

NATURE FRESH SEAL →



Custer State Park

TRAIL MIX

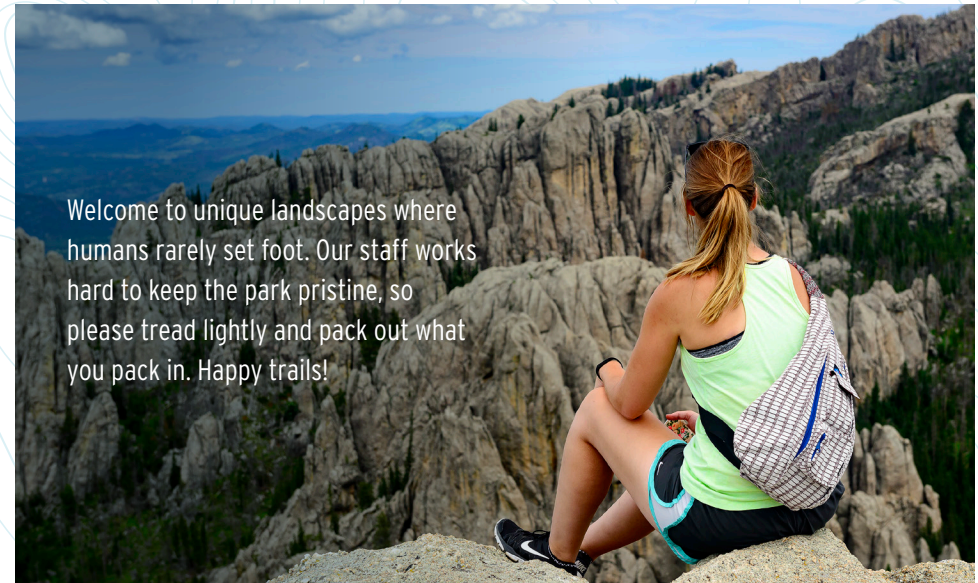
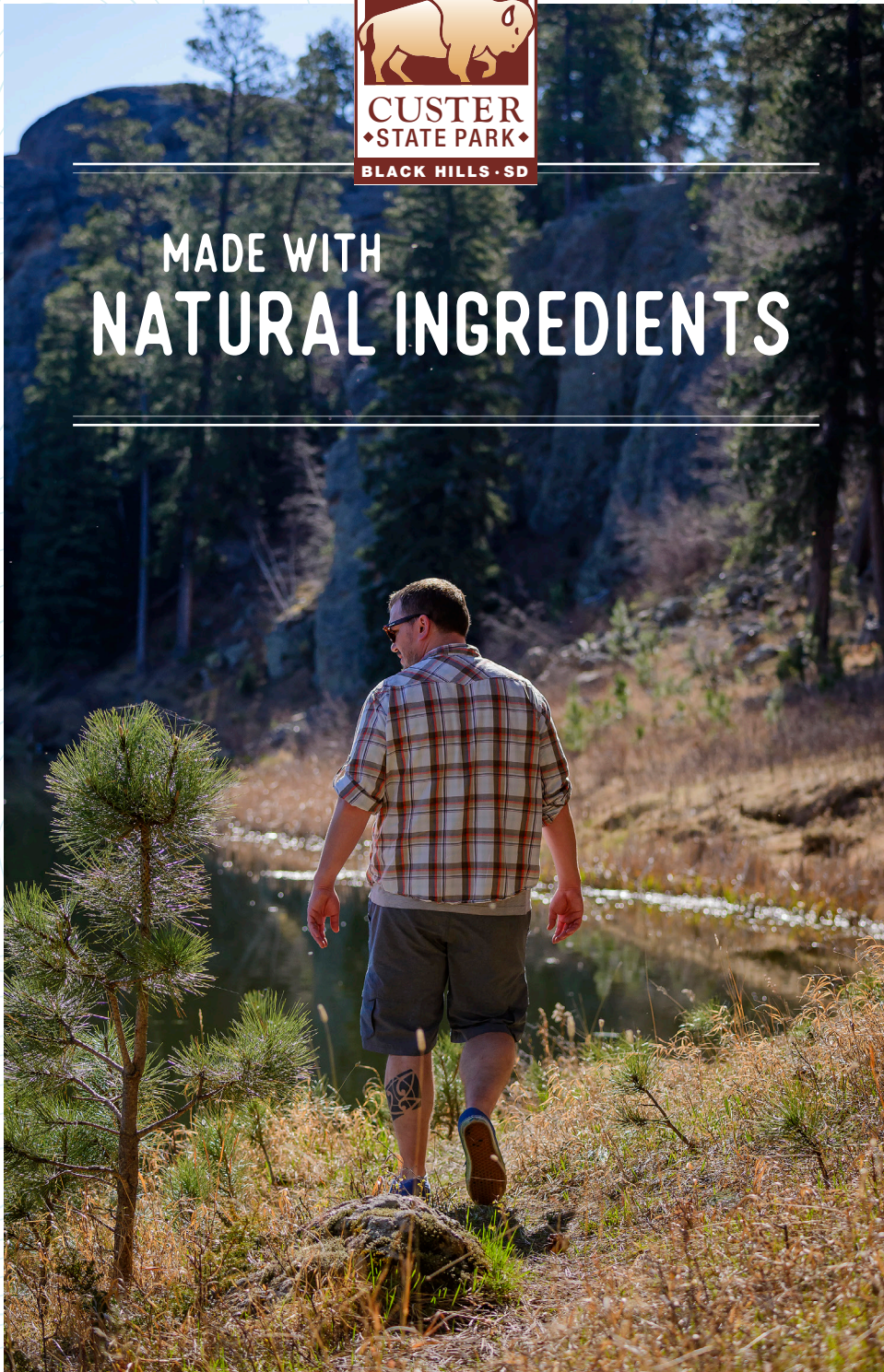
A Hiker's Guide to Custer
State Park's Greatest Places



