

◆ CUSTER STATE PARK ◆

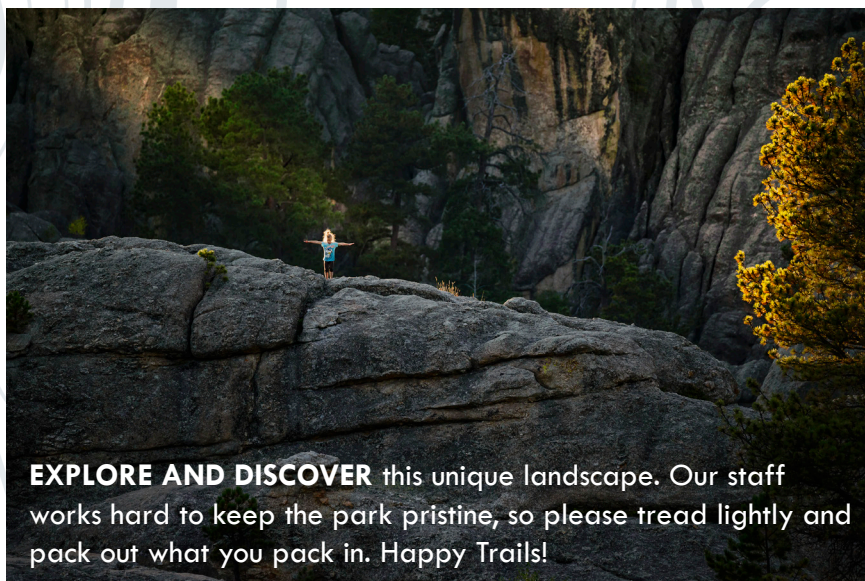
Trail Mix

A HIKER'S GUIDE TO CUSTER STATE PARK'S TRAILS





**MADE WITH
NATURAL INGREDIENTS**



EXPLORE AND DISCOVER this unique landscape. Our staff works hard to keep the park pristine, so please tread lightly and pack out what you pack in. Happy Trails!

TRAIL RATINGS

Easy / The trail mainly follows level ground with very little elevation change







Moderate / Parts of the trail include more inclines, hills or elevation changes. It may have more technical terrain such as rocky or root-covered trail, loose gravel on inclines, or narrow paths.

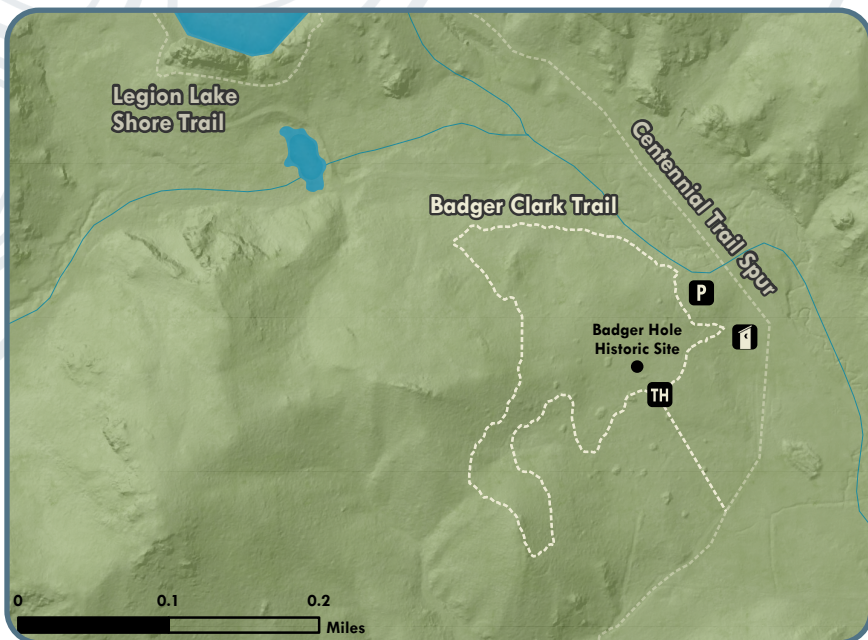
Strenuous / Much of the trail includes very steep slopes and rocky areas. It may include a long steady climb, may have steps or stairs and roots. Slippery rocks or other difficult terrain is also present.

CAUTIONARY TIPS

- There are no restrooms located along trails.
- Thunderstorms containing hail, strong winds, lightning and rain are frequent during the summer months.
- Wear shoes suitable for rugged terrain.
- Take a least one quart of water per person.
- Pack out your trash.
- Buffalo are common in these areas. Please remain at least 100 yards away.
- Leave what you find; removing plants, rocks and other items from the park is prohibited.

