lake is near the boyhood home of Paul Errington, nationally famous wildlife management teacher and author of several books on muskrat management. His writings often refer to his younger days spent researching the life and habitat of muskrats near Goodfellow Island, the closest land you see to the west. The lakes in the Oakwood group average from 6 to 10 feet deep. This shallow depth often results in winterkill of fish. Snow accumulates on ice, retarding sunlight needed to produce oxygen for the fish.