www.CusterStatePark.com



MADE WITH NATURAL INGREDIENTS



Welcome to unique landscapes where humans rarely set foot. 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, many 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 at least one quart of water per person.
- Pack out your trash.
- Buffalo are common in this area. Please remain at least 100 yards away.
- Leave what you find: Removing plants, rocks and other items from the park is prohibited.



BADGER CLARK TRAIL

Length: 1 mile (Loop)

Time: 2-4 hours

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Starting behind 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)

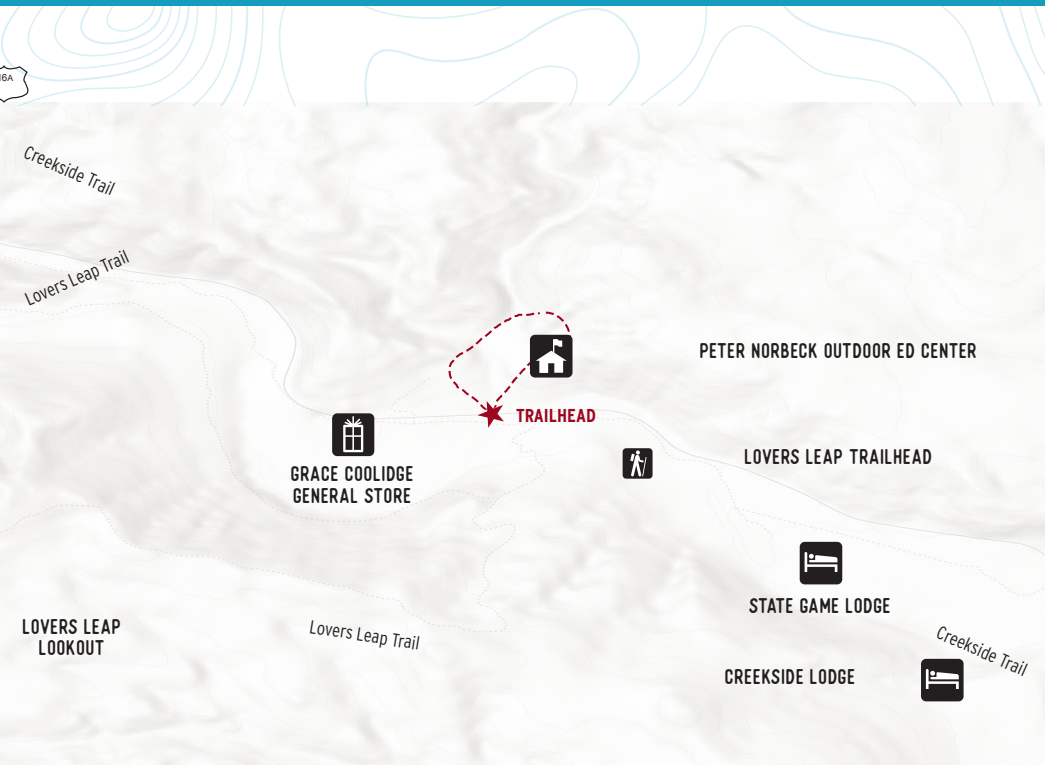
Difficulty: Moderate

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.