MAP LEGEND

-  Trailhead
-  Vault Toilet
-  Parking
-  Swim Beach
-  Restroom/Shower
-  Boat Ramp



BADGER CLARK TRAIL

Length: 1.2 mile (Loop)

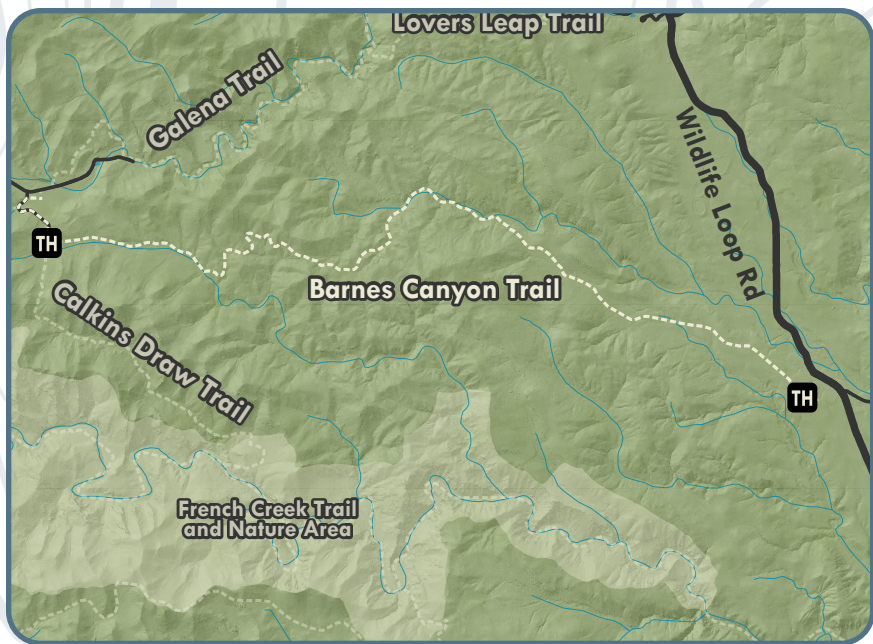
Time: 1-2 hours

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Starting beside the historic Badger Hole, this trail winds through mixed pine and hardwood forest and along rocky hillsides. A portion of the rock-lined trail was built by the famous cowboy poet Badger Clark himself.

FUN FACTS

- Charles “Badger” Clark was South Dakota’s first poet laureate.
- He lived in Custer State Park for the final 30 years of his life.
- You’ll find his poetry on numerous signs while hiking this trail.



BARNES CANYON TRAIL

Length: 4.7 miles (One-Way)

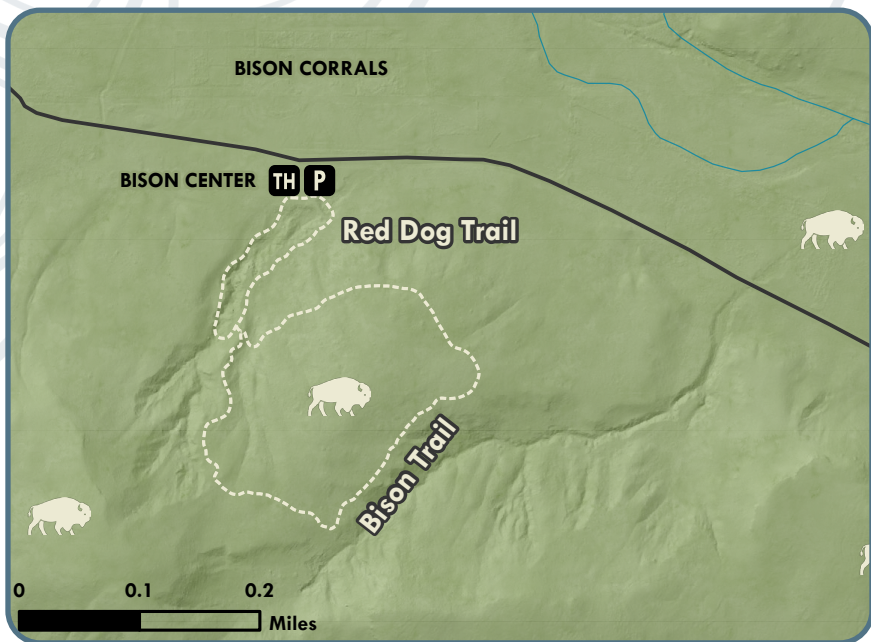
Time: 4-5 hours

Difficulty: Moderate

Follow the well-worn trail of homesteaders, loggers, and miners along Dry Creek, which may experience intermittent seasonal flow. Keep your eyes peeled for elk, deer, bighorn sheep and buffalo.

FUN FACTS

- There is evidence of old mines and lumber camps along this trail.
- The Canyon is named after a homestead in the area.



BISON TRAILS

Length:

Red Dog Trail - 1 mile (Loop)

Bison Trail - 3 miles (Loop)

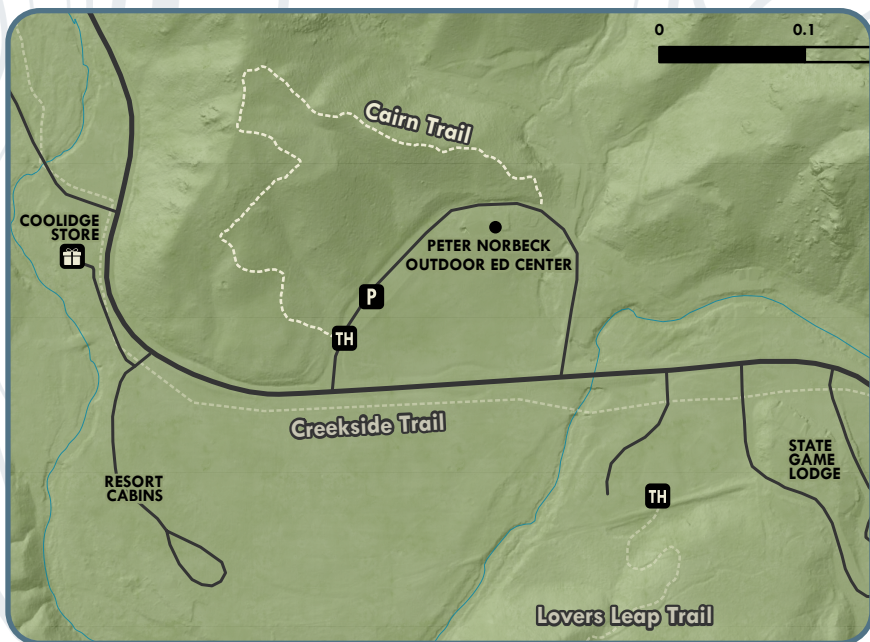
Time: 1 hour

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

One of the park's newer trails located near the Bison Center along the Wildlife Loop Road. These trails immerse you into the plains of the southern part of the park. Keep an eye out for not only bison but an array of wildflowers and plants. At the top you will have an amazing view of the prairie landscape.

FUN FACTS

- What's a "red dog"? It's a baby bison. Bison calves tend to be born from late March through May and are orange-red in color, earning them the nickname "red dogs."



CAIRN TRAIL

Length: .3 mile (Loop)

Time: 1 hour

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

The Cairn Trail climbs the ridge behind the Peter Norbeck Outdoor Education Center and loops through scars left behind by the Galena Fire. Highlights include a bird's eye view of the State Game Lodge and Grace Coolidge General Store. Note: There is limited shade along this route.

FUN FACTS

- The trail's name comes from stacked rocks, called Cairns, which have been used since prehistoric times as landmarks, burial monuments, and astronomical markers.
- Some of the bark on the old ponderosa pines in the area smell like vanilla or butterscotch.



CATHEDRAL SPIRES TRAIL

Length: 3.0 miles (Out & Back)

Time: 1-2 hours

Difficulty: **Strenuous**

STAFF NOTES:

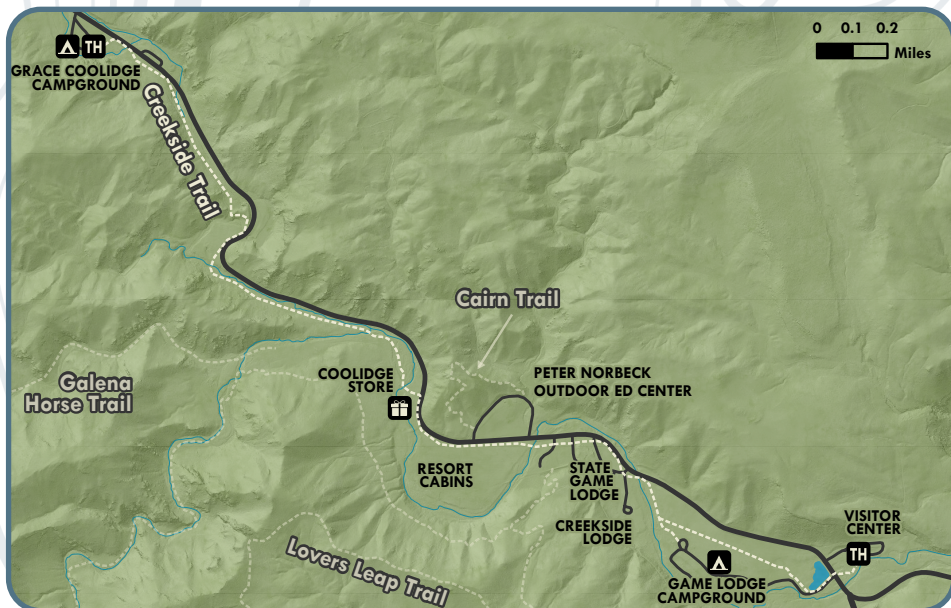
*This trail connects with Black Elk Trail #4 and Little Devil's Tower Trail. Look for signs and be aware of trail markings.

*Parking is limited

Beautiful and mystifying, the rock formations along Needles Highway were shaped millions of years ago, eventually eroding into granite pillars known as the Cathedral Spires. A steep section over boulders earns this trail a strenuous rating, although the grind is worth it for the views along the trail.

FUN FACTS

- The Spires are a registered National Natural Landmark as a unique geological formation.
- The Cathedral Spires are named for their resemblance to organ pipes in the back of a cathedral.
- Before choosing Mount Rushmore, Gutzon Borglum first considered carving the Spires into historical western figures, however the granite was deemed unsuitable.



CREEKSIDE TRAIL

Length: 5.2 miles (One-way)

Time: 1-2 hours

Difficulty: **Easy**

A very easy trail accessible to all, including wheelchairs, small children & even rollerbladers. Creekside Trail follows Grace Coolidge Creek in Custer State Park and includes several bridge crossings.