CAIRN TRAIL

Length: .3 mile (Loop)

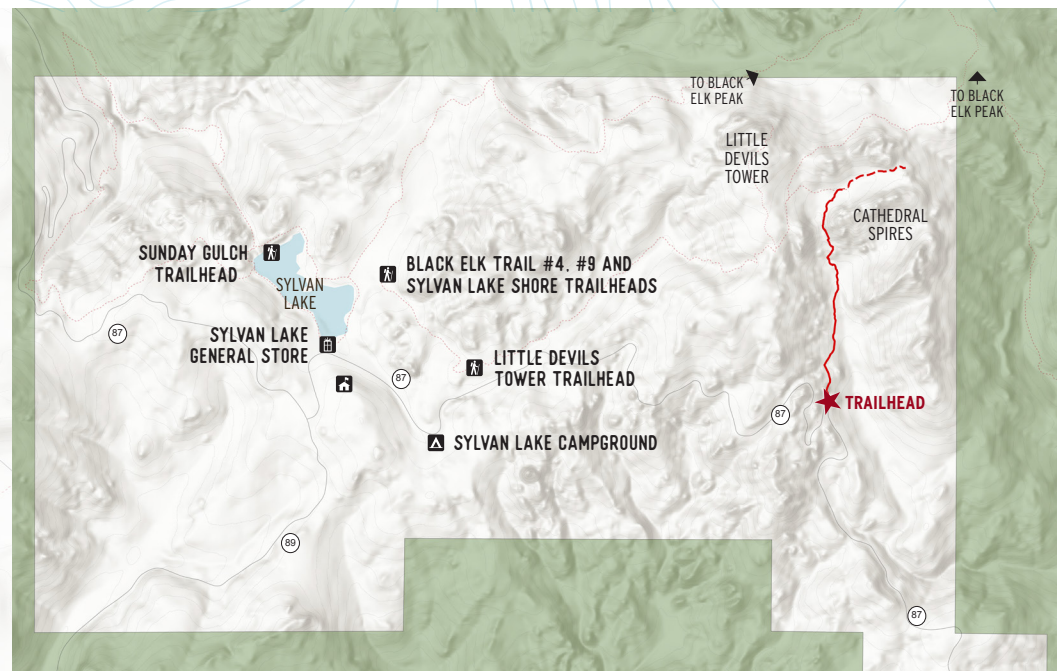
Time: 1 hour

Difficulty: Moderate

One of the park's newest hikes, Cairn Trail, climbs the ridge behind the Peter Norbeck Outdoor Education Center and loops through scars left by the Galena Fire. Highlights include a bird's eye view of the State Game Lodge and Grace Coolidge General Store. 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: 2.3 (Out & Back)

Time: 1-2 hours

Difficulty: Strenuous

Climb: 500 feet

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 views that constitute a near-religious experience.

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 presidents into the spires. The Spires' granite was deemed unsuitable.

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.



FRENCH CREEK TRAIL

Length: 12 miles (One-Way)
Difficulty: Moderate-Strenuous
Climb: 935 feet

There is no marked trail through this natural area. Hikers must blaze their way along the creek or follow paths of previous users, who are sometimes animals.

For a primitive outdoor experience, backpackers can dry camp in the French Creek Natural Area. Hikers using this area can camp anywhere along the canyon bottom but must be 50 feet away from the creek. Open fires are prohibited. Campers must self-register at the stations located on each end of the natural area. The fee is \$7 per person, per night.

This trail pinches together in an area known as the Narrows, where hikers must either climb a 60-foot cliff or swim the Narrows, a swim of about 100 feet depending on water levels. Watch for bighorn sheep, buffalo, and elk.