FUN FACTS

- The trail follows the Grace Coolidge creek which is the name of President Calvin Coolidge's wife. Both the President and First Lady stayed at the State Game Lodge.



FRENCH CREEK TRAIL

Length: 12.8 miles (One-way)

Difficulty: **Moderate** to **Strenuous**

French Creek gently meanders through Custer State Park and into the French Creek gorge. The stream flows beneath sheer canyon walls, past mixed stands of pine and hardwood forest and lush native vegetation. Because of the uniqueness and diversity of this area, 2,200 acres surrounding the gorge have been set aside as the French Creek Natural Area.

Although there is no marked trail through the natural area, hikers make their own way along the creek or follow paths of previous hikers. Hikers must cross the creek many times and wet feet are almost assured. During the drier months, the first mile of creek from the east trailhead flows underground leaving a dry stream bed.



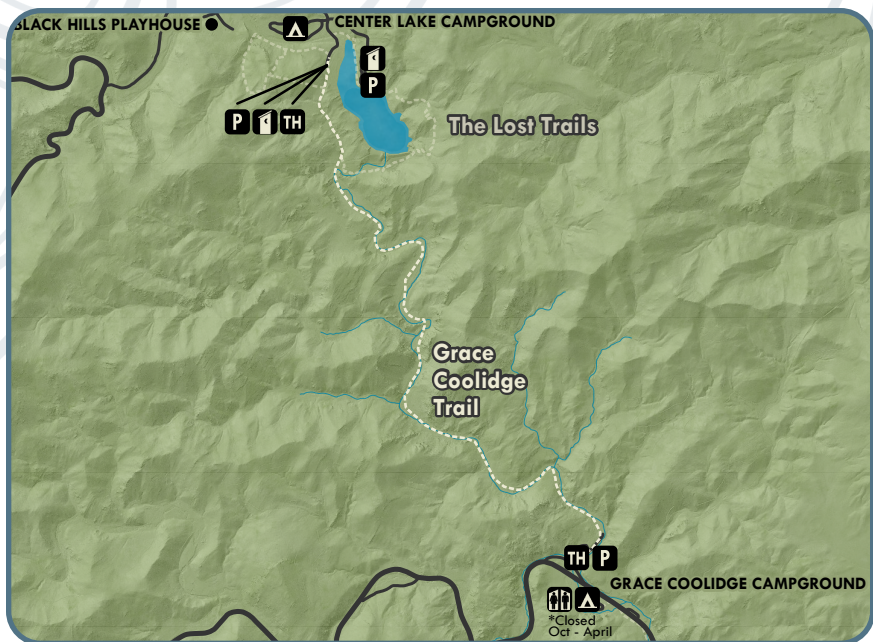
STAFF NOTES: The Narrows is where the creek pinches together and access is limited to climbing over the cliff (a steep embankment of 60 feet) or swimming (100 feet) through the creek.

FRENCH CREEK TRAIL PRIMITIVE CAMPING

Primitive camping is allowed within the French Creek Natural area.

Please Note:

- Overnight camping is only allowed within the canyon bottom.
- Campsites must be at least 50 feet from the stream.
- Open fires are strictly prohibited.
- Campers must self-register and pay camping fee at the East Trailhead or West Trailhead camping self-fee station.



GRACE COOLIDGE

Length: 3 miles (One-way)

Time: 2- 4 hours

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

This nearly-level trail follows Grace Coolidge Creek, crossing it many times as it meanders through the valley. Crossings may be difficult any time of the year, and you will get wet.

Flowing gently from the spillway of Center Lake, the creek contains six lowhead dams. The ponds and creekside offer excellent trout fishing and provide habitat for a variety of plants and wildlife found in this unique area.

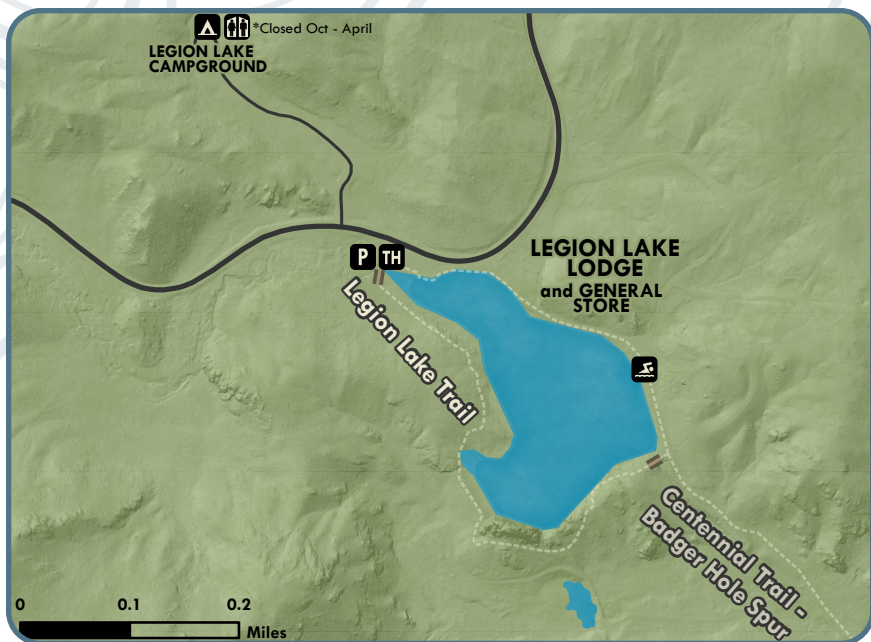


FISHING IN CUSTER STATE PARK

Fishing is one of the most popular outdoor activities in America. If you are looking for the excitement of having a fish on the line, the relaxation of a quiet day by the lake, or a chance to enjoy quality time with family and friends, try year-round fishing in South Dakota.