Staff Notes:

- Numerous streams crossings along this trail. You will get wet.
- Buffalo are common in this area. Please remain at least 100 yards away.
- Poison ivy is commonly found along this trail. Long pants and boots are recommended.



GRACE COOLIDGE TRAIL

Length: 3 miles (One-Way)
Time: 2-4 hours
Difficulty: Easy-Moderate

This nearly-level trail follows Grace Coolidge Creek, crossing it many times as it meanders through the valley. You'll happen upon six low head dams, built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The ponds and creekside offer excellent trout fishing and provide habitat for a variety of plants and wildlife.

Fun Facts

- The creek's name honors First Lady, Grace Coolidge who visited Custer State Park with her husband, President Calvin Coolidge in 1927.
- The creek's six man-made dams make for excellent fishing.
- There are four types of trout in the park: Rainbow, brown, brook and cutthroat.

Staff Notes:

- Poison ivy is commonly found along this trail. Long pants and boots are recommended.
- No horses are allowed in the Grace Coolidge watershed.



LEGION LAKE TRAIL

Length: 1 mile (Loop)

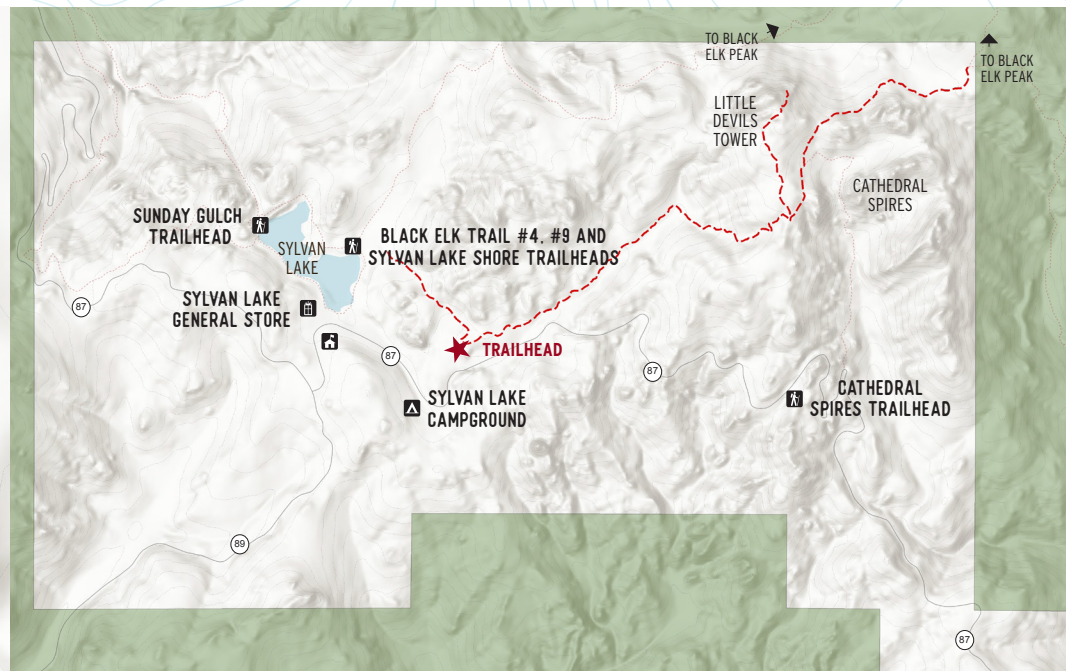
Time: 1 hour

Difficulty: Easy-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: Moderate-Strenuous

Climb: 700 feet

This spur trail branches off Black Elk Peak Trail #4 and ascends to the unique rock formation known as Little Devils Tower. Highlights include views of the Cathedral Spires and Black Elk Peak.

Fun Facts

- The rock formation gets its 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.

Staff Note: This trail connects with Black Elk Peak Trail #4. Look for signs and be aware of trail markings.





LOVERS LEAP TRAIL

Length: 4 miles (Loop)

Time: 2-4 hours

Difficulty: Moderate

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 ridgeline, 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 an excellent habitat for Bighorn Sheep.
- Along this trail you can see evidence and regrowth of the fires from 1988 (Galena Fire) and 2017 (Legion Lake Fire).