SCAN TO PURCHASE FISHING LICENSE



LEGION LAKE TRAIL

Length: 1 mile (Loop)

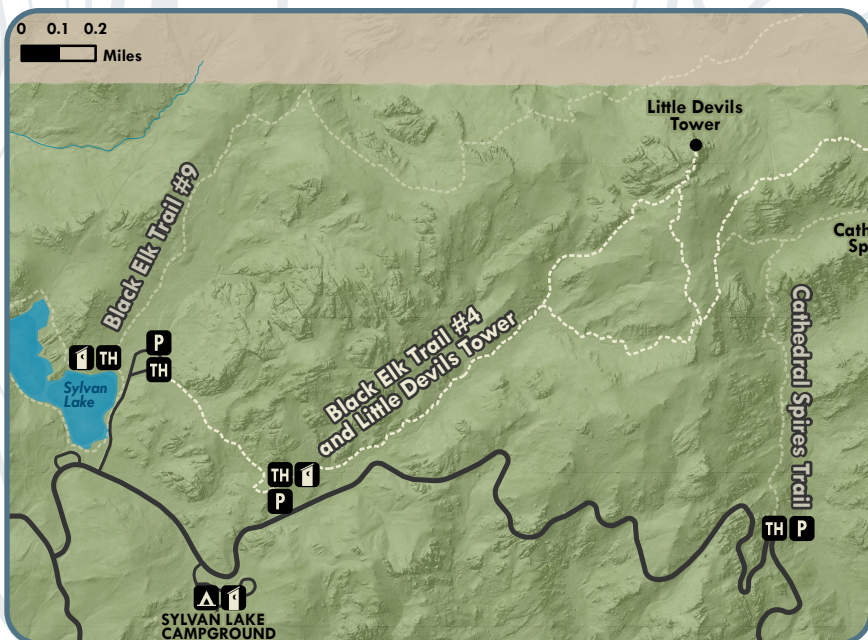
Time: 1 hour

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

With excellent views of the lake and rock outcroppings, this centrally located trail makes for a fun foray into the woods. The trail merges with Centennial Trail, which takes the difficulty up a notch in many rocky and steep places.

FUN FACTS

- Legion Lake is named for the American Legion Post that once leased the land.
- The Legion Lake fire of 2017 started in this area.



LITTLE DEVILS TOWER TRAIL

Length: 1.5 miles (One-way)

Time: 2-4 hours

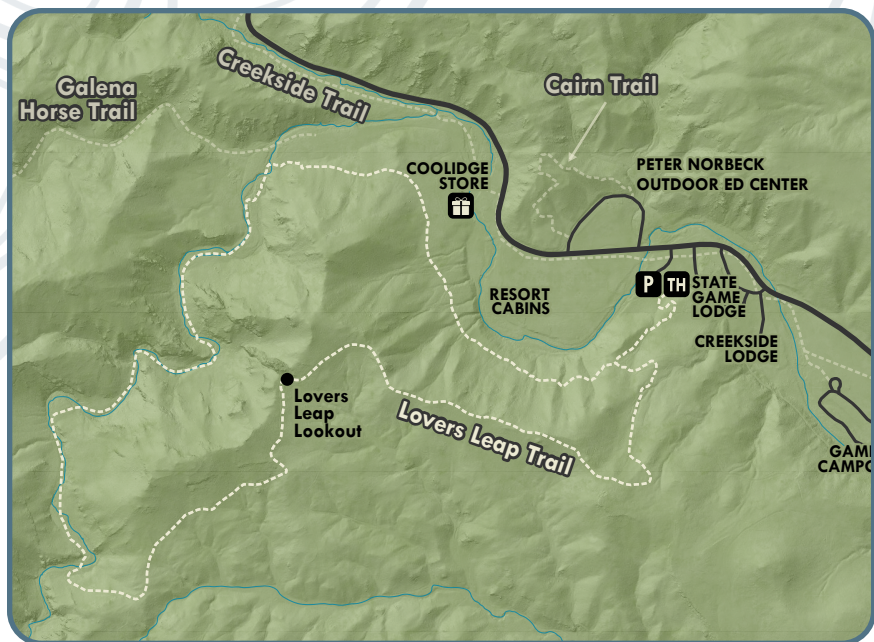
Difficulty: **Strenuous**

STAFF NOTES: This trail connects with Black Elk Trail #4. Look for signs and be aware of trail markings. There is rock scrambling on this trail.

This spur trail branches off Black Elk Peak Trail #4 and ascends to the unique rock formation known as Little Devils Tower. There is a lot of uneven ground and exposed rock to climb through; however, the views of the Cathedral Spires and Black Elk Peak are spectacular.

FUN FACTS

- The rock formations get their name from a resemblance to Devils Tower National Monument from a distance.
- At the summit you can see Black Elk Peak and the back of Mount Rushmore National Memorial.



LOVERS LEAP TRAIL

Length: 4 miles (Loop)

Time: 2-4 hours

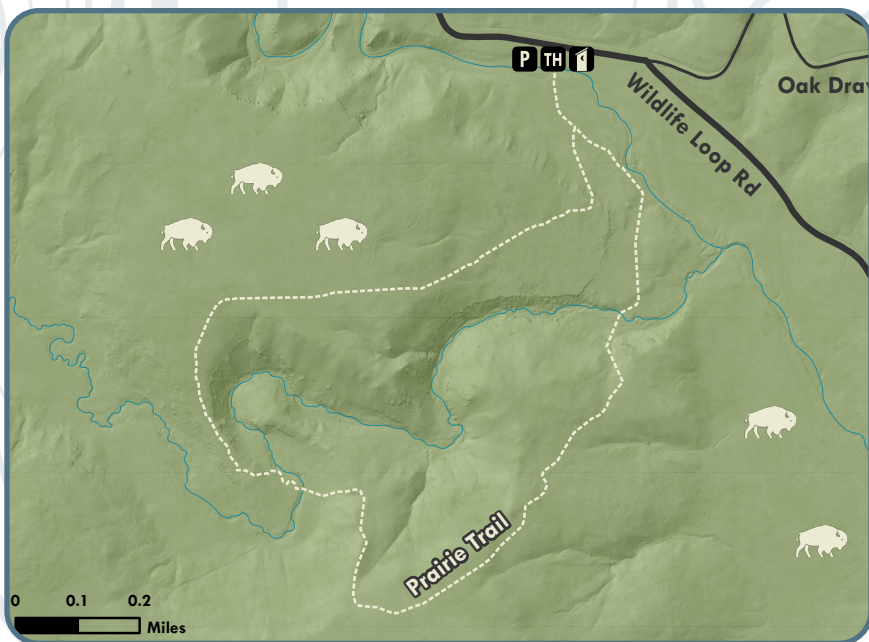
Difficulty: Moderate

STAFF NOTES: Poison ivy is commonly found along this trail. Long pants and boots are recommended.

One of the park's most popular trails, Lovers Leap begins with a steep ascent through ponderosa pine and oak forest. The trail follows the ridge line, the highest point being Lovers Leap. Highlights include views of Mount Coolidge, Black Elk Peak and the Cathedral Spires. The trail descends quickly to Galena Creek, which hikers cross numerous times after reaching the bottom.

FUN FACTS

- This area is excellent habitat for Big Horn Sheep.
- Along this trail you can see evidence and regrowth of the fires from 1988 (Galena Fire) and 2017 (Legion Lake Fire).
- Parking is limited during the summer months. Consider using the Peter Norbeck Outdoor Ed Center parking lot.



PRAIRIE TRAIL

Length: 3 miles (loop)

Time: 2-3 hours

Difficulty: Moderate

STAFF NOTES: Poison ivy is commonly found along this trail. Long pants and boots are recommended. Buffalo are also common in this area.

Prairie Trail explores the park's rolling prairie grasslands and hosts a spectacular summer wildflower display. Part of the path follows a small stream through a stand of mixed hardwoods. Please note there is not a lot of shade along this route.

FUN FACTS

- This habitat is home to bison, prairie dogs, and numerous wildflowers.
- In the springtime, keep an eye out for the bell-shaped, lavender Pasque wildflower, the state flower of South Dakota.



STOCKADE LAKE TRAIL

Length: 1.5 miles (Loop)