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

PRAIRIE TRAIL

Length: 3 miles (Loop)

Time: 2-3 hours

Difficulty: Moderate

Climb: 416 feet

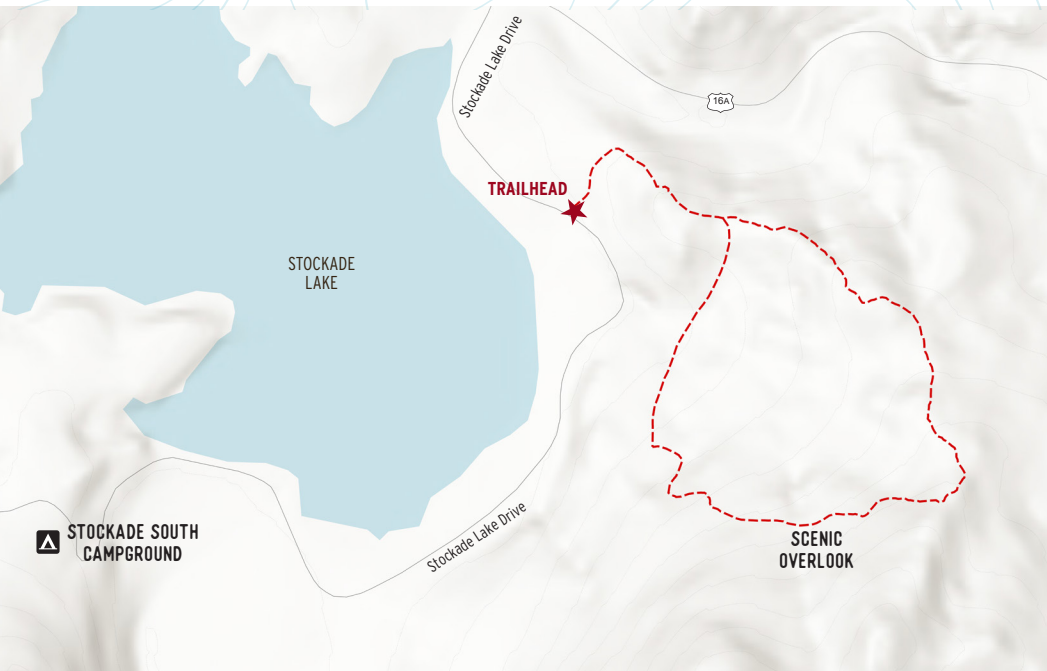
Prairie Trail explores the park's rolling prairie grasslands and hosts a spectacular summer wildflower display. Part of the path follows a small stream through stands of mixed hardwoods.

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.

Staff Notes:

- Poison ivy and snakes are commonly found along this trail. Long pants and boots are recommended.
- Buffalo are common in this area. Please remain at least 100 yards away.



STOCKADE LAKE TRAIL

Length: 1.5 miles (Loop)

Time: 1-2 hours

Difficulty: Moderate

Climb: 390 feet

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 name 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: Moderate–Strenuous

Climb: 776 feet

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

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.

Staff Notes:

- This trail begins on the Sylvan Lake Shore Trail. Look for signs and be aware of trail markings.
- Keep a sharp eye out for mountain goats.





SYLVAN LAKE SHORE TRAIL

Length: 1 mile (Loop)

Time: 1 hour

Difficulty: Easy-Moderate

Climb: 115 feet

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.
- Many rock climbers can be found summiting the unique rock formations along this trail.

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



THE LOST TRAILS

Length: 3 miles (One-Way)

Time: 2-4 hours

Difficulty: Moderate-Strenuous

We know little about the origin of the Lost Trails. It's believed they were built in the 1930s 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.





DID YOU KNOW?

- At 7,424 feet, Black Elk Peak is the highest point between the Rocky Mountains and the European Alps.
- Custer State Park's herd returned in 1914 when 36 buffalo were released into what was then known as the Custer State Game Sanctuary.
- The Cathedral Spires were considered as a location for Mount Rushmore before Gutzon Borglum nixed them over poor granite quality.
- In 1927, President Calvin Coolidge made the State Game Lodge his "Summer White House."
- Living the dream: Buffalo eat for 9-11 hours per day.
- The Avenza map app is an excellent resource to use when hiking in the Black Hills.



IF CALLING 911 FOR ASSISTANCE...

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



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