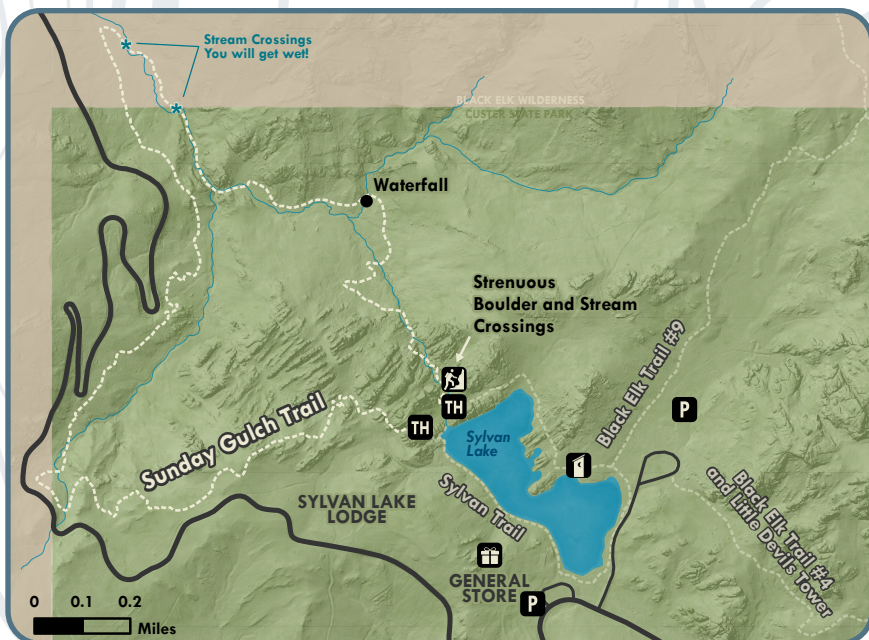
Time: 1-2 hours

Difficulty: Moderate

Beginning on the east side of Stockade Lake, this trail climbs a wooded ridge then circles back to the road. Hikers trek through dense pines and thickets of aspen and birch on this fairly steep walk. Top views include the Needles, Black Elk Peak and Crazy Horse Memorial®.

FUN FACTS

- Originally known as Dorran, the lake was renamed for the Gordon Stockade on its western shore.
- Dorran is the home of the original homesteader in the area.
- The lake and trail were built by the men of Camp Dorran, a 1930s Civilian Conservation Corps camp.



SUNDAY GULCH TRAIL

Length: 4 miles (Loop)

Time: 2-4 hours

Difficulty: Strenuous

STAFF NOTES: Many rescues happen on this trail due to hikers being ill prepared for the strenuousness of the trail. Please make sure you are aware of the challenges of this hike.

Explore towering trees, colossal boulders and a gurgling creek in Sunday Gulch, one of the Black Hill's more unique places. Many rare plant and variety of tree can be seen along this trail.

One unique feature along this trail earns it a Strenuous rating, for about a 1/4 of the hike, you will be climbing and scrambling along small waterfalls and pools.

The trail begins on the Sylvan Lake Shore Trail. Look for signs and be aware of trail markings.

FUN FACTS

- You will climb alongside multiple waterfalls on this trail. Be prepared to get wet.
- The trail travels through a spruce tree habitat. Notice the temperature drop and change in plants as you travel the trail.



SYLVAN LAKE SHORE TRAIL

Length: 1 mile (Loop)

Time: 1 hour

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

STAFF NOTES: This trail connects with Sunday Gulch Trail. Look for signs and be aware of trail markings.

One of the most accessible trails in Custer State Park, this hike lacks nothing in natural beauty. Highlights include breathtaking views of Sylvan Lake's unique granite backdrops, where Nicholas Cage filmed *National Treasure 2*.

FUN FACTS

- This trail takes you past the location of the original Sylvan Lake Lodge which burned down in the 1930s.
- Many rock climbers can be found summiting the rock formations along this trail.
- Please note parking is limited and this is a very popular trailhead.



THE LOST TRAILS

Length:

Upper Loop - 1 mile (One-way)

Lower Loop - 2 miles (One-way)

Time: 2-4 hours

Difficulty: Moderate

STAFF NOTES: Poison ivy is commonly found along this trail. Long pants and boots are recommended.

We know little about the origin of the Lost Trails. It's believed they were built in the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps and only recently have portions been rediscovered. Approximately 2/3 of the marked routes are original but the rest have been lost to time. Highlights include sweeping overlooks and rock staircases carved into granite.

FUN FACTS

- Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps as a working trail, this trail was "lost" to time. In 2017, park staff found the remnants of the trail and recreated the hike.
- The men of the Civilian Conservation Corps also built the dam on Center Lake and some of the buildings at the Black Hills Playhouse.

CUSTER STATE PARK & BLACK ELK PEAK* TRAILS INFORMATION

Two of the most popular trailheads to Black Elk Peak (*formerly known as Harney Peak) start within Custer State Park and continue across the boundary to the Black Hills National Forest and Black Elk Wilderness.

TRAIL #9

Length: 3.3 miles (one-way)

Time: 2-4 hours

Difficulty: Moderate

STAFF NOTES: Begin just across the footbridge leading to the swimming beach. The most traveled and shortest route to Black Elk Peak*.

TRAIL #4

Length: 3.5 miles (one-way)

Time: 3-4 hours

Difficulty: Moderate to Strenuous

STAFF NOTES: Begin at the furthest southeast corner of the day use parking area. Connects to the Little Devil's Tower Spur trail, and ends at the intersection of Norbeck Trail 3. Norbeck Trail 3 intersects with Trail 9, which continues to Black Elk Peak*.

Note: stay left at the Grizzly Creek Trail 7 intersection to stay on Trail 3. Watch for the intersections with Norbeck Trail 3, Grizzly Creek Trail 7 and Trail 9 in the Black Elk Wilderness. These are easy to miss, especially on the return trip.

MAPS

- Detailed topographical maps area available for sale at any of the park general stores.
- AVENZA MAPS app is highly recommended. This app uses your devices built-in GPS to locate you even when you are out of range of a network or Internet connection and is free to use.



Download the app from the *APP STORE* or *GOOGLE PLAY*. Then search for Custer State Park Maps. Or scan the this QR code.

RULES & REGULATIONS

Regulations differ within the state park system and the National Forest and Wilderness areas. Open fires in Custer State Park and Black Hills National Forest Service are only allowed in designated fire grates in established campgrounds and day use areas.

CUSTER STATE PARK REGULATIONS & INFORMATION

- A park entrance license is required and must be obtained at an entrance gate prior to entering or parking.
- Trails are marked with blue diamonds.
- Stock is prohibited on the Harney Range trails within the park.
- Camping is allowed only in designated campgrounds.
- Pets must be on a leash no longer than 10 feet.

BLACK ELK WILDERNESS REGULATIONS & INFORMATION

- Trails are marked with tree blazes and signs at intersections.
- Stock are allowed on trails, unless otherwise noted.
- Camping is allowed anywhere EXCEPT within 1/4 mile of Black Elk Peak* and Trail 9, and at least 100 feet from water sources.
- Pets must be leashed or under strict voice control.
- Visitors must register at any of the major trailhead portals into the wilderness and carry registration form with them.
- Groups are limited to 25 beating hearts (stock, pets, hikers combined) - groups of 10 or less are recommended.
- Only non-mechanized, non-motorized transportation, no bikes, strollers, etc.

Cautionary Tips For Hiking Black Elk Peak*

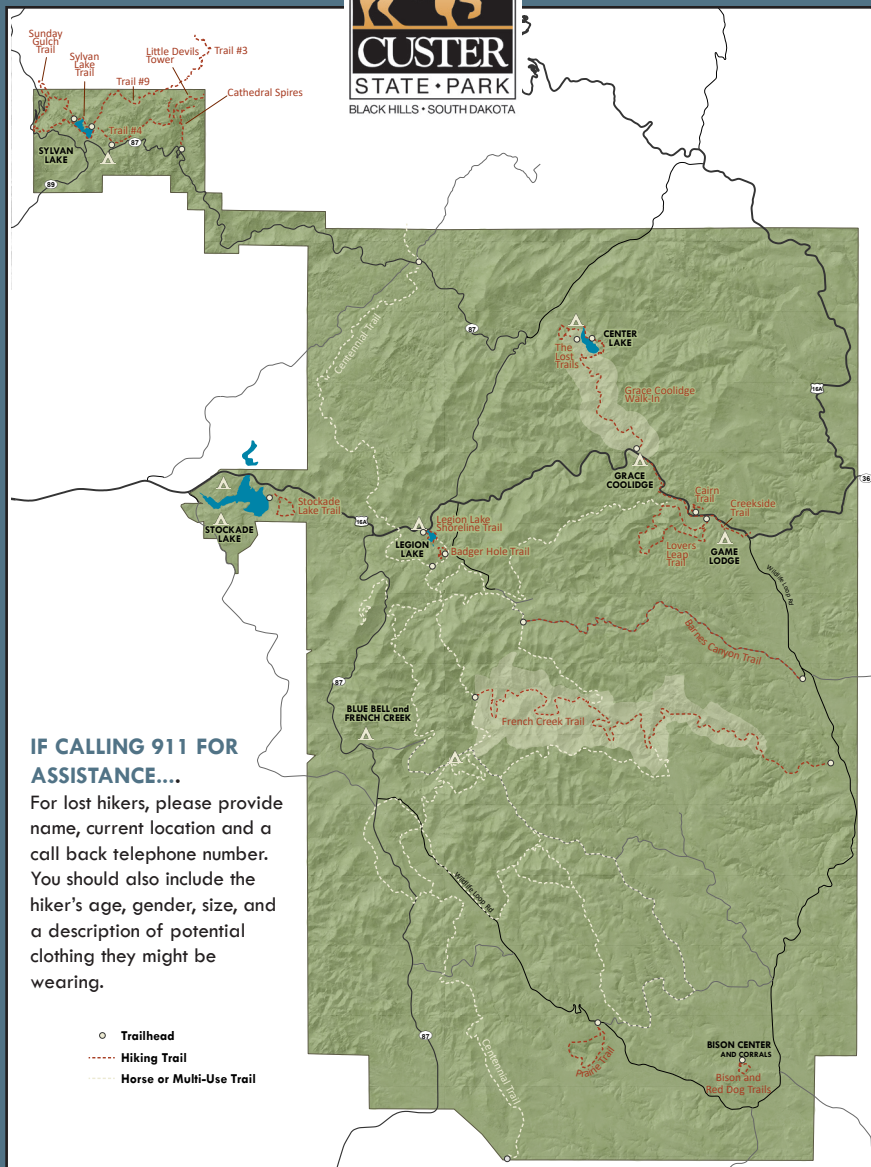
- Thunderstorms containing hail, strong winds, and rain are prominent during the summer months.
- Wear shoes suitable for rugged terrain.
- Take extra clothes, it will likely be windy and cooler at the peak.
- Take at least one quart of water per person.
- NO RESTROOMS located along the trails.
- Pack out your trash.

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CUSTER
STATE • PARK

BLACK HILLS • SOUTH DAKOTA



IF CALLING 911 FOR ASSISTANCE....

For lost hikers, please provide name, current location and a call back telephone number. You should also include the hiker's age, gender, size, and a description of potential clothing they might be wearing.

- Trailhead
- Hiking Trail
- Horse or Multi-Use Trail

TRAILS

605.255.4515

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